An Applied Vegan Poetics

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Abstract

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This dissertation engages poetic contemplations of nonhuman and human animals in order to propose what I call *a vegan poetics*: that is, an applied reading/writing practice in service of an inclusive liberatory struggle and by way of imaginative translation, transformation and embodiment of animals. The first chapter charts a definitional inquiry into the framework, situating it within the historical, social and scholarly contexts from which it emerges, and offering key theoretical and methodological entry points. The subsequent chapters, or "Acts," then illustrate the concept in action, modelling an applied vegan poetic reading practice using the work of contemporary female poets. Together, my readings of these texts (and the tensions they illuminate) articulate both the potential and limitations of poetry as an instrument for linguistic and social change. The ambition of my project is to develop a poetic reading/writing practice that negotiates the entangled relations between human and nonhuman bodies and dismantles

anthropocentric paradigms of violence deeply entrenched in our culture and scholarship. In order to achieve this, I argue new forms of language are needed. In this sense, the poet plays an important role in the project of animal liberation. Through a vegan poetics, the reader is driven to fundamentally reconceptualize human categorization of and coexistence with animal beings, allowing for the poetic transfiguration of commodified objects into living subjects. By cultivating emancipatory literary practices *An Applied Vegan Poetics* initiates both imaginative and material emancipatory action.

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For those of us who live at the shoreline
standing upon the constant edges of decision
crucial and alone
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looking inward and outward
at once before and after
seeking a now that can breed
futures
like bread in our children's mouths
so their dreams will not reflect
the death of ours

Audre Lorde, 'A Litany for Survival'

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Why cannot a body itself be testimony.

Ariana Reines

Introduction to a Vegan Poetics

> *The white fathers told us: I think, therefore I am. The Black mother within each of us—the poet—whispers in our dreams: I feel, therefore I can be free. Poetry coins the language to express and charter this revolutionary demand, the implementation of that freedom. Those dreams are made realizable through our poems that give us the strength and courage to see, to feel, to speak and to dare.*
>
> -Audre Lorde, 'Poetry Is Not a Luxury'

> *There can be no pastoral as long as there is a slaughterhouse.*
>
> -Gabriel Gudding, *Literature for Nonhumans*

I would not have become a vegan if I were not first a reader.

Imagination, writes philosopher Maxine Greene, is "a means through which we can assemble a coherent world [and] is what, above all, makes empathy possible. It is what enables us to cross the empty spaces between ourselves and those we teachers have called 'other' over the years" (*Releasing the Imagination* 3). Indeed each time we pick up a book, we pick up an invitation to perform an exercise in empathy—stepping, through reading, into the perspective of any given "other"; confronting viewpoints beyond the boundaries of our limited lived experience and holding space for alternate realities—past, present and future. In a culture of political division, homogenized discourse and enduring global violence—including violence toward humans, animals and the earthly ecosystems that enable and support life—an exercise in empathy comprises an act of resistance.

I credit the empathetic imagination—cultivated in large part through reading—with igniting my own early vegan instincts—instincts that led me to question the widely accepted implications of the species line. But, as I have learned through years of activism, empathy is rarely enough to instigate structural change. A tension arises between liberal conceptions of literature as an affectively (and thus socially) transformative apparatus and a radical politics focused on direct action as a means of instigating social revolution. This tension is mirrored in the realm of animal rights, with ecofeminist arguments for an ethic of care contrasting markedly with rights-based approaches to the moral inclusion of nonhuman animals. While these two political philosophies are by no means mutually exclusive (in fact, I argue the opposite), they highlight a dialectical tension germane to questions about the social function of literature.

Poetry in particular, I argue, holds the capacity not only to develop the empathetic imagination, but to lay the imperative rhetorical groundwork for formative social transformation with regard to species relations. We can only demand that which we have the language to describe. The open field[1] of the contemporary poem constitutes a site of linguistic invention. This site welcomes experimentation and rule breaking, a departure from everyday rhetoric, and does not necessarily rely on temporal (or causal) configurations of storytelling and knowledge-building. The intellectual and epistemological work of poems—as sites of "making"[2]—is fundamental to breaking down the parameters of existing thought and inventing anew a language to reflect and bring about the world we desire. Any theory of change, if it is to be successful beyond the realm of theory, must recognize normalized hegemonic language (and its reproduction) as a key structure of the ruling paradigm.

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[1] See Charles Olson's "Projective Verse" (1951) on open verse and composition by field.
[2] The word *poet* derives from the Greek *poiētēs* ("maker"), from *poieō* ("to make") (*OED*).

It is from the alignment between poetry and veganism as practices of revision (of language, of thought, and of action)—the way in which an imaginative practice of reading may serve as a vehicle, enabling and activating a mindset and applied practice of nonviolence toward animal beings—that the occasion for a vegan poetics arises. At the center of this project is a question: *What can a poem do?*

More than 70 billion land animals are killed each year (FAO), mostly in industrialized facilities, commonly referred to as "factory farms." These dead animals are then processed and packaged into food, as well as rendered into other industrial products for human use. *What can a poem do?* Industrial animal agriculture is a leading driver of habitat destruction and species extinction. More than one in five species on Earth currently faces extinction, and this number is expected to rise to 50 percent by the close of the century. Industrial practices have polluted and overfished earth's oceans almost to the point of total collapse; if the current rate continues, we may see fishless oceans by midcentury (Worm et al. 2006). *What can a poem do?* At my own higher education institution, monkeys used for medical experimentation die from starvation, dehydration, strangulation, choking on their own vomit, mauling by other stressed animals, and (of course) euthanasia, at the hands of their human captors. *What can a poem do?*

This dissertation engages poetic modes of contemplating nonhuman (and human) animals, cultivating what I call a *vegan poetics*: that is, an applied reading/writing practice in service of an inclusive liberatory struggle and by way of imaginative translation, transformation and embodiment of animals. The applied practice helps readers to thoughtfully negotiate the entangled relationship between human and nonhuman bodies and to dismantle violent paradigms in which our culture and scholarship are entrenched.

A definitional inquiry into a vegan poetics highlights the problem of language (alongside language's emancipatory qualities) and emphasizes the need for new forms of expression. Nowhere does linguistically speciesist binary thinking appear more prevalently in this dissertation than in my struggle to refer justly to the animals themselves. I will break down the animal-human binary extensively in Act Two, but it is important to acknowledge here that the terms animal and human do not (correctly or justly) reflect the reality of the species distinction to which they so often aim to refer. Humans *are* animals. Throughout this work, I predominantly opt to use the term "nonhuman animal" to refer to the living beings—cows, pigs, turkeys, wolves, etc.—about whom I am writing. The term is nonetheless as inadequate as it is clunky, suggesting a categorization by means of negation or absence; as if a dog or fish or spider is first and most identified by his or her not being human (as opposed to, say, his or her doggyness, or fishiness, or spideryness). Some animal studies scholars use terms such as "more-than-human" or "other-than-human" to refer to nonhuman subjects (both animals and ecological subjects like trees and rivers). In the context of this project, neither seems to fit; a vegan poetics seeks to break down species hierarchies (these animals are different from humans—neither "more-than-human" nor less); and "other-than-human" seems to exacerbate the conceived estrangement or separation between species, when we are pursuing the very opposite: a net of relations. It's clear that, in order to dismantle anthropocentric understandings of living beings and to cultivate ethical rhetorical representations of them, new language is needed. I underscore, again, the important role of poets in the project of animal liberation.

Indigenous American botanist and writer Robin Wall Kimmerer describes the need for a "grammar of animacy." Contrasting English to Potawatomi and most other indigenous languages, she writes, "English doesn't give us many tools for incorporating respect for animacy.

In English, you are either a human or a thing" (*Braiding Sweetgrass* 56). Indeed our language leaves little space in between anthropocentrism (and, in poetry especially, frequent anthropomorphism) and objectification or inanimacy. The moral exclusion of nonhuman animals in the language reflects and reinforces their moral exclusion in the material world. As Kimmerer says, "grammar is just the way we chart relationships in language" (57). While the poems discussed in subsequent chapters do not reinvent grammar entirely, they participate in a poetics of animacy, inviting us to navigate one such chart of relationships and ultimately to extend subjecthood to all living beings.

The dominant language of killing, even when employed to oppose certain forms of violence toward nonhuman animals, exhibits the very qualities of anthropocentrism and inadequacy that prop up speciesist paradigms. For instance, animal welfare advocates support the practice of (so-called) "humane slaughter"; this terminology is exemplified in anti-cruelty legislation such as the Humane Slaughter Act and welfarist organizations like the Humane Society. Such language—*humane, adj:* characterized by sympathy with and consideration for others; feeling or showing compassion; benevolent, kind (*OED*)—begs the question of exactly what kind of killing can realistically be deemed considerate or kind, particularly from the victim's point of view. Then again, the term "humane" derives from "human," and thus perhaps precludes the perspective of the nonhuman altogether—even as it is most frequently applied to contexts involving the treatment of nonhuman animals. Related in origin and usage is the term "humanity," which is used to delineate the human species as well as to signify kindness/benevolence. The collapsing of these two meanings at the linguistic level might suggest to an unlearned reader that the quality of compassion is somehow related to or even a product of

one's belonging to the human species. If human treatment of nonhuman beings is any indication, the available language is reductive at best and treacherous at worst.

A vegan poetics acknowledges the problem of the human (and respective nonhuman) category as a justification for exploitation, erasure and the stripping of rights; but it ultimately builds toward a lived poetic practice as an expression of the human, not in spite of it. Such a practice, I argue, holds potential as a basis for radical social resilience and coexistence amidst planetary crises. In this way, the project proves useful in practical ways beyond the bounds of literary studies—in particular, for environmental, animal rights, and social justice activists and scholars. While poetry cannot solve the problem of the human, it can and does provide space to inhabit and question the space of human knowledge and embodiment; this dissertation seeks to offer generative insights into the transformation of species relations and the part poetry has to play in the making of the movements that will carry out that transformation.

This chapter provides an introduction to the concept of a vegan poetics, presenting and situating a definitional inquiry within the historical, social and scholarly contexts from which it emerges, and offering key theoretical and methodological entry points into the framework of a vegan poetics. The subsequent chapters, or "Acts" as I call them, then illustrate the concept in action, modelling an applied vegan poetic reading practice using the work of numerous contemporary female poets. Together, the readings demonstrate the power and potential of art as an instrument for imaginative transformation, re-sensitization and social change in the struggle toward collective liberation.

Albeit stemming from representations of and relationship to the nonhuman, *An Applied Vegan Poetics* is ultimately a humanist project. Whereas a post-humanist[3] philosophy diminishes

[3] Jedediah Purdy provides a helpful discussion of humanism and posthumanism in *After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene* (2015). He states, "I would like to resist the choice between the post-humanist position and the

the boundaries between the human and natural world, a vegan poetics acknowledges and interrogates material differences between human and nonhuman species. The ethic of care I promote, however, complicates some humanist accounts of empathy in the sense that it does not rely on recognizing sameness; rather a vegan poetics works toward an ethic of care across difference (namely, the difference of species) and with regard for the rights-bearing status of all sentient beings. I argue that the writers and texts presented here actively strive against the ongoing erasure of oppressed bodies and demonstrate how poetry might constitute a site of social change by way of linguistic invention, imagination, and revision. When we strive to rewrite hegemonic and anthropocentric discourses and to engage in liberatory practices of knowing (and unknowing), we learn to be better readers and writers, better literary critics, and better critics of the world at large.

Situating a Vegan Poetics

A (Very) Short History of the Vegan Social Movement

Veganism is a lived philosophy and liberation struggle, a social movement that seeks to bring liberation to (nonhuman) animals. Contemporary Western definitions and understandings of veganism originate primarily from the founding of The Vegan Society in England in 1944 by Donald Watson and a small group of non-dairy vegetarians. Watson et al. called for the

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humanist riposte and instead adopt both, but each for a different sort of work. Each names truths that are important but incomplete"; according to Purdy, "the most powerful part of the traditional humanist position [is] the special place of human choice, judgment, and value," whereas "Post-humanism treasures equality, among species and life forms as well as (usually) among kinds of human beings; but equality is not a fact. It is a principle" (284-5). A vegan poetics is based in the former (i.e. choice, judgement, and value across differences).

extension of justice across the human-animal species line, recognizing both the inherent moral rights of nonhuman animals and their positioning as fundamental to militarism, barbarism and the industrial supply chain. In some sense a utopian project, the founders' vision for a vegan movement emerged directly from their historical context and analysis. Having witnessed two devastating wars and the unimaginable trauma and tragedy they inflicted, writes sociologist and former animal rights political prisoner Roger Yates, "it was the position of the vegans that humanity's tyranny towards humans *and* other animals was *connected*" ("And if you know your history…"). Watson himself was a conscientious objector during World War II, self-professedly "sickened" by the events of the war. The Vegan Society developed an expansive vision for the future—for a different kind of humanity, "the first one in the whole of our history that would truly deserve the title of being a civilization," as Watson stated in a 2002 interview—a vision based on "the principle of the emancipation of animals from exploitation by man" (Cross 16). As Yates frequently states, in a time of war, "the vegans declared peace."

In addition to its anti-war roots, the modern vegan movement draws heavily on the awareness and values of food justice and ecology. Fay Henderson, one of the original co-founders of The Vegan Society, wrote about the "food problem" in 1948,[4] referencing the connection between industrial animal agriculture and food insecurity,[5] and Eva Batt emphasized the depletion of nutrients and minerals from the soil; in 1964, Batt described veganism as "a way of living which avoids exploitation whether it be of our fellow men, the animal population, or the soil upon which we all rely for our very existence" (8).

[4] See Henderson's "You Have Been Warned," in the Winter 1948 edition of *The Vegan*.
[5] The industrial animal agriculture system is not only unsustainable in terms of land/water use and soil depletion; it also requires that a vast amount of the food grown be transported and fed to industrially bred nonhuman animals rather than to the significant portion of the human population who are undernourished and/or food insecure.

In tandem with practices of veganism, the animal rights movement rose to prominence in the 1970's and 80's. Frances Moore Lappé's *Diet for a Small Planet* (1971) and Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* (1975), based on environmentalist and utilitarian philosophies respectively, increased public awareness of animal exploitation and promoted vegan practices. In 1983, Tom Regan, pioneer of abolitionist animal rights, published *The Case for Animal Rights*, which underscored nonhuman animals as rights bearers. The so-called "rights-based animal rights" position brought forward by Regan (but less prevalent among today's vegan discourse) distinguishes between fundamental rights violations and instances of animal cruelty (the latter belong to a welfarist argument for less cruel conditions of exploitation); by this metric, human use or exploitation of a nonhuman animal constitutes a rights violation of that individual, regardless of the level of cruelty.

As Nocella et al. write, animal liberation and rights movements, broadly speaking, "emerged out of ideas, theories, and actions based upon the seemingly simple, but profoundly radical, premise that nonhuman animals are subjects with agency, not objects to be used as humans see fit" (*Defining Critical Animal Studies* xix). Paramount to the case for veganism and animal rights is the notion of *speciesism*—in other words, the assumption or belief that certain species are inherently more important or more worthy of ethical consideration than others. Humans most often place themselves at the top of the hierarchy in instances of speciesism, but the term is also exemplified by legal protections from cruel treatment bestowed upon cats and dogs in some countries (laws which don't apply to farmed animals) or common human affinities for soft mammals versus insects. *Speciesism* can be positioned alongside other forms of discrimination such as racism, sexism and ableism, and helps situate the vegan movement

alongside sister social justice movements, including civil rights, feminism and environmentalism.

In any discussion of veganism, it is important to acknowledge nonwhite and non-Western practices of nonviolence toward animals dating back centuries (including abstinence from their consumption for ethical, spiritual, economic, health and/or environmental reasons)—for example in Eastern religions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism (Rastafarians). The history of veganism long predates the formation of The Vegan Society in the twentieth century. One of the earliest known vegans is thought to be the Syrian poet and philosopher Al-Ma'aari (born 973 AD), and numerous Western philosophers, including Pythagoras, Hesiod and Draco were believed to be vegetarian or vegan. Fundamental to the history of veganism is the long-standing relationship between industrial-scale animal farming and colonization. Today, many vegan voices from black communities, indigenous communities and the Global South continue to go unheard or are actively erased by mainstream, whitewashed narratives of veganism to the detriment of both human and nonhuman bodies. And within mainstream veganism, the most prominent voices dominating the movement tend to be men—despite the fact that women comprise the overwhelming majority of vegans in the Global North.

In the age of social media, the vegan movement is increasingly subject to corporate and consumerist capture, its founding principles of global peace and radical nonviolence watered down through capitalistic co-opting and theories of change rooted in hegemony. And prominent strains of current vegan advocacy often misrepresent the movement as being solely focused on nonhuman animals, eclipsing or ignoring the wellbeing of humanity and the need for symbiosis across species lines. To the contrary, throughout the twentieth and into the early twenty-first century, Donald Watson continued to discuss the potential of the vegan movement to "save

Mankind" (2002). In a 2014 chapter on the historical formation of veganism, sociologist Matthew Cole describes the interrelation between human and nonhuman liberation at the heart of a vegan philosophy:

> […] the vegan telos therefore combines compassionate non-exploitation of other animals with an emancipated vegan self *and* a more compassionate human society. Vegan ethics, from the beginning, was directed towards these interconnected goals of transforming human beings and transforming human society, with both flowing from the foundational reconfiguration of human-nonhuman animal relations. (220)

While a vegan poetics focuses primarily on these species relations and their representations in poetic texts, the vegan (human) subject also comprises a site of transformation. Through lived practices (including consumption and purchasing choices), vegans pursue a state of liberation on the level of the body. This body is also then reproduced and represented (and often misrepresented—feminized, mocked or dismissed) throughout culture to various effects. Species relations form not only based on attitudes toward nonhuman animals but also on assumptions about what it is to be human (see Act 3 for discussions on the category and meaning of the human).

Critical Contexts and Scholarship

Critical scholarship from writers, academics and philosophers has been integral to the progress of the modern vegan social movement as well as to the study of that movement. A contemporary vegan poetics draws primarily on three fields of scholarship: critical animal studies, ecofeminism (particularly vegan studies), and poetics.

Critical Animal Studies

Officially founded in 2001 upon the creation of the Center on Animal Liberation Affairs (now called the Institute for Critical Animal Studies, or ICAS) by Anthony J. Nocella II and Steve Best, critical animal studies builds on some earlier animal studies scholarship but distinguishes itself in its justice-focused pursuit of animal (and collective) liberation as a fundamental objective. This objective necessarily draws together activists, academics, and activist-academics. Because an applied vegan poetics is directly concerned with the role literature has to play in liberatory action and activism, critical animal studies scholarship constitutes a cornerstone of the theoretical framework in which a vegan poetics operates.

The emergence of critical animal studies over the past two decades marks a shift in theoretical and methodological approaches within the academy. Taylor and Twine describe this shift as "a long overdue change […] that better reflects the importance of other animals as social beings in their own right. This entails a focus on the significance of their enmeshment with both the meanings of what it is to be 'human' as well as their presence in our everyday material lives" (3). This focus on material conditions and embrace of clear political commitments (commitments rooted in liberation movements and anarchism) individuates critical animal studies from mainstream animal studies and begins to carve out space for more radical critical inquiry and action. Among the stated principles of ICAS is an organizational pledge to avoid "eschewing narrow academic viewpoints and the debilitating theory-for-theory's sake position in order to link theory to practice, analysis to politics, and the academy to the community" and to "dismantle and disassociate one's self, movement and group from academia, academics, academies, and the academic industrial complex [in so far] as they institutionalize and detach from social movements…"

While a vegan poetics is primarily invested in the intellectual and epistemological work of poems, the connection between language and social change is of pivotal importance. I title this dissertation project *An Applied Vegan Poetics* because I am more interested in the application of the framework than in any "theory-for-theory's sake position." In most cases, the creation of a poem may not constitute direct action (in its typical sense); but when the language veganism demands does not fully exist, the movement remains limited. A vegan poetics is needed to make that language.

Ecofeminist Vegan Studies

The second field of study from which this dissertation builds its framework and methodology is vegan studies. Laura Wright proposed vegan studies as an academic area of inquiry and analysis in 2015 with the publication of *The Vegan Studies Project: Food, Animals, and Gender in the Age of Terror*. Wright's project emerged largely from the work of ecofeminists throughout the second half of the twentieth century (and the early twenty-first), who illuminated the interconnections between the oppression of women and the oppression of the natural world, and sought to dismantle those oppressions. Greta Gaard defines the field of ecofeminism in "Living Interconnections with Animals and Nature" (2010):

> Drawing on the insights of ecology, feminism, and socialism, ecofeminism's basic premise is that the ideology that authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology that sanctions the oppression of nature. Ecofeminism calls for an end of all oppressions, arguing that no attempt to liberate women (or any other oppressed group) will be successful without an equal attempt to liberate nature. (1)

Pioneer ecofeminist writers and writer-activists include Rachel Carson, Susan Griffin, Carolyn Merchant, Mary Daly, Vandana Shiva, Greta Gaard, Marti Kheel, and Val Plumwood (among many others). Carol J. Adams specifically developed the area of vegetarian ecofeminism; her

book *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (1990) serves as a (if not *the*) foundational text for the later emergence of vegan studies (and provides much of the critical framework for Act One of this dissertation).

According to Wright, vegan studies scholarship attempts to define and to deconstruct "vegan" as an evolving identity category and practice (1). To engage in vegan studies is to examine social and cultural discourses surrounding veganism, to examine the changing politics of representation, and to deconstruct the ways in which the vegan body constitutes a site of contestation for social, cultural, political and ethical questions we face as humans. Vegan studies' focus on the identity category of vegan—which, as Wright points out, "may or may not be linked to an ethical imperative with regard to one's feelings about and advocacy for animals" (14)—differentiates it significantly from critical animal studies which considers advocacy for (and liberation of) animals *the* explicit ethical imperative. Vegan studies does nevertheless occupy a space of activist praxis that reaches beyond the academic; Wright states in her introduction to the collaborative volume *Through a Vegan Studies Lens: Textual Ethics and Lived Activism* (2019),

> A vegan studies approach is theoretical, but it engages a lived politics of listening, care, emotion, and the empathetic imagination. As Stephanie Jenkins says, for vegans, 'our ethics are not just a theory but a way of life,' and this reality is what distinguishes a specifically vegan studies mode of inquiry from animal studies more generally. […] we must be willing to listen to perspectives that may challenge our conceptions of 'theory' in favor of work that is more activist, potentially experimental, and less bounded by the strictures of academic writing. (viii)

Fundamental to understanding the historical context of the abovementioned scholars and their frequent emphasis on radical politics, anti-establishment paradigms, and direct action/activism is the fact that both critical animal studies and vegan studies arose during and from the post-9/11 era, or the age of the "war on terror." Wright points to the ways in which American culture

shifted post-9/11 and the way in which binary *us vs. them* rhetoric "characterized a new national narrative that constituted an overt and explicit politics of fear, of profound bifurnacation, and of xenophobic intolerance" (30). This nationalist rhetoric lent itself to increased dehumanization of and violence toward (seemingly) foreign bodies; it also contributed to a shift in discourse around food, and in some instances, veganism was allegedly linked to extremism or anti-American protest. In the wake of post-9/11 America, critical animal studies explicitly sought to "defend dissent, revolutionary politics, total liberation activism, and underground liberation groups such as the Animal Liberation Front and the Earth Liberation Front" (ICAS). Indeed the passage of the Patriot Act and the expansion of the surveillance state held dire consequences for all pro-liberation activists. A prominent example of such persecution was the conviction of the Stop Huntington Animal Cruelty (SHAC)-USA activists under federal animal enterprise terrorism charges. Environmental and animal rights activists continue to frequent the FBI's list of top domestic terror threats and are subjected to increasingly draconian legislation brought forth to protect corporate animal abusers and industry and to prosecute grassroots activists.

Poetry and Poetics

The occasion for an applied vegan poetics arises from a need to define and demonstrate what the above combined frameworks—in other words, a practice in pursuit of animal liberation—might look like in the context of literary studies. If veganism is to be understood as part of a broader ecofeminist project of cultivating an ethic of care across difference—toward all beings, including nonhuman animals and the natural world—poetry and poetic forms of storytelling constitute a valuable tool. Poems directly create spaces in which to engage shifts of perspective, perform affective labor, and expand/revise the constrictions language effects on social relations. Poetry is

also in various respects a disciplined linguistic practice or expression and in this way bears resemblance to veganism as a disciplined lived practice and expression of values. What might a vegan lens bring to the study of literature, especially literature that includes representations of animal bodies? And how might it help us to reexamine critical readings of poems such that those readings push us to shift dominant modes of consciousness, to transform ethical and political philosophies, and to better our treatment of nonhuman earthlings outside the boundaries of written works?

Poetic engagement with and representation of the natural, nonhuman world—often referred to as nature poetry and/or ecopoetry dates back millenia. As Lynn Keller writes in *Recomposing Ecopoetics* (2017), "Poetry had a place in early ecocritical conversations because of the distinguished Romantic tradition developed by writers such as William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Clare, and, across the Atlantic, Ralph Waldo Emerson and his Transcendentalist circle—which included Henry David Thoreau, whose prose was central to early ecocriticism in the United States" (9). Rich—even radical—works of ecopoetry and ecopoetics continue to emerge today, but, as Gabriel Gudding points out in *Literature for Nonhumans* (2015), when nonhuman animals are mentioned in a typical essay or poem, it is far more frequently "the wild, well-named bird or the cold fox in the threatened stream" (110) than the billions of industrially bred and killed "food" animals. The absence of visible animal suffering in ecopoetics mirrors in some sense the much more calculated repression of writing on and images of slaughterhouse animals (for instance, through the criminalization of recording in such facilities).

Gudding identifies a major gap in the field of contemporary poetics:

> There is unhappily in poetics, and in the majority of contemporary political, philosophical, and ecological thought, a failure to see the nonhuman animal even at its most extreme limit of suffering.

> […] The majority of critical theorists, poets, and ecologists who speak of biopower, ecopoetics, animal welfare and factory farming still willfully take pleasure in the brutalization of our most other others. It bears repeating: the majority of the very thinkers who love justice and who would object to the unnecessary killing of animals still eat them. They persist, even in their most disciplined thought, as ethical misers and energetic dupes of capital. (108)

The omission of the nonhuman animal's suffering among the work of so many contemporary environmental writers not only serves capital, but also furthers disconnection at the level of body and mind. It reinforces an understanding of human-nonhuman relations that can only be described as an unreality; "Forewords, prefaces, and introductions to recent anthologies of ecopoetry and the postmodern pastoral won't mention the slaughterhouse at all, though the bodies of dead nonhumans are universally eaten and worn, and CAFO's[6] are scattered across countrysides everywhere" (114). An applied vegan poetics sets out to foreground houses of slaughter in their various forms and to lend presence to the nonhuman animals inside them in the eyes of humans. A vegan poetics is antithetical to the subjugation and erasure of living beings.

In a 2014 interview, critical animal studies theorist John Sanbonmatsu argued that "capitalism and patriarchy pose the two greatest challenges to animal liberation today: capitalism because it drives animal exploitation economically, ideologically and politically ('politically' insofar as the state is effectively controlled by big business); and male dominance because it propagates a value structure of objectification, domination, and violence." Poetry, at its best, I argue, does the opposite; it tears down this hegemonic value structure and subverts capitalistic paradigms of consumption. In contrast to the slaughterhouse, or house of slaughter, which seeks to hide violence and enclose animals, the poem provides a house of *stanzas*, or open "rooms,"[7] in

[6] CAFO refers to a "concentrated animal feeding operation," usually confining at least 1000 animals.
[7] The poetic term *stanza* comes from the Italian *stanza*, meaning "room" (*OED*).

which to foreground animal presence. Mark Doty describes poetry's uniquely restorative power as such:

> Poetry is a vessel for the expression of subjectivity unlike any other […] I think we're hungry for singularity, for those aspects of self that aren't commodifiable, can't be marketed. In an age marked by homogenization, by the manipulation of desire on a global level…poetry may represent the resolutely specific experience. The dominant art forms of our day—film, video, architecture—are collaborative arts; they require a team of makers. Poems are always made alone, somewhere out on the edge of things, and if they succeed they are saturated with the texture of the uniquely felt life. (*Cortland Review,* 1998 interview)

The commodification and homogenization of nonhuman animals by means of the global animal industrial complex manipulates human desire for coexistence and kinship across species lines. Industry and media convert connection into disconnection, killing into pleasure. Poetry holds a unique capacity to undertake a reversal of this translation process by tapping into what Doty describes as "the texture of the uniquely felt life." In this way, the creation of a poem is the opposite of an industrial (dis)assembly line. Of course, poems do circulate in a marketplace and are thus commodities themselves. However they are not dead or passive objects; rather language has agency, rewriting at times the conditions of its own making and acting upon and in conversation with the mind of the consumer/reader. Poems combat stasis in this way.

To argue for a poem's restorative power with regard to nonhuman beings is not to suggest that it exists entirely outside anthropocentrism. As Margaret Ronda asks in her essay "Anthropogenic Poetics" (2014), "does not all poetry 'have its origin in the activities of man'? Does not the word *poetics* itself capture this sense of human making[?]" (102). To abandon the worldview of the human being would prove a tall order in the context of a uniquely human art form. Rather a vegan poetics can be situated within what Evelyn Reilly describes as "a series of human decenterings"; "ecopoetics requires the abandonment of the idea of center for a position in an infinitely extensive net of relations" (*Styrofoam* 257). Such an ecopoetic project is, as

Gudding suggests, morally corrupt, and doomed to fail if the net of relations fails to include nonhuman animals.

The emerging field of *zoopoetics* stands in contrast to ecopoetic works that erase nonhuman animals (especially "food" animals). Zoopoetics can be defined as a "literary theory and practice that treats nonhumans as individuals with agency, as conscious world-having individuals worthy of moral consideration—not as metaphors for human tribulation" (Gudding 113). Aaron Moe's 2014 work *Zoopoetics: Animals and the Making of Poetry* emphasizes some of the ways in which nonhuman animals are "makers," enacting their own forms of bodily poiesis through gestures, vocalizations and imitations. A vegan poetics can be seen as a sister movement to zoopoetics, as the two share this fundamental assertion of moral consideration for the individual animal being. Vegan poetics however is jointly interested in the notion of the human (animal) body and in the role of poetry in social justice movements and collective cultural conscience.

John Kinsella discusses the figure of poet as activist in his book *Activist Poetics: Anarchy in the Avon Valley* (2010):

> For me, poetry has no point unless it's a prompt or aid to political and ethical change. This is not to say that a poem should be political or ethical *instruction*, but rather that it might engender a dialogue between the poem itself and the reader or listener, between itself and other poems and texts, and between all of these and a broader public. (16)

Poetry tends to promote neither stable identities nor fixed knowledges, and frequently presents the reader with a defamiliarized experience of the (normalized) ordinary. A vegan poetics wields this deconstructive function for the specific purpose of illuminating the (falsely and immorally) centered construction of the human and provoking dialogue about how to confront our relationship to the billions of individual material animals on whose backs our society is built—then to change it. Bridie McGreavy draws on Kinsella's work, discussing the role of language in

the (re)construction of the net of relations in which we exist: "When we attend to how language participates in constructing our sense of order—like in the dialectic social-ecological—and how the world does not conform to our persistent attempts to order it in these ways, we invite the question of how to dwell differently with the world" ("Resilience as Discourse" 115). In other words, questions and theories of social and ecological change are birthed through attention to language.

In *The Poethical Wager* (2003), Joan Retallack refers to *poethics*, a term she coined in the 1980's in "an attempt to note and value traditions in art exemplified by a linking of aesthetic registers to the fluid and rapidly changing experiences of everyday life":

> A poetics can take you only so far without an *h*. If you're to embrace complex life on earth, if you can no longer pretend that all things are fundamentally simple or elegant, a poetics thickened by an *h* launches an exploration of art's significance *as*, not just *about*, a form of living in the real world. (26)

The deliberate connecting of aesthetics to conditions of material life is perhaps what Doty means when he speaks of "the texture of a uniquely felt life"—at once "textured" (the material body, the material poem on the page) and "felt." Much of human-nonhuman relation in the context of the animal industrial complex, if it can be said to be "felt" at all, is characterized by apathy. Poetry's capacity, through aesthetic form, to invite or restore feeling directly facilitates a pursuit of justice and liberation. As Gudding writes, "The notion of who justice applies to is always historically bounded by the apathy of violent disregard" (116). With respect to nonhuman animals, a vegan poetics seeks to push those historical boundaries through participation in a poetics of responsibility and relation.

Vegan Poetics: A Definitional Inquiry

Defining the Scope of the Project

At the core of *An Applied Vegan Poetics* is a definitional inquiry—an endeavor to explore the possibilities of such a reading/writing practice and in doing so to define the parameters of the term. While students of literature may find my analysis of texts valuable in thinking about the status of poetics and the ethical-political dimensions of representing animals in literature, the project is equally aimed at ecocritical and environmentally engaged scholars seeking to consider the relationship between language and lived relationships with the nonhuman. I examine literary texts not as an end unto themselves, but as one tool by which to 1) ask ethical questions about living, writing, and acting in an age of unprecedented animal exploitation and environmental crisis; 2) critique dominant narratives of speciesism employed in the humanities, sciences and public sphere; and 3) provide concrete models for resistance, resilience and coexistence with the nonhuman.

The writers I have chosen to spotlight and analyze in the upcoming pages generally satisfy three criteria. Firstly, because a vegan poetics is bound up in a broader ecofeminist project to further liberation, this dissertation focuses on the work of female poets. Additionally, given the lack of female representation present in mainstream vegan movement leadership—which is reflective of neither the movement's history nor the current population demographics of vegans—centering female voices seems imperative. Secondly, because I am primarily engaging Western cultural narratives of human-nonhuman relation, I focus on anglophone writers, predominantly American ones (with the notable exception of British-Indian poet Bhanu Kapil in Act Two), while also acknowledging that other poets exist outside these modes of categorization. For instance, South Korean poet Kim Hyesoon's collection *I'm OK, I'm Pig!* engages

representations of nonhuman animals and pushes back against conventional forms of language that further capitalistic, patriarchal and speciesist violence against living beings. Furthermore, as my reading of Kapil's *Humanimal* will demonstrate, the language and histories of the "West" can never be separated from those of other regions, cultures and peoples.

Finally, the poets discussed fit (in various respective ways) Kinsella's description of "poet as activist." Some, such as Juliana Spahr, have participated in direct grassroots activism alongside their writing practice; others simply participate, through the creation of their poetic work, in acts of "resistance to the State, the myriad hierarchies of control, and the human urge to conquer our natural surroundings" (Kinsella 16). Spahr has written extensively about the political efficacy of poetry, weighing desires "to not overestimate the impact of literature and/or reform of literary institutions as meaningful activism on its own and in isolation" with arguments that "literature is a productive medium for countering the way that colonialism destroys cultures" (*Entropy*, 2015 interview). My readings will repeatedly interrogate the question of poetry's role within social movements, considering both language's capacity to enact material change and its limitations. With regard to animal rights specifically, it is also important to note that these writers do not endorse the specific philosophy of veganism in any instructive or explicit way through their poems. The lens of a vegan poetics can nevertheless be productively applied, because the bodies represented in their poems and texts are (for the most part) the animal bodies least written about, least visible and least remembered.

While all forms of human oppression are linked, there is a key distinction between discussing the objectification, exploitation and erasure of the nonhuman animal body and the animalization of the human body (usually as a way to objectify, exploit or erase that body). To dehumanize a human body by way of (usually speciesist) conceptions of the nonhuman animal is

to deny the material reality of that body's humanness; whereas to exploit or violate a nonhuman animal on the basis of his/her nonhumanness is to oppress that individual on account of his/her innate being. This project centers its inquiry around the species line and the imagination of a poet(h)ics inclusive of nonhuman animals. In thinking about the relationship of this inquiry to the animalization of black and brown bodies, readers can look to myriad examples. Racist contentions about the definition of "personhood" litter the pages of history—from the labeling of indigenous peoples by white settlers as inferior "savages," to the Three-fifths Compromise which counted slaves as only three-fifths of a person, to the post-9/11 images of Abu Ghraib Iraq prisoners naked and leashed like dogs. Today, in the United States corporations routinely enjoy the legal status of personhood resulting in dire implications with regard to corporate accountability; in effect, corporate personhood means that corporations enjoy greater legal protections and rights than many individual—and disproportionately disenfranchised black and brown—human bodies.

Modern animal agriculture and the industrialization of the food supply system in North America must be situated within the historical context of settler colonialism. Eli Clare writes in *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure* (2017):

> White colonial settlers claimed the land as their own, dividing it into neat rectangles, fencing it, and establishing herds of cattle. The grazing and migration patterns of bison had been integral parts of these ecosystems, whereas cows destroyed the grasses, giving nothing back. And then white farmers literally tore up the prairie with their plows. They planted monocultures of wheat, corn, and soybean. One hundred seventy million acres of tallgrass prairie used to exist in North American; seven million are left now. Today when we eat corn or steak produced on agribusiness farms in the Great Plains, we are connected all the way back to that mountain of skulls. Monocultures start with violence, removal, and eradication. (134)

Discussions of racial ecologies in industrial agriculture must also include slaughterhouse and packing plant workers, the overwhelming majority of who are people of color and who are

among the most exploited workers on the planet.[8] The animal rights movement has largely failed to build lasting coalitions between such (human) labor and (animal) liberation struggles. While the history of modern agriculture and its connection to the ongoing animalization of black and brown bodies falls beyond the scope of this dissertation, I direct readers to Marjorie Spiegel's *The Dreaded Comparison* (1996), to the work of contemporary vegan writer-activists Aph Ko, A. Breeze Harper and Shanti Chu, as well as to Bénédicte Boisseron's writing on the relationship between race and the animal in Afroamerican history and culture. With specific regard to veganism, Harper discusses increasing numbers of black women who choose a plant-based diet to combat racial health disparities and to "decoloniz[e] their bodies from the legacy of racialized colonialism" ("Going Beyond…" 157). Writers such as these illustrate the relevance and power of veganism in postcolonial contexts and across racial (and gender) lines.

To conceive of, represent, or witness a body other than one's own is in some sense to perform a "reading" of that body. Hence, in our lives as well as in the pages of books, we are all positioned as readers of the nonhuman world. The central project of a vegan poetics—in its pursuit of a language that attests to every animal's right to liberation, "their right to be, to live in the sovereign territory of their own lives" (Kimmerer 358)—is to disrupt the normative effects of reading animals and to foster a textual space in which existing forms and modes of thinking are challenged—and (eventually) reborn. Neither direct action nor extending empathy to nonhuman beings will prove enough if such pursuits are not met with a language adequate to veganism as an emancipatory ethics, politics and practice.

Five Theses of a Vegan Poetics (Five Ways In)

[8] See the Food Empowerment Project (foodispower.org) for detailed reports on factory farm workers and their labor conditions.

Vegan poetics: an applied reading/writing practice in service of an inclusive liberatory struggle and by way of imaginative translation, transformation and embodiment of animals.

Below I present five key principles, or theses, of a vegan poetics. I consider these to be creative and critical attributes that inform the literary, cultural and ethical lenses this study of poetry applies. The theses are not intended to be comprehensive or exclusionary—only to ground and give shape to the new concept being proposed. In *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (2012), B. M. Reed distinguishes between "restricted" and "expanded" notions of *poetics*.[9] In the context of this dissertation, the following principles will be applied to the study of selected poems; in other words, I am operating within a restricted definition of poetics. I am interested in poems themselves as distinct agents of linguistic, social and material change, as well as how particular poetic reading practices help mediate that change. However, the framework of a vegan poetics may also be applied and adapted expansively to other forms of "making," including other literary genres and modes of expression.

1. Exhibits participatory attachment to or allyship with activists/activism, whether in the form of direct grassroots action or acts of resistance against hegemonic forces; in other words, a vegan poetics is as bound up in acting and doing as it is in literary or intellectual study. The imaginative space created and inhabited by poetry is not viewed as separate

[9] In a restricted sense, poetics refers to "compositional principles to which a particular poet subscribes," whereas an expanded poetics refers to any "survey of the structures, devices, and norms that enable a discourse, genre, or cultural system to produce particular effects" and therefore does not necessarily place poetry at the center of its argument (1058-9).

from the material or natural world. Fundamental to a vegan poetic practice is exploring the relationship of art to social change.

2. Revises speciesist language and thinking, understanding the nonhuman animal to be an individual, breathing, rights-bearing creature with his/her own experiences, desires and innate purpose for his/her life (not ours). This includes responsible uses of metaphor and efforts to trouble the boundaries of anthropocentric language, often utilizing poetic form. A vegan poetics renders the testimony of an animal body more legible.

3. Navigates multiple scales of knowledge, lived experience and resistance, and draws connections between them, noting patterns of oppression as well as productive tensions. This includes negotiating historical, geographic and cultural scales, and interrogating the personal's relationship to the political, the singular's relationship to the collective, and the species line itself.

4. Restores feeling to the experience of contemplating and bearing witness to the lives of human and nonhuman animals. *Sees feelingly.* Understanding that the animal industrial complex is built on mechanized, patriarchal models of manufactured apathy toward living beings, a vegan poetics communicates and legitimizes affective experience. It works toward a personal and collective reestablishment of feeling, while acknowledging that the rights-bearing status of nonhuman animals is not dependent on any human sentiment of mercy or benevolence. Emotional sensation and bodily presence on the part of humans

are nevertheless viewed as integral to the formation of a sustainable net of interspecies relations and the cultivation of an authentic ecofeminist ethic of care.

5. Seeks and serves the goal of total liberation[10] for all living beings, namely by integrating poetry's transformative capacities with the urgent need to transform systems, relations and the dominant cultural ethos.

Applying A Vegan Poetics

The subsequent chapters of this dissertation seek to model the concept of a vegan poetics in action. I present three sets of readings as "Acts," in the sense that they are examples of what it might look like to *perform* a vegan poetics. The poetic texts I have chosen to analyze all engage and espouse, to varying degrees, the values of this theoretical framework. While a vegan poetic lens could certainly be used to critique and challenge texts that do *not* engage or espouse those values, my definitional inquiry into a vegan poetics seeks to integrate the mutually enriching relationship between a vegan poetic *reading* and *writing* practice. What a poem can "do" is equally dependent on the lens a reader brings to the text as it is to the writing itself. It can arguably *do more* when it is engaged through literary, social and ethical frameworks and modes of analysis. In the subsequent Acts, I present situated (as opposed to isolated) readings of poems; negotiating the intersections of creative and critical practice, the reader attempts to bring something *to* the poem.

[10] "Total liberation" is a term frequently used by animal rights scholars and activists to refer to the liberation of all life (including humans, nonhumans and the earth). ICAS defines total liberation as intersectionality in action.

Throughout my critical dialogue and definitional inquiry, I draw on voices from a variety of fields, including literary critics, ecofeminists, ecocritics, animal scholars and anthropologists. As I situate the poems within my own framework, I also situate the practice of a vegan poetics in relationship to existing conversations and theoretical debates. In Act One, my readings of poems from Ariana Reines' *The Cow*, Jenny George's *The Dream of Reason* and Kathryn Kirkpatrick's *Our Held Animal Breath* explore literary representations of farmed animals and the poetic tensions those representations bring to light. In thinking about animal presence—both literary and corporeal—I apply Carol J. Adams' notion of the absent referent to the context of poetry. Poetic language, I argue, navigates presence/absence differently than other forms of speech. I point to examples of the ways in which the works of Reines, George and Kirkpatrick expose transliterations of animal presence into absence and pursue forms of expression that restore the absent referent to presence. Attempts to represent nonhuman animals through human mediums (such as written poetry) are inherently informed by an inability to fully know the experience of nonhuman animals, both as individuals and as species. However, due to its status as an open site or field for linguistic exploration and invention, the poem productively inhabits the partial perspective and often makes the limitation of that perspective (and the limitations of form) its object of attention.

Donna Haraway advocates for knowing "with" or alongside nonhuman beings as a way to disrupt hierarchical relations and establish earthly kinship across species lines; while in some ways her process of rewording and "reworlding" species relations aligns itself with a vegan poetic practice, it ultimately overlooks and erases the fundamental differences in material autonomy between humans and the farmed animals imprisoned within the animal industrial complex. "Knowing-with" fails to dismantle anthropocentric and speciesist patterns of

thought/language. When placed in the context of poems, my critique of Haraway in Act One helps expose the dangers of metaphor in writing across species differences. While a metaphor brings two seemingly separate subjects/objects into relation through language, it also risks reductively conflating those subjects/objects or enabling one to eclipse the other. We encounter this poetic tension in *The Cow*, which explicitly yokes violence against cows to violence against women. Ecofeminist theorists like Adams and Haraway likewise underscore the parallels between patriarchal oppression and speciesist/ecocidal oppression in a critical context. However, poetry and the reading of poetry enable us to explore with greater nuance the multi-dimensional function of metaphor, as well as the forms of absence/presence and ways of knowing/unknowing it makes possible.

Act Two builds on my discussion of parallel forms of oppression, namely between nonhuman animals and women/girls as "other" (i.e. subaltern) bodies, but it also begins to directly break down the categorical binary of the "human" and the "animal" upon which speciesist practices are based. Taking Bhanu Kapil's *Humanimal* as its central poetic text, Act Two posits that the notion of a hybrid or "humanimal" body is a productive poetic site upon which to deconstruct false and unjust paradigms of relation. While rooted firmly in the analysis of form—both the form of poetic language and the form of the humanimal body—Act Two is more heavily historically situated. *Humanimal* is based on the story of the "wolf-girls" or "feral children" in early twentieth century India, and the poetic tensions highlighted within are deeply engaged with global histories of colonialism and patriarchy. The historical framing integrated throughout my close readings of the text helps us to think about the relationship of cyclical patterns of violence to language, constructions of species identity and ethics of care. I present Joan Retallack's poetics of the "swerve" as a way to name one form of defiance against

oppressive structures. The swerve is both a literal description of resistant form (as in swerving away from a physical threat) and a metaphor for nonlinear social transformations that change the course of history. The humanimal body, in this case of the wolf-girl, serves as a poetic embodiment of the swerve and a powerful agent of border-breaking and restorative hybrid-being against fabricated categories of purity, pathology and nonanimal humanness.

While Act One emphasizes and upholds animal presence across difference (of species), Act Two complicates and deconstructs that difference to the extent that dominant modes of language misrepresent and abuse that difference. To confront otherness is to negotiate multiple scales of relation, including to the self. I conclude, in Act Two, that the term *humanimal* could realistically be said to describe every human body. Both the poetic figures of the wolf-girls and the speaker-poet function as mirrors in this sense. Act Three picks up on the face in the mirror, turning its attention to constructions of the "human." While it may seem illogical to focus attention on the human in the context of a *vegan* poetic practice (since veganism argues against human supremacy), I argue that the problem of defining the human is fundamentally related to our ongoing abuse of other species and its relationship to poetics.

Act Three presents several poetic renderings of *mis*reading the human—first at the level of the individual body or human form in Jorie Graham's *Never*, and secondly at the level of the collective in "#Misanthropocene 24 Theses," co-authored by Juliana Spahr and Joshua Clover, and Spahr's *That Winter the Wolf Came*. For the speaker in *Never*, the form of a human subject becomes indistinguishable from that of nonhuman object, reflecting the trans-corporeality (Stacy Alaimo's term) or material enmeshment of the human and her environment and the frequent inability of the human to identify her own species (and its parameters). A scaled-up version of this disrelation from species and self can be seen in the poems of Juliana Spahr, which engage

the concept of the Anthropocene (a species-level abstraction and misreading of the human, I argue) and the notion of a social movement as one iteration of collective human form. Here we return to the question of a poem's agency in relationship to activism. What does the making of a poem have to do with the making of a social movement? My application of a vegan poetics repeatedly calls for the renegotiation of nonhuman animal presence in language, as facilitated by poetry; however, implementing a vegan poetic practice ultimately requires a renegotiation of human presence as well. As it builds toward the cultivation of a relational and emancipatory orientation within and across species lines, this humanist project dissects the mediated quality of representation and the disparate implications of poetic mediation for the living subjects to which poems so often refer.

A note on the use of images:

Between sections, you will notice I have included photographs of animal beings. The suppression of images of animal suffering and slaughter (images that help combat the invisibility of the animal industrial complex and the erasure of those animals' lives) is paralleled by a relative absence of images of "free"[11] animals living outside this system of torture. I include photographs of animals to emphasize how animal bodies are themselves testimony to animal presence and selfdom. They are not here *for us*, but are simply here. Though this dissertation argues for the value of poems in the project of animal liberation, poems do not grant animals rights, identity or animacy; animals themselves do, by their very existence. Of course, a photograph is only a representation. Like poetry, photography is an art form, imposing upon the

[11] "Free" is of course a relative term. Rescued animals, such as those in my photographs, can still be said to live under some conditions of human enclosure and domination, even as they have been liberated from the animal industrial complex and are treated with compassion and care.

subject/object its own framework (in this case, a literal “lens”), and is thus entangled in its own ethical and aesthetic questions of mediation. Such questions, as they pertain to genres and art forms outside poetry, lie beyond the scope of my dissertation project, but I include these images in the hope that they serve to remind us poems are made of words; however much they may heighten readerly affirmation of and affective/ethical orientation toward nonhuman animals, they are not the animals themselves.

Testimony 1

Act One:
The Nonhuman Animal

It is not half so important to know as to feel.

-Rachel Carson, *The Sense of Wonder*

The mouth's the haven for all an eye cannot disperse.

-Ariana Reines, *The Cow*

Consumption is the most prevalent way in which humans encounter animals. Globally, each year more than seventy billion land animals and trillions of sea creatures are killed for food. Despite the rise of vegetarianism and veganism, meat consumption per capita is at an all-time high and continues to increase year after year. The practice of consuming animal products, though habitual and frequently inadvertent in any "meaning" beyond satisfying personal appetite or taste, nevertheless constitutes participation in a social, cultural and historical pattern of hierarchy and speciesism. In Act One, I apply the lens of a vegan poetics to representations of farmed animals, their slaughter, and their consumption in contemporary poetry. I begin with farmed animals 1) because they are killed and consumed so prevalently, and 2) because they are least often depicted in ecopoetry and ecocriticism. In these ways, their bodies undergo erasure literally and figuratively at an unparalleled scale.

Part of the project of a vegan poetics is to resist and reverse this erasure by linking ethical commitments directly to form. Language has the power to afford imaginative definition[12] and to render subjects more legible, but it is also highly limited. I place poetry at the center of my project, because, I argue, it is uniquely equipped to navigate the tensions between absence and presence, metaphorical and literal, part and whole, and individual and species/kin. Neither my readings of poems nor theories of poetics at large necessarily resolve these tensions; however, the applied practice of a vegan poetics places emancipatory demands on both thought and feeling. The slaughterhouse must be torn down in all its forms—the tangible buildings *and* the theoretical structures that uphold them. Therefore an inquiry into form—and the poetic tensions that are revealed in the process—is needed to confront animal exploitation and facilitate liberation.

I open Act One with readings from *The Cow*, by Ariana Reines. Her depictions of industrially bred cows consciously navigate the boundary between representations of animal presence and representations of animal absence. My reading of these poems seeks to illuminate the processes by which farmed animals are made absent, and to explore the poetic possibilities for restoring animal presence. With the help of Carol J. Adams' feminist-vegetarian theory, I also analyze Reines' portrayal of cows in relation to her portrayal of women in order to draw parallels between the objectification/erasure of female bodies and the objectification/erasure of farmed animals. Here we see an example of the ways in which the poetic (de)construction of nonhuman bodies holds implications far beyond the realm of animal agriculture and veganism.

[12] The term "imaginative definition" is borrowed from Rob Nixon. In *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011). Nixon underscores the need to "[find] imaginative forms that expose the temporal dissociations that permeate the age of neoliberal globalization" and to "[render] visible occluded, sprawling webs of interconnectedness" (45-6).

Next, I look at poems from *The Dream of Reason*, by Jenny George, in order to expand and interrogate dominant human conceptions of knowledge or "knowing" across species lines. In my reading of George's poems on pigs, I show how poetic language/form offers one entry point into knowing nonhumans differently—namely outside or in spite of the systems responsible for their oppression, and so as to center animals as singular subjects as well as agents of expression and resistance on their own terms. Kathryn Gillespie's documentation of farmed animal auction and slaughter grounds my readings of poems in the material practices of the animal industrial complex. And Donna Haraway's notion of "knowing-with" nonhuman animals provides a useful foil by which to highlight patterns of anthropocentrism and welfarism that ultimately obstruct the lens of a vegan poetics. I also de-center the human through my analysis of the inherent partial perspective inhabited by any human encountering another species; therefore I reject "knowledge" as the chief basis for advocating across species lines, in favor of rights-based theories of justice.

Finally, my readings of Kathryn Kirkpatrick's poems on farmed animal slaughter, namely from *Our Held Animal Breath*, emphasize the alignment between poetic form and the notion of animal body (not human knowledge) as testimony—testimony to one's own rights, experience, suffering, and presence. I argue that illegible bodies become killable bodies, in part because of the illegibility of such testimony. The poems throughout Act One all serve to increase—through language—the legibility of nonhuman animal bodies. This legibility is a key step if we are to shift species relations on both a conceptual and a material level; poets such as those I feature here are essential to the project of animal liberation in this respect. My readings recognize poetry as a site of resistance—against erasure, objectification and violence—as well as a site of reclamation—of animacy, expression and agency. Together, they demonstrate how a vegan

poetic reading and writing practice productively redefines the function of language in representing nonhuman animals.

Animal Presence and Absence

Ariana Reines' poetry collection *The Cow* (2006) enters the spaces of the slaughterhouse and rendering plant[13] and lends presence to the lives and deaths of cows (and people). Key to many of the poems is Reines' incorporation of the actual language of animal agriculture, slaughter and rendering—for instance drawing directly from industrial manuals on carcass disposal, pharmaceutical dispensation and waste treatment. This language is not simply replicated but rather resituated and reinvented to draw attention to the practices and processes by which the animal industrial complex wreaks violence on living, feeling bodies. By juxtaposing and synthesizing such language with lyrical forms of expression, Reines strips the acts of their supposed capitalistic function within the food system and forces the reader to confront—subject-to-subject—the beings we so freely consume. I select Reines' collection as my first literary artifact because it presents one of the starkest alternatives to anesthetized consumption of animal bodies (and their representations) and, I argue, exemplifies a productive intervention into the language of normalized violence.

The Cow is not lunchtime poetry (though perhaps it should be); often extremely explicit and visceral, the poems engage discourses of the body that anchor language in material existence and struggle. Cows, covered in their own excrement, are brutally killed and bled out (to put it

[13] Rendering plants are facilities that process the so-called "leftovers" or "waste" from dead carcasses, converting animal tissue, bones and other parts into commercial products such as oils and plastics. Rendering plants are a key component of the profit structure in industrial animal agriculture.

lightly); women are raped and sliced open. "Clean the language. Clean it," Reines writes in "Nico Said…"[14] and does the opposite. The concept of rendering also figures prominently in the collection (in addition to slaughter). In industrial animal agriculture, parts of the carcass that cannot be sold for meat and are thus deemed "waste" products are typically taken to a rendering plant, where they are broken down to be eventually processed into products such as bone meal, fertilizer, soap, grease, biodiesel, plastic, pet food, and animal feed. The verbiage of *rendering* highlights the material translation of animal bodies (or body parts) into consumable commodities. However, *to render* also refers to the linguistic, conceptual, or cultural translation of bodies—i.e. to render someone helpless, invisible, expendable, and/or killable. Applying a vegan poetic lens to *The Cow*, I interrogate this dual translation (via killing/processing and via language) through my readings of poems. I question what it means to represent a nonhuman animal through the form of a poem, whether an anthropocentric reproduction of that animal can ever be accurate, and—if it cannot—how can poetic translations of nonhuman animals hope to advocate for the subjecthood of the individuals they emblematize? What does it mean for a poet to "write" the cow?

The Conflation of Women and Cows

One way that *The Cow* powerfully and productively engages poetic tension between the metaphorical and the literal is in the linkages it calls forth between the animal body and the female body as sites of oppression, as well as sites of resistance. In my analysis, I draw extensively on the work of Carol J. Adams in this respect. Adams wrote *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* in 1990, in which she examined the historical and

[14] The full title of the poem is "Nico Said Excrement Filters Through the Brain. I's a Kit."

critical intersections between feminism and vegetarianism. The book not only constitutes a formative ecofeminist text but helped form the theoretical basis for vegan studies to eventually emerge years later. In *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, Adams introduces the concept of "texts of meat":

> By speaking of the *texts of meat* we situate the production of meat's meaning within a political-cultural context. None of us chooses the meanings that constitute the texts of meat, we adhere to them. Because of the personal meaning meat has for those who consume it, we generally fail to see the social meanings that have actually predetermined the personal meaning. [... Meat] is seen as an item of food; its meaning recurs continuously at mealtimes, in advertisements, in conversations; and it is comprised of a system of relations having to do with food production, attitudes toward animals, and, by extension, acceptable violence toward them. (24)

By nature of its title and content, *The Cow* directly invokes the notion of a text of meat and resituates it within a poetic context. Poetry, I argue, is uniquely positioned to oppose and/or displace texts of meat, restoring to presence that which has been rendered absent—in other words, it works to undo the erasure of bodies (including the body of the woman and the body of the cow). By refusing to "adhere" to accepted meanings of texts of meat, *The Cow* attempts to make meaning outside/despite the industrial "system of relations" in which the book circulates—and the body of the cow/woman comprises the (re)central site of meaning-making (and contestation).

Adams' work emerges largely out of a disconnect between feminism and animal studies: the "failure of feminists to recognize the gender issues embedded in the eating of animals" (26). Reines specifically chooses the gendered figure of the cow as her primary nonhuman subject, probing the identity categories of both woman and cow, and the interconnected oppressions members of these categories undergo. Reines' speaker(s)—fluctuating between distinctly human and vaguely animal—clearly identify a feeling of kinship between woman and cow that emerges predominantly out of shared or linked experiences of suffering. Within industrial food systems,

most male calves are killed shortly after birth (though some are raised for leather or to supply bull semen), whereas dairy cows are kept alive for their reproductive capabilities (to supply milk). Both the cows and the women in Reines' poems are extremely sexualized, objectified, and frequently constitute victims of violence. They are also defined repeatedly by a perceived bodily absence; their bodies serve as holes to be penetrated or vessels to be emptied, filled, and emptied again. *The Cow* includes many graphic scenes of intercourse, anal penetration, and oral sex, but the vision of the female (animal or human) body as vessel or absence is not purely sexual. For example, in "In Which She Pays For Her Tardiness," Reines writes:

> There was a kink in the thing that was a girl
> […]
> I was a sock filled with rubble
> CROTCH
> I was the shaft some light filled
> I was a skin
> They filled me with something
> I was a LUNG

To be "girl" is to be a "thing," a (body) part, a container to be occupied. The container is sometimes occupied by blood, semen, antibiotics, rubble, light, flesh, air… Throughout *The Cow*, Reines repeatedly lends a presence to this amorphous absence.

In *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, Adams applies the term *absent referent*[15] to animal subjects in the food industry. Through slaughter, animals become absent referents, translated from live individuals into "food." According to Adams, they are made absent literally (through death), definitionally (through terminology), and metaphorically (through imaginative repurposing). Poets without a doubt participate in the second and third modes through their treatment of animal subjects; Reines is no exception. She identifies, in particular, the

[15] For a lengthier explanation of the "absent referent," as well as additional examples, see *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, pages 51-6. Adams refers to Margaret Homans' discussion of the absent referent in literature in *Bearing the Word: Language and the Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing* (1989).

uncomfortable tension underlying this entanglement between woman and cow—the way in which, via linguistic conflation, one sometimes cannibalizes the other.

> There is a stupidity in the conflation I am in the act of, cow with a cattle car and mother with me, cunt and carcass and book and stomach. But this stupidity, if it belongs to me, is also exterior to me. Humans got brutalized by being packed into cattle cars and dying in them or by them which in turn humanizes, necessarily, the suffering of the beasts for which cattle cars were made. Then what. Signification is incestuous, iterative, autofellating. ("Lodge")

The problem with intersectional comparisons, especially conveyed through language, become apparent in this example; if to animalize humans in such a way is also to humanize animals, it is for the benefit of neither. To refer to the animal "holocaust" or the "rape" of cows is contentious in part because, as Adams puts it, "some terms are so powerfully specific to one group's oppression that their appropriation"—despite very literal parallels such as the slaughter of pigs in gas chambers or the forcible impregnation of dairy cows—"is potentially exploitative" (54). Poetry's frequent reliance on signification and metaphor, while useful for drawing connections, is potentially risky in this way.

In her article, "Writing in the Anthropocene: Idle Chatter or Ecoprophetic Witness?" (2009), Kate Rigby makes a case for the value of "writing into the Anthropocene in the mode of prophetic witness," while also acknowledging that in a context of modern ecocide, language runs the risk of amounting to "little more than 'idle chatter'" (173-4). Reines participates in a mode of signification—albeit arguably more present than "prophetic"—that bears witness to violences of such intensity and scale that language is called upon to walk a difficult line between "idle chatter" and the kind of potentially exploitative terminology to which Adams refers. *The Cow* rotates between various modes of expression, intertwining prophetic verse, vernacular utterance (crude at times), and the repurposed language of corporate carnage; the effect of this linguistic interlacing is a compression of the gap between witness and witnessed, speaker/reader and poetic

subject. It is in this gap, between "sovereign self" and Other, that Rigby situates her argument for broader ecological ethical consideration:

> […] the relative unconcern—the refusal to witness—with which the fate of non-human others is generally regarded, notwithstanding the efforts of individuals and minority groups, whether that fate is traced in the extinction of whole species or in the day-to-day suffering and death of animals in the meat trade, in laboratories, in recreational hunting, or simply on our blood-spattered roads, holds a clue as to the structural connection—but not, I repeat, equivalence—between genocide and ecocide. (175)

In an animal rights context, even if we refrain from using terms, such as "holocaust" and "rape," that risk rendering different violences as equivalences, to conjure the voice or the perspective of a cow in a poetic context is to anthropomorphize (*human*ize), to participate in the imaginative rewriting of a nonhuman individual's ontological experience. Even as Reines acknowledges a "stupidity" in the signification in which she engages, such implementation of exploitative, "incestuous" signification through poetry is "also exterior" because such practices manifest themselves in our institutions, our cultural traditions, our language, and our history. In short, they circulate as texts of meat.

By linking the multitudinous and overlapping erasures of women and cows in her poems, Reines exposes what Adams refers to as the institutionalized, patriarchal—and, I add, speciesist—"structure of the absent referent" (53), and ignites a long and complicated process of restoring that referent—by lending voice to that which is silent, a face to she who is anonymous, and presence to that which is absent. "There are vessels that have had their innards emptied out," Reines writes definitively in "Dear Marguerite"; amidst this hollowness, speaker(s) search continually for:

> […] the residue of what a body is doing but somehow in the iterative efflux of sound in which meaning resonates [*poetry?*] containing also the residue of others who are dead, so that the substance of signification is also ghosts. ("Leftovers")

The Cow's mode of witness looks to the meaning resonating from disappeared and othered beings. Through representation, the absent referent(s) are residual, there and not there, ghosts the poet refuses to let disappear completely but fails, inevitably, to bring back to life.

When animal rights activists participate in the practice of "bearing witness" to animal suffering and slaughter, a commonly stated objective is to see animals for what—or rather *who*—they are, as opposed to resources, property or future food products, and usually with the hope of experiencing or intensifying some kind of empathetic connection. Just as Reines' representation of "ghosts" walks the line between absence and presence, the practice of bearing witness likewise fails to bring animals back to life (or to prevent their deaths in the first place). In this way it is a symbolic act in many (though not all) ways, but one in which participants actively rewrite dominant portrayals of animal bodies through their own embodied experience (that of witness). As in this example, a vegan poetics does not pretend to do away with all metaphor—to do so would be impossible and some metaphors are indeed quite productive—but it does sustain an allegiance to literal human and nonhuman animal presence, to the singular beings and bodies upon which the human gaze falls.

Representation, Signification and the Dangers of Metaphor

How is one to read the formal presence of "the cow" in the context of a poem? Can and should the cow be read as a metaphor? Adams states that a major challenge of vegetarian (and, I argue, even more so vegan[16]) activism is "being heard about literal matters in a society that favors symbolic thinking" (85). Poetry likewise has a tendency to favor symbolic thinking. One could

[16] While Adams refers primarily to vegetarianism in *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, her vegetarian-feminist critical theory can and should be extended to include and argue in favor of veganism. Her more recent critical work supports extending this framework, explicitly advocating for veganism.

feasibly choose to read every mention of "cow" in Reines' collection as a metaphorical stand-in for "woman." I argue, however, that the book resists this kind of purely allegorical reading or anthropomorphic allegiance. Reines routinely juxtaposes the lyrical with the literal, particularly during the nineteen-page series entitled "Rendered" that occurs late in the collection—a series in which she details various processes of and materials involved in cattle rendering in exceeding detail (again drawing directly on industry manuals and vocabulary).[17] Reines describes various encounters of violence (toward both cows and women) with graphic precision, maintaining an allegiance to the literal that works to thwart the erasure of violence and oppression—including erasures carried out through metaphor. The literal (no-longer-absent) referent takes up space in the poems. Or, as Adams puts it, "To make the absent referent present—that is, describing exactly how an animal dies, kicking, screaming, and is fragmented—disables the power of metaphor" (63). In such a way, a vegan poetic practice calls upon the reader to contemplate the cow herself, not her absence.

For all the compelling factual details Reines provides, when it comes to the cow's perspective, the reader might ask, how literal can a poem be? And what is the effect of combining this veritable mode of witness and documentation with the lyrical dynamism of verse? One example occurs early in the collection when Reines makes the first direct reference to the body of the cow:

> Moistest mouth is cow's mouth sorrow face normal. Hung up hind legs reversed negated shit brains rear world. ("Blowhole")

In literal terms, this is a description of a cow about to be or having just been slaughtered—"hung up" by its "hind legs." (In a standard slaughterhouse practice, cows are hung upside down so as

[17] Examples include explanations of "Z Value" (temperature increase required to reduce thermal death), "Downer Cow" (a mature dairy cow who remains recumbent hours after calving), vaginal and anal exploration of cows' bodies, and various specific steps in standard meat processing (65-83).

to have their throats slit and then to bleed out.) A few pages later, we get the same scene, this time from the supposed cow's perspective:

> My body is the opposite of my body when they hang me up by my hind legs. ("Knocker")

Thus, even as Reines moves into the territory of anthropomorphosis or projection of human voice onto the nonhuman body, she builds upon the literal. And as they hang her up, a rewriting of subjecthood occurs; reversal and negation serve as forms of erasure, forcibly stamping out the animal's essence to reveal "shit brains rear world." Physically speaking (because she is upside down) the animal's bottom or "rear" has replaced her face—the primary outward expression of identity and suffering (suffering already normalized in the eyes of the beholder—"sorrow face normal"). An animal is also often said to "rear" on his/her hind legs (often in fright or aggression), but here the hind legs are elevated, reversing the natural positioning of "rearing." Finally, the language echoes *rear (v.)*, as in to raise or bring up, as a mother rears her child; in this way, Reines gestures further toward the notion of an upside-down or contemptible world brought forth not by any motherly body but "shit brains."

Adams condemns our society's "failure to acknowledge the importance of body-mediated knowledge" (167). Meat serves as an antithesis to the living body; as one awakens to the "revelation of the nothingness of meat," "one sees that it came from something, or rather someone, and it has been made into a no-thing, no-body" (187). Texts of meat stand to disaffirm representations of animal life. Presence is translated—violently—into absence, "she" into "it," subject into object. The body of the mother in particular repeatedly endures this translation in *The Cow;*

> To be a blank upon which the hells project their sorrow and to forgive them, that means to be a mother. ("In The Most Holy Place Shalt Thou Eat It")

In the case of the mother, there lies a kind of unsung nobility in such emptiness, a nobility being desecrated with each transliteration of the body—through oppressive forces such as violence, enslavement, sickness, time, and (eventually) death. In "Dear Marguerite," Reines writes:

> Time's up for the mommas time's up for the mommas they're all gonna get too old for longer and longer and die slower and slower and you're not gonna care, are you, gentle reader.

Here, the "gentle reader" is confronted directly with the question of an ethic of care in the context of a literary practice. An ecofeminist lens demands that the reader "care" about the "mommas" (human and nonhuman) and the lens of a vegan poetics likewise rejects the reading of body as commodity or container. The mother serves as the ultimate vessel for absence/presence, as her body literally carries her child, is emptied of that child, fills up with milk, then is emptied of that milk. Or, in the case of dairy cows, the body of the mother is drained dry not by its child but by the industrialized milking machine, re-impregnated, drained dry, re-impregnated, drained dry—"Delve into the marzipan of her rutted teats. / You have got to squeeze her squeeze her squeeze her" ("Valve")—and so on until her body is spent[18] and thus economically useless. And so she is sent to slaughter—translated, rewritten into a different kind of matter.

As it continuously undergoes rewriting, the cow's body becomes increasingly detached from perceived notions of "animacy"[19] such as vitality, mobility, and freedom. In "Blood Libel," Reines starkly narrates:

> Then you find out that the gift of a body alone doesn't guarantee any kind of life.

[18] The term "spent" refers to a dairy cow who is too old or depleted to produce milk. Spent cows are typically killed for meat.
[19] Both *animal* and *animate* derive from Latin *anima*, meaning "breath" or "soul" (*OED*).

Cows and all farmed animals indeed have their entire lives decided—written—for them before they are even born. In the poems, cows, women, and speaker(s) are all imprisoned in systems of devaluation and violation; the sensation they most closely associate with "the gift of a body" seems to be pain—"Body is whole, body hurts. Body is whole, body hurts" ("Dear Marguerite")—alongside loss or absence of selfhood:

> Where am I not in my body, where am I least in it. What could be excised from me most easily.
> Where is a living thing not itself. Is her shit any less her.
> […]
> Where does life exist. ("Rectal Exploration")

This series of questions suggests a grasping for the kind of body-mediated knowledge that has long been ignored. In a world where dominant practices of seeing and speaking repeatedly advance the erasure of lived suffering, our speaker wonders, "Why cannot a body itself be testimony" ("Advertisement"). In the animal activist examples of vigils, bearing witness, and the procurement of undercover footage, the animals themselves become just that: testimony or proof of their lived experiences and the conditions of their slaughter. However, the controversial nature of such practices and in many cases the legal regulations they brush up against contend that, in the eyes of most humans, a body does not constitute testimony (particularly if that body is female or nonhuman). I will return to the subject of body-mediated testimony later in Act One, but *The Cow* importantly aligns itself with activist practices by setting its sights on the restoration of the referent by means of the body. That is, testimony of "life" lived, "a living thing." Of course, just as not all bodies are deemed equally worth of life, not all language is deemed equally valuable. Poetry, like legally sanctioned speech or "testimony," has undergone methods of framing and forming that separate it from everyday language. Part of the difficulty of restoring the absent referent through poetry lies in the limitations of language as well as the risks of metaphor.

A vegan poetics rethinks the status of metaphor within poetic utterance, seeking to link ethical commitments more directly to form. At the back of *The Cow*, Reines includes an image of two naked women with oversized breasts, heaving pregnant bellies, udders, and horns. The image visually illustrates the linked experiences of women and cows, but also draws attention to the ridiculousness of such a metaphor. The image, unaccompanied by any text or specified origin, exudes a certain comical perversion and reminds us that all representation carried out by humans is anthropocentric at heart. In "Dear Marguerite," Reines writes matter-of-factly, "DEAR WOMEN // I know that you are not cattle." For all the conflation between women and cows upon which the book hinges, it asks—of the reader and perhaps of the speaker-poet as well—that this conflation be a restorative measure, a means to expose oppression and suffering, not to hide or exploit them. In this way, the metaphor of women as cattle depicted in the image and collection at large conjures empathy for both species, despite its literal inaccuracy.

According to Adams, feminism questions the structure of stories, locating feminist meanings in the "gaps and silences of traditional narrative" (105). Poetry as a genre is particularly well suited to probe gaps and silences, and a vegan poetic reading/writing practice aligns itself with this mode of rhetorical inquiry. The literal silence of the cows—both in the sense that they cannot speak words and in the silence of death—occupies space in many of Reines' poems, haunting the abundant white space on the page, even as it gives way to anthropomorphic revisions: "Eat me. / Eat me. / Silence of eternity" ends the poem "Decorticated." No cow wants, let alone begs, to be eaten. But the human voice attributed to her, however facetiously, reminds us that a fundamental distinction between the women and the cow is that the woman (speaker-poet figure included) possesses the tool of words while, from the perspective of the human, the cow has none and thus remains voiceless, silent. (As I will discuss

later, farmed animals are in fact far from voiceless or silent, communicating through bodily utterances such as lows and cries, but such "language" is rarely listened to or valued in the setting of an industrial kill facility.) Though the speaker repeatedly expresses a feeling of futility in language, when reading/writing the life of a cow, we must consider how far from the wordless animal it is appropriate to place the figure of the woman, given her possible empowerment through voice. With each poem, the speaker renews her power of lyrical expression; this expression contrasts the haunting permanence of the eternal silence associated with the "decorticated" or skinned animal body, which will be transported, processed, and packaged into someone somewhere's meal: "Eat me. / Eat me." The quiet that follows seems not just to probe the gaps and silences of the traditional narrative of texts of meat, but to attempt to rewrite that narrative altogether.

To write about cows inevitably involves representation; texts of meat argue that such beings are not of our species, and are thus different from us, disconnected, "other." "The Seed Is Rotten Under Their Clods," engages such disconnection and links it to the act of violence:

> We don't care what the fucker feels. Sensation that is something wholly other.
> Long night of guts.

While *The Cow* does not go so far as to argue that the woman's perspective is the cow's or that the cow is entirely representative of the woman, the repeated conflation of bodies throughout Reines' poems resists this notion of complete otherness. What would a sensation that is "wholly other" look or feel like, after all? How would one write about it? While they are alive, the bodies of the cows have faces, exhibit emotions, have relationships, are violated, feel suffering, cry out—"Acres of wishes inside of her" ("Knocker"). Isn't it more likely that in order to endure the "Long night of guts," to murder and decorticate living beings, or even simply to witness such an act, one must *make* their bodies other?—as the slave master does his slave, as the rapist his

victim, as the man who—in "In Which She Pays For Her Tardiness"—hurls a tungsten lamp at the woman he claims to love. Another poem's speaker professes:

> When the difference between seeing and others, and all else, becomes
> clear as a veil.
>
> I start to know something that is a membrane somebody licked onto my two eyes.
>
> […]
>
> Is this shithole my membrane, do I have to feel the ends of what I feel by virtue
> of what it is. ("Se Trouver Dans Un Trou, Au Fond D'Un Trou")

This notion of a veil or membrane questions the very nature of seeing, of the individual human's capacity to bear witness. It impedes visibility and obscures its true subject, enabling the viewer to *make other*. The speaker questions the ends or limits of individual feeling and the impetus behind those limits; perhaps "We don't care what the fucker feels" "by virtue of what [not *who*] it is": a cow. What if sensation only looks *other*-ly on account of some "shithole" membrane or veil, not even one's own?

In "Trope," we encounter yet another representation of obscured reality:

> Now that my face is become a hood
> Over the pulp of bad stuff that daily harms its outlook. Now that I know
> That it is not for them I cry but for me. For me.

Does a reader or activist's grief upon bearing witness emerge from a feeling of sympathy or empathy? And is either one ever not caught up in the entanglement of the ego? An admission of selfishness on the part of Reines' speaker pervades the collection, bringing into question the (un)ethical impulses often caught up in acts of seeing and writing other beings. What does it mean to "write" the cow (not just to write *about* her)? Reines clearly suggests that a translation or altering occurs through language (words are a human construct after all), yet aims to provide an alternative "writing" of these living bodies to the ones performed by texts of meat, in books, and in slaughterhouses and restaurants alike:

> I cannot count the altering that happens in the very large rooms that are the guts of her.
>
> Words translated. (“Billet”)

What kinds of translations and representations of a body are possible? And might we seek out a less exploitative (re)writing, one that’s more true to the cows themselves, despite the impossibility of really knowing them?

In *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, Adams recalls eating a hamburger as a child while mourning the death of her pony: “I could summon no ethical defense for a favoritism that would exclude the cow from my concern because I had not known her. I now saw meat differently” (12). In this moment, a politics of grief is suddenly unconcealed from Adams’ view—one in which degrees of mourning directly correlate to degrees of personal loss and the disparity between the cow and the pony’s personal value exists only on account of a problematic “favoritism” (what animals rights advocates and scholars call “speciesism”). A vegan poetic lens attempts to lessen this disparity, shrinking the distance between an abstract or “other” being and one which is valued because known. Reines’ poems attempt to “see differently” by challenging us to consider what it means to “know” an animal; to read her, to write her, to rewrite her, represent her, anthropomorphize her, use her, consume her…

Poetics of Change

What is the relationship between the creation of poetry and a theory of change? At times the speaker-poet sounds empowered in her defiance of traditional narratives of oppression—“I will not train myself to love this shit” (“Dear Marguerite”)—but she also acknowledges the potential uselessness of writing as a form of activism or change; “What does a country need a poet for. To

put up bunting on the dead shanks of dreams," asks "Valve." And, in "Blood Libel," the speaker notes how

> Everything can be put to use except the low. The utterance.
> The language of meat doesn't change much.

Reines aligns the cries ("low[s]") of the cows and poetry in their alleged uselessness. This uselessness is at once tragic and promising, underscoring the importance of poetry as an instrument of disruption. While the speaker bemoans continued violence and loss, like the lows of the cows, poems are enclosed within but also transcend commodity value and the capitalistic paradigm; in that transcendence, their "uselessness" lends powerful presence to alternative paradigms in which living beings are valued for their own sake.

Adams would surely agree that "the language of meat doesn't change much," as we witness its meanings get reproduced over and over again in our lives. If we are to stop replicating cruel, inhumane practices toward humans and nonhumans alike, we must stop reproducing their meanings. And in order to do so, we must attempt to remove the "membranes" from our eyes, the "veils" and "hoods" from our faces. We must not "*dis*member the meaning of meat from animals' lives" (Adams 165, emphasis added) and instead *re*member the live body, the referent, the individual. A vegan poetics marries experience to living memory, however fleeting. Indeed, Reines seems to find value in the rewriting of texts of meat, even in moments of futility:

> The language of meat doesn't change much. But still if there is something
> I can do to shit reality by writing I have to.
>
> […]
>
> […] I have to find out how writing has to do with what happens. ("Blood Libel")

Adams offers a clue into writing's relationship to activism, contending, "Vegetarianism is an act of the imagination. It reflects an ability to imagine alternatives to the texts of meat" (191). Poetry, I argue, is aligned with vegetarianism and veganism in this way, in its imaginative

capacity to transform a body. And Reines demonstrates through her collection how a writer might make the most of such an alignment—by making remembrance (*not* dismemberment) a literary aspiration and priority.

What can a book do? asks a vegan poetics; what agency might be awakened by foregrounding the remembrance of animal bodies?

> Can a book carry you into the world you have to pretend doesn't exist most of the time, can a book carry you back out into what first made you alive. Muscles in their marbling enfolding the sickest livers and the saddest eyes, and tongues that flop out pinking as they dessicate. ("A Cleaner, Safer World")

Furthermore, I ask, can a book (such as *The Cow*) lift a veil or membrane to reveal a living, suffering body? Can it connect a reader to "what first made you alive"?—matter, body, mother. Can a book be a vehicle that "carries you" toward a different, more righteous kind of seeing? These are questions the subsequent sections and Acts of this dissertation seek to explore. Adams describes texts of meat as "structures that transform flesh […] into meat [… and] signal the degree of distancing that our culture has determined is necessary for consumption of animals to proceed" (163). She stresses the need for alternative cultural interventions and interruptions from all directions, including literature. If texts can transform flesh this way, can texts also transform it back, reverse it, un-erase individual subjecthoods? In other words, can they make us see the cow instead of the meat?

An undercurrent of numb guilt pervades much of the collection—"I am too sorry to know how I feel," admits the speaker in "Please Be The Beef…"[20] The speaker's desire to help both the women and the cows is dependent upon recovering sensation. In "Rendered," she calls for a sweeping reestablishment of feeling:

> I want to found a country where everybody feels.

[20] The full title of the poem is "Please Be The Beef, Please Beef, Pleasure Is Not Wailing. Please Beef, Please Be Carved Clear, Please Be A Case of Consideration."

Universes shooting out of matter so tiny you can only feel it.

Where seeing is flawed or thwarted by forces of erasure, feeling holds the capacity for a different kind of "knowing." However futile language may prove for Reines and/or her speaker(s), *The Cow* certainly rouses such feelings in its reader—if not emotional sensations such as sadness or sympathy, then visceral ones at the very least; in its graphic descriptions of blood, mucus, and feces, for examples, it succeeds in spoiling one's appetite. In this respect, while not all poetry can (or aims to) argue on behalf of animals or oppressed bodies at large, poems can help us relearn how to feel—sorrow, disgust, anger, connection, empathy. This is why I argue that my vegan education began the first time I picked up a book.

"Item" opens with a reference to Hindu impressions of the cow: "It is not that you have to worship her. You just have to not kill her." While the poetic intentions and contentions of *The Cow* (and veganism at large) may seem radical to the everyday reader (and the everyday meat-eater), Reines' effort to displace and disarm texts of meat through poetry instigates the most basic of reparations. Instead of a text of meat, she offers up a text of cow. The book is, after all, entitled simply: *The Cow*. By choosing to title the collection thus, she reaffirms the individual animal, the living body—not her species at large or her translation. According to Adams, "Being in touch with the vegetarian body restores the absent referent and body-mediated knowledge" (177). Reines certainly proves to be "in touch," but through *The Cow* she also makes clear how complex, incomplete, and precarious this process of restoration remains. There is more work to be done.

Getting to Know Animals

In her childhood tale of biting into a hamburger while mourning the death of her pony, Adams attributes her "favoritism" (i.e. speciesism) to the fact that she did not "know" the cow whose life was ended in order to produce the burger. Indeed the majority of people have no firsthand contact whatsoever with the animals they regularly consume. But what is it to "know" a nonhuman animal exactly? Is it to see him, touch him, interact with him? Or to comprehend, generally speaking, her origin, the stages that comprised her life, the cause and method of her death? Should human knowledge of animals be based on intellectual, affective, or embodied understanding? Must we feel animal pain and suffering as our own pain and suffering in order to say veritably we have "known" that animal? And what forms of knowing are (and are not) valued with regard to cross-species relations?

In this section, I will explore the dilemma of knowing a nonhuman animal and the relationship of knowledge to poetic and linguistic form. Examining manifestations of farmed animals in Jenny George's *The Dream of Reason* (2018), I argue that poems constitute a site in which to encounter nonhuman animals (or rather their representations) differently. George's work in the realm of social justice and ecological health clearly informs her poetry, as *The Dream of Reason* presents a "dream" or collection of dreams in which cross-species encounters are viewed from a relational lens, and nonhuman animal bodies are depicted as vibrant with animacy. George's poems on farmed pigs in particular offer rich opportunities to explore the possibilities of a vegan poetics and the forms of knowing that most productively enable the dismantling of speciesism.

Critical conversations about cultivating more equitable practices of care (including of nonhuman animals) have in many cases participated in the very anthropomorphism that enables violence toward animals in the first place. Scholars are increasingly pushing back against

historically fraught perspectives; the work of animal studies scholar Kathryn Gillespie, for example, seeks to increase the legibility of the dominant value system (i.e. anthropocentrism and speciesism) in order to erode that system. And critical animal studies theorist John Sanbonmatsu goes so far as to argue speciesism is at the root of every form of social domination (*Critical Theory and Animal Liberation*). "Otherness" stems on the one hand from known (observed or perceived) differences between beings and on the other from an absence of knowledge—an unknowing or unknowability with regard to fellow beings. Animal studies scholar Susan McHugh questions what kinds of knowledge humans can ever have about other species in *Animal Stories* (2011):

> Self-questioning all too often comes at the expense of discovering what happens when we move from studying animals with any established methodology or preset value system to imagining ourselves working within (even against) a newly formulated discursive field that brings together complex and different constructions of and methods for studying (with) animals, then the need for narrative ethology becomes all the more apparent. (23)

In kinship with that narrative ethology, I identify the need for a poetics that seeks to entertain alternatives to "established methodology[/ies] or preset value system[s]"; where philosophy and criticism provide the new "discursive field" McHugh describes, the open field of the poem constitutes a site of in(ter)vention, experiment and change—linguistic and affective in nature. In the examples ahead, animal poems engage, apply, and resist preset models of "knowing" across species lines; they deconstruct and de-center human knowledge of nonhuman animals, situating it within a broader network of relations—one which does not reduce animals to disposable commodities on the basis of nonhuman status. As I will demonstrate in my readings of George's poems on pigs, a vegan poetic practice seeks to read with particular attention to ways of "knowing" animals that fall outside the dominant/preset value system. These include (but are not limited to): 1) connection to or awareness of the singular being, 2) encounters with or witness of

embodied animal expression(s), and 3) partial understanding of nonhuman animals, paired with the acknowledgement that there are limits to human understanding. If unquestioned assumptions are indeed the foundations of any culture (as Derrick Jensen often argues), then these examples of "knowing" animals differently challenge not only the form and content of cultural knowledge about nonhuman animals, but the culture itself.

The Obscuring of the Singular Being

A poetic tension also exists between representations of animals as singular subjects and as synecdochic stand-ins for their respective species. As previously discussed, contemporary ecocritics and environmental activists tend to focus on macro-level species knowledge. While this is useful for the study of population changes, extinction crises, and the effect of industrialization on whole ecosystems, the application of a species-level lens (especially in isolation) obscures the existence/experience of singular beings. The animal industrial complex depends (much more nefariously) upon manufactured concealment of singular animal beings. In the (dis)assembly line production model, each unit (resource/commodity/product) is a carbon copy of every other unit, indistinguishable and interchangeable. The capitalistic language of animal agriculture reflects the concealment of singular being; farmed animals are referred to as (live)stock, and later (dead)stock on a store shelf. Animal bodies are also branded so as to reinforce a lack of individual existence—through numerical or symbolic branding (via a branding iron, tattooing, painting, earmarking, eartagging, or microchipping); later their dead bodies will also be "branded" as product, this time through packaging labels and advertising. Techniques such as these serve, materially and conceptually, to obscure the singular being.

In her palindrome poem, "The Traveling Line," Jenny George underscores the plurality and monotony of industrial pig farming processes. The poem begins:

> The sun on their backs is a stroke of burning gold.
> The smell the bright dust of the yard.
> The pigs are loaded onto trucks.
> The pigs are prodded through a passage.
> They roll their many eyes.
> They see the hind legs of the one ahead.
> They call to one another like birds.

The pigs on their way to slaughter are always plural, grouped together, and nameless—described only by their species category, "pigs," or through the plural pronoun "they." George's use of the poetic line further mimics the assembly line, or unit-by-unit treatment of the pigs, each line identical in its containment of a single, straightforward prosaic sentence, relentlessly followed (in the next line) by another single, straightforward prosaic sentence (and so on). Singular identity or knowing of/"with" the individual animal becomes impossible; the system is too automated and each animate action is so brief—occupying only a single linear unit in the "traveling line"—that they blur together, the lives of the pigs becoming identical in the eyes of the human witness or reader.

Animal studies scholar Kathryn Gillespie describes this obscuring of singularity through "the traveling line" during her first visit to a farmed animal auction. Disturbed and saddened by the controlled, commonplace violences carried out at the auction, she vows to try to remember each animal's face "[a]s a way to honor each cow, and her embodied experience of being so thoroughly commodified" (89). Similar to the monotony captured by George's poetic choices, Gillespie explains that "the auction has a profoundly abstracting effect. The mundane nature of the auction yard and the relentless, routine nature of commodifying the animal body insists on the abstraction from the singular animal. […] In the auction yard, the *cow* easily blurs into a stream of *cows*, and the routine circulation of living capital becomes monotonous" (90). Indeed

knowledge of the singular is rarely valued when it comes to human knowledge of farmed animals; as Gillespie emphasizes, any momentary conception of a singular life gives way quickly to that of the quantifiable, commodified units of production, or moreover food products themselves.

A vegan poetics, as exemplified in George's poem, seeks first to expose this translation and secondly to resist it. George chooses the palindrome form for "The Traveling Line," meaning that halfway through the poem, the lines reverse themselves, repeating backwards giving a mirrored effect to the text. The "center" of the palindrome reads:

> They hold still inside confusion.
> A current passes through their bodies.
> Blood comes from their mouths in strings.
> By the ankles they are swiftly inverted.
> Blood comes from their mouths in strings.
> A current passes through their bodies.
> They hold still inside confusion.

After electrical stunning—the "current"—pigs are typically hung upside down (like the cows Reines describes) so that the blood can be drained from their carcasses. This "inversion," marking both their death and their conversion from animals into meat, serves as the "hinge" point for the palindrome structure. Henceforth the lines repeat themselves in reverse fashion, emphasizing the repetition and scale of the slaughtering process. It becomes impossible to keep track of each singular death, just as Gillespie fails to remember each distinct face in the stream of cows at the auction. Over 200 million animals are killed for food each day globally (or, more accurately, close to three billion per day if we include fish and aquatic animals); this equates to well over 2000 land animal deaths per *second* (FAO). In the latter half of "The Traveling Line," the end of each linear unit echoes the death (or "inversion") of yet another animal, as the experiences of suffering—"fever," "confusion," "blood"—multiply and the poet piles one on top of another to create a sense of impenetrable innumerability.

Fundamental to a vegan poetic lens is the question of scale—the ability to illume and navigate multiple scales of knowing and being. To more clearly illustrate the degree to which apprehension (or lack thereof) of the singular being shapes human conceptions of animals, we might compare the way most Americans conceptualize the 200+ million farmed animals killed each day to the way we conceptualize our nonhuman "pets" or domestic companions. I experience or "know" my dog not as a border collie, an economic asset/liability, or commodity object, but primarily as an individual—a singular being with a unique personality, perceivable emotions and experiences, and a name. The thought of eating her, Jasmine, the individual, horrifies me. And yet, comparisons between, for examples, the consumption of dog meat in countries such as China and the consumption of cows and pigs in the United States are difficult to refute. The only difference is a cultural categorization of certain species as "pets," based on common exposure to singular animals or to the depiction of singular animals in widely circulated cultural narratives (in contrast to texts of meat). In this way, direct interaction with singular animals provides the most access to such "knowing." I argue that the application of a vegan poetics can help us to craft more critical practices of reading all animal bodies (not just culturally accepted ones), not only in the context of direct cross-species encounters but also indirect ones. This is important because, for most Americans, particularly in urban and suburban areas, whether encountering farmed animals through their representations in advertisements, food labels, media, or other narrative "texts," indirect or mediated exposures to animal bodies are far more common.

George's depiction of the abstracting effect of industrial slaughter practices and her description of the pigs' suffering in "The Traveling Line" encourage a critical reading of human, or rather *in*human(e), treatment of and relationship to pigs. But the palindrome structure simultaneously offers something more: a reparative reading of pig slaughter. In the shadow of

slaughter, as the lines reverse themselves during the second half of the poem, the animal bodies are in some sense brought back to life on the page. After the swift "inversion," the pigs are depicted alive and autonomous again, moving, seeing, calling out to each other, and in the final lines of the poem,

> They smell the bright dust of the yard.
> The sun on their backs is a stroke of burning gold.

As the poet brings their live bodies back into the daylight, an imagined reversal or undoing—an *un-translation*—occurs. Through her use of the palindrome form, George at once exposes the mechanized translation of animals into meat *and* resists that translation by offering an imagined restoration of the animals as animals, pigs as pigs.

In *Animal Stories*, McHugh identifies *indeterminancy* as a key component of literary power in reshaping readerly conceptions of nonhuman animals:

> […] scholars of animals and animality today are mapping more permeable species boundaries, […] locating narrative as a zone of integration, one that does not end in literary studies so much as it begins to explain how story forms operate centrally within shifting perceptions of species life. Through their very indeterminancy, narrative processes thus appear to concern the very conditions of possibility for human (along with other) ways of being. (2)

George's "The Traveling Line" veritably serves as one such "zone of integration," but the poetic form facilitates an even stronger push toward indeterminancy (does the poem depict the pigs' life or death?) than narrative forms of storytelling or literature. The palindrome by its very nature resists chronological/temporal scales of being and is thus able to "travel the line" between a depiction of the material status quo (an assembly line of industrialized slaughter) and an imagined alternative possibility (life, brightness, sunlight). Likewise the poem mediates the boundary between life and death in a cyclical fashion, so as to displace normalized, linear narratives about the process of pig slaughter—narratives in which the translation of beings into meat is a foregone conclusion.

Embodied Animal Expression

A second basis for "knowing" that a vegan poetics espouses is knowing centered in (encounters with or witness of) embodied animal expression(s). By expression I mean that animals communicate attachments, animacy, agency and experiences by means of the body. Dominant forms of knowledge surrounding human relationships to nonhuman animals, especially farmed animals, foreground just that—*dominance*. Power, agency and influence, particularly of a physical nature typically function and are depicted as one-directional; whether in the example of a farmer forcibly impregnating a dairy cow, a pig being advanced into the stunning chute through use of an electric rod, or even non-slaughter examples of human-animal interactions such as riding a horse or walking a dog, humans dominate animals (not vice versa). As literary objects, poems can be said to contain knowledge (for instance, about animal bodies), but they are also linguistic agents, facilitating or challenging the formal parameters through which knowledge is exchanged. Language shapes us as much as we shape language.

We can see an example of multi-directional agency in George's poem, "Influence," in which the speaker contemplates an epigraph reading, "The quiet handling of pigs produces quieter pigs":

> True, we mold the world.
> Something passes through our hands—
> a pig, a person, clay or alloy,
> some living material—and the handling
> shapes the thing.
> I split a melon and two neat halves fall away.
> Things proceed from us.

Even as the opening section of the poem acknowledges a seemingly normative understanding of human dominance or "handling"—one in which "pig" (and, interestingly, "person") is equated to a "thing" to be "shape[d]"—the speaker subtly distances control (and perhaps accompanying

culpability) from the supposed human influencer; rather than us *doing* things, "Things [simply] proceed from us." Then comes a stark interruption:

> This illusion is smooth and enduring.

By declaring one-way human dominance over living "material[s]" to be an illusion, the speaker flips the epigraph on its head, and in the second stanza that follows, George tracks the animate slippage between nonhuman object and living animal:

> But in certain rare moments, the gears kink,
> sputter, and reverse. Then objects
> flash us with their genius.
> Fingers twined in yarn become yarn.
> A knife's intention travels up the arm.
> And the pigs—hushed, breathing
> calmly in their pens—quiet us into handlers.

The reader encounters a "zone of integration" here—not just between life and death but between human and nonhuman; the forms of the fingers and the yarn become entangled and the boundary between the inanimate knife and the human arm grows blurry. George's depiction of "A knife's intention" entering the human body—it "travels up the arm"—calls to mind the collapsing of slaughterhouse machinery with slaughterhouse workers, particularly in factory farms where workers are required to kill and process animals at dangerously fast line speeds comprised of repetitive motions over the course of lengthy shifts. Well-documented repetitive stress injuries and chronic pain among slaughterhouse workers underscore the fact that humans are not in fact robots. In George's poem, the knife is depicted as the origin of violent "intention," as if the simple presence of the object influences the human action. In the final two lines of the poem, and amid the looming threat of violence brought on by the knife's animate presence, the speaker presents us with one final "material"; we must now contemplate not the "neat" splitting of a melon or the animacy of an "object" like yarn, but rather a living creature. The atmosphere of threatening violence is temporarily deflated by the "pigs—hushed, breathing / calmly in their

pens" and who "quiet us into handlers." Thus, George strips the term "handler" of its typical agency, gently reversing the direction of physical dominance exerted through her portrayal of farmed pigs.

Even in activist circles, the language used to depict nonhuman animals frequently deprives their bodies of agency—examples include protest signs reading "I speak because she can't" and the name of the animal rights group Anonymous for the Voiceless. Such rhetorical conventions suggest that animals do not have voices; though they don't speak words (perhaps with a few parroting exceptions), scientists have documented that many species of nonhuman animals communicate in complex verbal and nonverbal ways and even non-scientists can easily observe that farmed animals in particular are far from voiceless. The screaming of farmed pigs inside CO2 chambers can be heard from some distance and mother cows cry out—sometimes for days on end—upon the removal of their newborn calves (both are standard industry procedures). Despite the prevalent trope of humans dominating animals to the point of objectification, nonhuman animals continually express attachments, animacy, agency and experiences through their voices and body language, and many instances of animals exerting physical forms of active resistance to human dominance have been documented. All of these expressions present opportunities for humans to "know" nonhuman beings outside the strict language of human dominance. Yet, in agricultural practice, examples of such resistance are often portrayed as atypical and are hidden from the public as much as possible.

Gillespie chronicles several such acts of bodily animal resistance in *The Cow with Ear Tag #1389* (2018). A steer attempts to escape from the auction by jumping a fence; a mother cow attempts to protect her calf by kicking and blocking the man herding her; another mother cow refuses to leave her calf (they are to be auctioned separately). These acts of resistance are treated

as isolated incidents and are all dealt with through the application of (frequently violent) human dominance. The steer is chased down, cornered, and shot as auctiongoers lament only the loss of "some high-quality beef" (78); the first mother cow is forcibly herded into the ring while a potential bidder deems her "psychotic" (79); and the second mother cow is allowed to temporarily remain with her calf while she is bid on only so as not to disturb the efficiency of the auction (the two are separated at the first opportunity after which both bellow loudly to one another). Everyday acts of farmed animal resistance such as crying out, physically expressed attachments to family members, and unwillingness to advance along a kill shoot or into a pen are quickly dismissed as anomalies and entirely rejected as a basis by which to foster interspecies knowing—let alone to develop subsequent practices of care informed by the embodied expressions of animals. Resistance tends to be "handled" instead through the use of force (through routine practices such as separation, enclosure, castration, tail docking, beak clipping, hitting, kicking, throwing, etc.), devices of domination (such as nose rings, farrowing crates, cages, other confinement systems, physically manipulative drugs or supplements, electric or non-electric prods, and ultimately blades, bolt guns, gas chambers, and other killing instruments), or through coercive incentives such as strategically placed food and water. In other words, clearly expressed attempts at and desire for partial or total autonomy on the part of farmed animals are forcibly and violently rejected.

A vegan poetics foregrounds examples of embodied experience and expression—such as George's "Influence"—in order to argue that such experiences and expressions must be taken seriously as a basis for advancing human understanding and treatment of nonhuman animals. As Reines asks in *The Cow*, "Why cannot a body itself be testimony"? Poetry holds the capacity to exhibit and affirm such testimony—creating a language to stand in alignment with direct activist

practices of documenting the suffering and resistance of animal bodies and holding vigils to bear witness to those bodies and their lived (and killed) experiences. Given the current rate of industrial animal slaughter, the restoration and preservation of as much body-mediated interspecies knowing as possible must be enacted, even as small but increasing numbers of the public begin to take such testimony seriously.

Gillespie visits an animal sanctuary in *The Cow with Ear Tag #1389* and is struck by a display of (empty) modern confinement systems "for visitors to look at, touch, and imagine inhabiting: a veal crate, a gestation crate for sows, and a battery cage for hens" (130). The visible, tangible presence of these apparatuses elicits a feeling of grief and horror in the viewer; "the purpose of displaying these devices [is] to evoke an embodied visceral response" (131). In this way, the sanctuary combines encounters with the singular being (by offering visitors the opportunity to meet, witness and interact with individual animals) with embodied knowledge—not only the body-mediated testimony of (at least somewhat) autonomous animals, but moreover an embodied *human* experience brought on by imagining what it might be like to live, for example, in a two-foot-wide crate for months on end. The embodied testimony of the animals themselves creates an embodied form of knowing in the human witness—or reader. Poetry likewise (arguably more than comparatively standardized forms of writing like journalism or informational material such as pamphlets distributed by activist groups) evokes in the reader a participatory embodied experience, both real and imagined. In the examples of "The Traveling Line" and "Influence," George imagines alternatives to violent lived experiences of animals, negotiates the permeable boundaries between human and nonhuman, and illuminates a multi-directional enactment of dominance between species; her poems exemplify how a vegan poetics not only creates a "zone of integration" but also renders the testimony of a body more legible.

The Partial Perspective

In contemplating animal expressions of attachment, animacy, agency and experience, it is important to acknowledge that the testimony of a nonhuman animal body can only ever be (to humans) *more* legible—not entirely legible. This distinction underscores the shortcomings of "knowledge" as a basis for advocating across species lines. The partial (incomplete) perspective tends to be partial (prejudiced) toward its own line of sight. Unlike forms of testimony such as documentary and nonfiction prose, linear dissemination of knowledge is usually not the primary objective of a contemporary poem. Inhabitation of the partial perspective in a poem (usually through a poetic speaker or voice) rather becomes a vehicle for asking/provoking questions, shifting perspective, awakening affective or aesthetic experiences in the reader, or experimenting with the multi-layered dimensions of language.

Donna Haraway discusses the notion of partial perspective in the context of feminism in her article "Situated Knowledges" (1988); the "doctrine of objectivity," she argues, is not necessary for the pursuit of feminist knowledge claims, the cultivation of critical practices or a "commitment to faithful accounts of a 'real' world, one that can be partially shared and that is friendly to earthwide projects of freedom…" (579). Likewise objectivity is not a necessary condition for a vegan ethics or a poethics; the partial positioning of the human is not regarded as an obstacle to a total liberation project and can in fact be regarded as productive to the challenging task of cultivating a reciprocally peaceful net of species relations. Haraway's attribution of value to a fragmentary (in this case human) vantage point, while simultaneously and humbly recognizing its limitations, speaks directly to this aspect (and difficulty) of an applied vegan poetic practice:

> The split and contradictory self is the one who can interrogate positionings and be accountable, the one who can construct and join rational conversations and fantastic imaginings that change history. […] Subjectivity is multidimensional; so therefore, is vision. The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and therefore able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another. […] Struggles over what will count as rational accounts of the world are struggles over how to see. (586-7)

A vegan poetics seeks to manifest these struggles over how to see in our creative language. To inhabit a vegan body is to fundamentally change how one sees animals; the vegan sees a cow as a living being and a "hamburger" as the dead flesh of that singular, embodied and partially knowable being. Debates over whether modern human consumption of animal products is ethical frequently devolve into debates about the *degree* of sentience, intelligence, or capacity for pain nonhuman animals possess. Though such questions are certainly worth pursuing further, with regard to veganism they tend to miss the point because they overlook and erase the evidence already available to us and the forms of knowing that clearly permeate species divides.

In considering ways of seeing and knowing farmed animals, Gillespie discusses how farmers and industry workers "know" the animals they work with

> in a *particular kind of way*. They know them within the confines of their conceptualization as commodities. […] These are ways of knowing that situate the cow's singularity in a logic of commodification and that can obscure the fundamental impacts of this logic on her life and being. […] these are ways of knowing that *depend* on *not knowing* other things that would complicate the farmer's role in the process of transforming the cow into a marketable good. (23)

Though I argue that partial knowing is a valuable form of knowing when thinking across species lines, knowledge of any given species/individual is not a prerequisite for their ethical consideration or the extension of rights. Furthermore, partiality should not be used as an excuse for obscuring those aspects of nonhuman life that *are* knowable (animal farming practices provide ample examples of doing exactly that). Rather acknowledging the condition of partial knowledge claims across species lines, while at the same time seeking to expand human

knowledge of animals (especially through less recognized forms of expression such as bodily expression and singular being), allows us to expose anthropocentric attitudes, ethical hypocrisies, and acts of victimization and violence—and thereupon to eliminate or adapt such practices.

George's poem "Notes on Pigs" reveals the strangeness of the knowledge of pigs humans do and do not possess. Through a catalogue of seemingly matter-of-fact "notes" about pigs, the poem taps into the power of partial knowing in rethinking interspecies relationships. The poem begins,

> A pig has eyelashes.
> The pig's eyelashes function like our own eyelashes,
> but have a different meaning.
> A pig who cares about her looks is absurd.
> A pig does not take a long evening bath, with a glass
> of sparkling grapefruit juice set on the porcelain ledge.

Despite the plainly factual nature of the poem's opening statement—"A pig has eyelashes."—and the fact that many nonhuman animals indeed possess eyelashes, George's choice to focus the reader's gaze on a pig's eyelashes (a delicate and rather intimate body part due to the closeness required to see or notice an animal's—or person's—eyelashes) has an oddly humanizing effect. The poem goes on to distinguish the shared function of human and porcine eyelashes from their "different meaning[s]." Indeed knowledge claims often have little to do with fact or functionality and much more to do with meaning (another reason why poetry is so important as a purveyor and inquisitor of linguistic meaning). George illustrates the affective nature of such a knowledge claim through her use of humor—by conjuring the image of a pig caring about her looks or doing something ridiculous like taking a bath or drinking sparkling grapefruit juice (these acts are ridiculous due to their explicitly human qualities).

Next the poem examines the relationship of standard interspecies relations and meanings:

> Many people live near animals.
> A person who cares about a pig is a rare thing.

> Neither a pig nor a person is invincible.
> A pig is a tasty thing, when killed and cooked.
> A person dressed in a pig costume is trying to be funny.

The juxtaposition of the first two lines in this section plainly exposes widespread speciesist attitudes, demonstrating that our proximity to animals does not translate to any widespread ethic of care (at least in the case of the pig). The "person who cares about a pig" echoes the "pig who cares about her looks" a few lines earlier; both are presumed strange ("absurd" and "rare," respectively), a parallel which begins to expose the incongruities that characterize normative "meanings" of interspecies relations. Why, the reader must consider, should caring for an animal be strange or uncommon?

Both human and nonhuman animal bodies are deemed vulnerable—neither is "invincible"—but despite a shared mortality, only one can acceptably take on the "meaning" of food: "A pig is a tasty thing, when killed and cooked." The poem acknowledges a normative partial knowledge claim here; veganism and a vegan poetics do not deny the fact that indeed a pig *is* "a tasty thing," but George's poem importantly avoids saying, "bacon is a tasty thing." Instead, George's speaker upholds (to the best of her ability) the identity of the singular animal, her embodied presence, and not its disembodied anthropocentric translation. In the line that follows, through the image of a person in a pig costume, the reader encounters an attempted literal human embodiment or translation of the pig. This example of attempted humor reflects an attitude of dominance and speciesism—as if to suggest a human is so different from an animal that to dress up as one is funny (as the image of a pig sipping juice in a bathtub is funny, again due to its absurdity). In actuality, this embodiment seeks to further *dis*embody the real, living pig, particularly as the mocking of the pig comes on the back of the "killed and cooked" pig. A pig is of course not a person, and a person is not a pig. But George's purposeful juxtaposition of applied violence and attempted humor highlights the presumed sovereignty of people over pigs.

Normative attitudes of dominance are then challenged directly in the final lines of the poem:

> Pigs have superior eyesight.
> A pig can see the silver belly of a plane moving across the sky.
> Or a beetle crawling up a fence post.
> Certain pink tulips, when the sun hits them, have the color
> of a clean pig.
> A pig can only give birth to a person in a dream.
> When a pig dies, it is either mourned by other pigs or not.

"Pigs have superior eyesight," is an example of the kind of partial knowledge completely overlooked by farming practices and mainstream cultural narratives about pigs. It challenges such narratives by demonstrating that, despite manifestations of dominance like killing or mocking, alongside sentience, intelligence, and capacity to feel pain, superiority is far from objective. George's description of the "superior" eyesight presumably implies eyesight superior specifically to that of humans; this too is a partial knowledge claim (eagles, for example, have superior eyesight to that of pigs). Beauty serves as another example of a knowledge claim that defies objectivity and totality. Humans typically consider the pink color of tulips described in the poem to be beautiful, and yet a pig of the same color is not typically considered beautiful by humans. The poem's careful fluctuation between particular similarities and differences between pigs and humans, as well as juxtapositions of cultural attitudes and attributed meanings authenticate poetry's ability to make the ordinary seem strange, and in doing so to question and challenge accepted assumptions and knowledge claims with regard to other species.

"Notes on Pigs" fittingly ends on a note of uncertainty—or indeterminacy (to borrow McHugh's term)—"When a pig dies, it is either mourned by other pigs or not." George acknowledges the partiality of human understanding by pointing to a *lack* of knowledge about pigs. A vegan poetics must accordingly probe and expand the limits of partial knowledge claims, while at the same time recognizing partiality's connection to the singular and embodied

experiences of animals (situated within a broader net of relations). In the words of Haraway, "I am arguing for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims. These are claims on people's lives. I am arguing for the view from a body" (589). A vegan poetics expands and redirects such an argument so as to include nonhuman bodies; after all, these are *also* claims on *animals'* lives.

The alternative modes of interspecies knowledge-building I have presented in this section all seek to "know" nonhuman animals in ways that resist the normalization of commodification, subjugation, and violation. But to return momentarily to Carol Adams' childhood hamburger, we must also ask why knowledge (whether objective/subjective, total/partial, etc.) is ever presented as a requirement for the ethical treatment of nonhuman beings in the first place? Adams states, "I could summon no ethical defense for a favoritism that would exclude the cow from my concern because I had not known her. I now saw meat differently" (12). We *don't* know the majority of the animals we consume, and this fact somehow—unjustly—differentiates them from the dogs, cats, and hamsters many of us know, love, and offer sanctuary.

Killing Animal Kin

Having explored poetic modes of witnessing and (un)knowing nonhuman animals in the previous sections, I now move to the act of slaughter, and the translation of commodified bodies into killable bodies. Here is where a vegan poetic lens distinguishes itself most sharply from welfarist critiques of animal agriculture in activism and animal studies. To help illuminate this (po)ethical

distinction, I draw on Donna Haraway's theory of cross-species kinship in my reading of subsequent poems by Kathryn Kirkpatrick. Though she utilizes the vocabulary of solidarity and ecofeminism, and frequently deconstructs/revises language with nonhuman beings in mind, Haraway's analysis falls short of granting nonhuman animals sovereignty and ultimately obstructs the lens of a vegan poetics and the pursuit of animal liberation. Any authentic ethic of care, I argue, ends at the entrance to the slaughterhouse.

Throughout much of Haraway's work, she describes cultivating responsible cross-species relations not as a process of knowing but rather "*knowing-with*" and "*becoming-with*." In "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin" (2015), she offers up cross-species kinship as a way forward—to address earthwide problems in the present era and to cultivate conscientious relations to each other across difference. In this section, I examine the ways in which knowing-with and becoming-with earthly and otherly "kin," including nonhuman animals, fail—despite their attempts to embrace singular, body-mediated and partial perspectives of those animals and to encourage better practices of care—to address or account for human conventions of violating and killing animals.

Haraway's expansive work spans almost a half century and includes foundational critiques of anthropocentrism and of patriarchal theories of science and technology. I take up Haraway's work on species relations in particular because so much of it directly aligns itself with a vegan poetic lens; her grasp of the partial perspective, foregrounding of kinship, and desire to foster a "capacity to care [and] to respond" across human and nonhuman "Others" provide great insight into critical frameworks and practices of more productively and ethically reading and writing nonhuman animals. In "Staying with the Trouble for Multispecies Environmental Justice" (2018), Haraway writes, "That knowing-with and knowing-otherwise are what might be

able to knit together today's needed but too diffuse 'we' for reworlding in the Chthulucene"[21] (103). Knowing-with—alongside its multiple accomplices, "becoming-with," "making-with," and "thinking-with," which reverberate throughout Haraway's body of work—suggests a shared or somewhat indiscriminate autonomy between human and nonhuman "kin," an impulse toward a co-writing of the Chthulucene. "Knowing-with" may not position animals as absent, but the adjacency it supposes fails to reflect the material conditions of their lives. This highlights another poetic tension a vegan poetic practice must tackle—namely the tension between efforts to create language that lends authentic agency and presence to animal subjects and the equally vital impulse to confront the slaughterhouse in all its bloody reality.

In this section, through my reading of poems from Kathryn Kirkpatrick's collection *Our Held Animal Breath*, I argue that without an explicit condemnation of systematic animal exploitation and slaughter, it is impossible to carry out a critical (or lived) practice of knowing-with. The recognition of nonhuman animals as victims vacates the "with" of its intended potentiality, and a fundamental recategorization of farmed animals (as beings, earthlings, or kin rather than food products or commodities) distinguishes a vegan poetics from welfarist agendas and value systems that celebrate isolated instances of cross-species collaboration and kinship—essentially amounting to selective "liberation" (and thus not liberation at all). Through the convergence (but not conflation) of poetic and animal forms, Kirkpatrick pursues emancipatory language without attributing an agency to animals that is unrealizable under the current industrial agricultural system.

The Illusion of Knowing-With

[21] Haraway's term *Chthulucene* refers to a proposed epoch in which human and nonhuman refugees from environmental catastrophe join together or "make kin."

In *When Species Meet* (2007), Haraway pays particular attention to companion species, namely her dog whom she delightfully describes toward the end of the book saying, "she enriches my ignorance" (301)—a beautiful description of the kind of *not*-knowing by which a vegan poetics abides. However this attitude is not applied to other nonhuman animal species. Though Haraway is evidently not in favor of corporate factory farming or industrialized violence toward animals, in her chapters on food animals, she explicitly defends the killing of animals in examples such as hunting and through her support for RBST practice,[22] as well as condones the practice of eating animals such as a feral pig killed by her hunter colleague and roasted whole at a backyard barbecue (presumably an animal she believes her friend to have "known-with"). These chapters situate themselves within pro-"humane slaughter" arguments, though they attempt to account for that killing through a discussion of supposed animal partnership.

With regard to experimental animal research, Haraway asks, "What might a responsible 'sharing of suffering' look like in historically situated practices?" (72). In response, what might it look like to "know-with" other victims of exploitation and extreme violence such as segregation, slavery, misogyny or warfare (however much we situate them historically)? While one can take steps to resist, mitigate, or fight against such practices of discrimination and violence, the embodied traumas and lived experiences of victims, I argue, are not and can never be "responsibl[y]" shared. We can and should position ourselves as allies to all victims of discrimination and violence, but to suggest we might share the suffering of animals exploited for human use is to ignore the drastic asymmetry of species-specific autonomy and the value attributed to individual lives.

[22] The Rare Breeds Survival Trust (RBST) furthers the breeding, selling and killing of nonhuman animals for consumption.

Kathryn Kirkpatrick's poetry, including her 2012 collection *Our Held Animal Breath*, at once illuminates the violence at the center of human-to-nonhuman relations and employs poetic language as one means of recognizing the agency of singular beings. "Having lost so much," she writes in "How to Lose a Democracy," "it will be easy / to unhinge language, / to unname each flower and tree." Kirkpatrick's poems do the opposite—naming and renaming, in the face of that loss, the individual animate and animal beings to which she refers. In "Calf" (2016), she explicitly aligns poetic form with the notion of animal body as testimony. The poem depicts a newborn calf, "Curled like a comma," left without shelter:

> […] His mother,
> formidable
> as a paragraph,
> has known a man's hand
> at her backside
> up to his elbow with his iron limb,
> his cache of bull semen
> an interstitial, artificial
> jerking off

This scene depicting the violence of artificial insemination (a normalized and standardized farming practice in factory farms and small-scale "humane" farms alike, as Gillespie documents in *The Cow with Ear Tag #1389*) clearly demonstrates the gaping chasm between knowing and knowing-with—the calf's mother has *known* rape, and while the speaker is angered at the cattlemen, the act of witness and description falls short of mutuality and shared suffering. A claim to know-with would erase the brutal discrepancy in power between human and farmed animal, captured here through the mechanization of the human body: "his iron limb." Humans do not and cannot know-with the animals they kill and consume, because we do not suffer *with* those animals. We do not stand for weeks, months, or years in our own feces *with* those animals. We are not raped, brutalized, or confined *with* those animals. We are not packed onto transport trucks *with* those animals. We do not die *with* those animals.

Kirkpatrick's speaker ends the poem by imparting the listener to (borrowing Adams' phrase) *see differently*:

> What has struggled into life,
> breathed through blizzards,
> is more than bones on a plate.
> Untether your lives
> from that numbness.
> Find yourselves
> spindly-legged in the cold.

The directive to detach from "numbness" hearkens back to the numb guilt Reines' speaker identifies in herself in *The Cow*; Haraway, too, encourages a reattachment to embodied feeling—in favor of "nourishing indigestion" (285), as one of her chapters proposes. "Calf" could be said to call for the kind of cross-species empathetic entanglement Haraway champions, but the poem goes much further in its direct affirmation, recategorization and reanimation of farmed animal life, attributing value and presence to the absent referent of the animal's body: "What has struggled into life, / breathed through blizzards, / is more than bones on a plate."

The poem's use of writing similes for the animals—the calf is "Curled like a comma" and the mother is "formidable / as a paragraph"—calls to mind questions of legibility and expression across species lines, and in turn enlivens the very conception of language. Kirkpatrick creates, through her descriptions, a unique grammar of anima(l)cy—composed from the convergence of linguistic form and animal form. The two forms are not conflated (the calf is not a comma; the mother is not a paragraph), but rather focalized via symbolic language. The site of the poem makes this productive convergence possible, with the bodies of the calf and mother serving as components of a larger testimony, articulated through the story of the human witness who angrily whispers "over barbed wire." Together with the words of this human witness, the bodies of the animals become "formidable" co-creators of a new poetics.

Illegible Bodies are Killable Bodies

In our attempts to tear down the structure of the slaughterhouse at both a material and theoretical level, it is important to interrogate not only the language of killing, but the language of killability. The study of poems can help us to understand the tension between potentiality and actuality, as well as the way that language can be deployed as an agent of collapse, weakening the division between the two. For instance, referring to pigs as "livestock" immediately positions them as objects for killing. When Haraway takes up the subject of animal slaughter in *When Species Meet*, she makes a distinction between to kill and to make killable:

> The problem is to learn to live responsibly within the multiplicitous necessity and labor of killing, so as to be in the open, in quest of the capacity to respond in relentless historical, nonteleological, multispecies contingency. Perhaps the commandment ['Thou shalt not kill.'] should read, 'Thou shalt not make killable.' […] It is not killing that gets us into exterminism, but making beings killable. (80)

As Gillespie discusses, drawing on the work of animal studies scholar James Stanescu, the death and suffering behind animal products lined up in a grocery aisle and the feeling of grief these can elicit in vegans are chiefly illegible due to the normalization of animal slaughter for food products (212). The animal subjects (and their secretions, in the case of eggs, dairy and honey) become "illegible" in the sense that they are 'written' into commodity products and are 'read' as such by the public. This process becomes normalized through replication and corroboration throughout the cultural ethos. Because the ubiquitous translation of bodies into food commodities is so definitive, even the vegan human body (in this case, experiencing grief in the grocery store) is rendered illegible to the mainstream society. Illegibility increases the killability of farmed animals—in fact, consumer dollars situate killability as the animals' defining quality and purpose within the capitalist system—and makes it easier for consumers to inhabit the "numbness" described above.

Within this system, the illegible vegan body (an outlier to such numbness) is marginalized (and in some cases mocked or demonized) but is not made killable—enjoying the protective privilege of human species categorization. However, it is important to acknowledge the slippery demarcation between killable human and nonhuman animal subject. Gillespie draws a useful parallel between animal slaughter and human victims of war:

> If it is already commonplace to say that certain lives (in this case, animals), just inherently matter less, then it becomes possible to make the stretch and say that some *human* lives matter less, and then it becomes possible to call the mass loss of human life something as innocuous as collateral damage. […] These and other forms of violence are predicated on categories of the animal, the subhuman, the less-than-human that render lives killable—without interrogating and dismantling the material and discursive work these categories do, there are limits to what progress can be made for human or nonhuman animals. (213)

Euphemism (such as "collateral damage") is a key driver of structural violence in the sense that it masks and normalizes acts which might otherwise be considered unacceptable by the public. The linguistic work of a vegan poetics resists this (mis)use of language in pursuit of textual representations true to the material reality of animal lives. The connection Gillespie makes between killable animals and killable humans in the above passage draws on the ecofeminist premise that forms of oppression are interlinked; the example illustrates one way in which the stakes of a vegan poetics extend beyond the nonhuman species boundary. Parallels between human victims of war and farmed animal victims of industrial agriculture do not seek to equate different species, but rather to "interrogate" and "dismantle" species categorizations as justifications for making a body killable.

The nonhuman animals themselves likely make no distinction between being made killable (assuming that killing is carried out) and being killed. Haraway condemns the act of "making killable" but ultimately not the act of killing: "Human beings must learn to kill

responsibly" (81); "killing well is an obligation akin to eating well.[23] This applies to a vegan as much as to a human carnivore" (296). Indeed vegans and non-vegans alike must consider a multitude of ethical and health-related questions (eating plants does not necessarily eliminate the killing of insects by means of pesticides or fieldmice by means of mechanized harvesting equipment, for example, nor does it address widespread exploitation of human labor), but to consider the slaughter of a pig "killing well" (let alone to deem the consumption of that pig "eating well") is to completely discount the animal's status as victim—*well* for whom?—and to overlook the interconnectedness of both industrialized and small-scale systems of killing.[24] "Killing well" only furthers ontological narratives of anthropocentrism and speciesism. Haraway's justifications for "killing well" are especially perplexing given her explicit recognition of nonhuman animals as "somebody as well as something."

Kirkpatrick's "At the Turkey Farm" (2012) explores our relationship to some of the beings humans typically deem killable:

> Ghostly sentinels, they stand at the railings,
> hundreds deep in the long, dark barn.
> Doors opened to the gloaming set free
> only the stench of their many pale bodies,
> jam-packed, bred featherless and barely winged.
> Except a brief sating at feeding,
> this is their only solace, to stand
> in their own shit, blinking in the fading light.

In this somber depiction of factory farming, Kirkpatrick describes the animals' bodies as dead before they are even killed—"Ghostly" and "pale" in the "fading light" of both day and their lives. Their faded presence is furthered by their number—like the pigs of George's traveling line, the turkeys are "hundreds deep" and "jam-packed"—as well as their disfigurement—"bred

[23] Haraway is alluding to Jacques Derrida's interview, "Eating Well" (1991).
[24] Examples of interconnectedness include the killing of male chicks as a condition for large scale egg production and the codependency of the dairy and meat industries.

featherless and barely winged." Herein we can see literal manifestations of beings made killable, as the turkeys have been genetically modified to become more conducive to killing and processing into consumable non-subjects; feathers and wings appertain to a turkey's animal presence, not to the commercialized food product (no one wants feathers on their Thanksgiving dinnerplate). Kirkpatrick's speaker continues,

> When we eat them do we take in their longing
> for the unentered meadow, their sadness
> for the sky they cannot fly into?
> Perhaps we become them, soldered to brutal
> twilight as their suffered bodies enter out own.
> Who will give them back their lives, feathered
> and winged?

Attributing emotions such as longing and sadness to nonhuman animal bodies, even in a poem, is of course fraught with risks of anthropomorphism, but Kirkpatrick entertains interpretations of animal emotions not only for the purpose of probing animal experience and expression, but moreover to consider questions of permeability between human and nonhuman bodies. Haraway argues, "There is no way to eat and not kill, no way to eat and not to become with other mortal beings to whom we are accountable…" (295). Even by Haraway's definition, the nature of industrial turkey farming obliterates any possibility of "becoming with" the individuals it victimizes. But Kirkpatrick's poem takes permeability one step further, wondering not if we "become with" the bodies we make killable but whether we actually "become them." Kirkpatrick considers the spiritual or karmic conflation of victim and oppressor—both "soldered to brutal twilight"—in addition to the physical conflation that occurs when the turkeys' dead "bodies enter our own" through consumption of food/flesh. In this way, the poem foregrounds the kind of accountability Haraway seeks to reignite in vegans and non-vegans alike; the metaphysical atmosphere of Kirkpatrick's meditation is ultimately paired with a recognition of very literal (and permanent) loss: "Who will give them back their lives"?

In the final lines of the poem, Kirkpatrick's speaker entertains, if not the possibility of "killing well," then at least (arguably) comparatively ethical forms of slaughter:

> […] As fair game in the wooded cove,
> full of amble and bursts of flight,
> their welcomed spirits would not haunt us,
> not like these standing naked
> pressed against their own deaths.

Haraway would perhaps argue that the hunting of wild turkeys here qualifies as an example of animals killed but not made killable. While a vegan poetic reading by no means seeks to equate the two drastically different examples of slaughter, the ending of this poem does pose questions about the categorization of turkeys as "fair game"—are they truly deemed "fair game" because of their placement in the natural environment of the "wooded cove," or are they deemed "fair game" because of their species? And in either case, what are the implications for our treatment of other wild species (including ones not typically and/or legally slaughtered for food, such as wild monkeys, whales or elephants) or of the human species for that matter? Are we "fair game" for any force of nature that seeks to dominate our "welcomed spirits" or are we too "standing naked / pressed against [our] own deaths"?

Ultimately, welfarist arguments for "killing well" or killing better attempt to account for the asymmetrical violence that occurs across and within species. Since few humans indeed exist completely outside killing, a vegan poetics likewise attempts to account for such violence; but accounting for violence and suffering must come second to efforts to alleviate that suffering as best possible.[25] If animals are to be "everywhere full partners in worlding, in becoming with" (301), as Haraway argues they are, the anthropocentric structures and standpoints that snuff out animal presence, experience, expression, agency, and value must be destroyed. Fundamental

[25] The Vegan Society attempts one such account in their present definition of veganism by including the clause "as far as is possible and practicable" (in reference to boycotting the exploitation of and cruelty to animals).

injustice and commodification do not allow for partnership or kinship between humans and farmed animals; thus welfarist arguments fundamentally oppose animal liberation. A vegan poetics proactively frames alternative practices of seeing, knowing, and reading/writing animals by foregrounding animal presence, exploring non-normative modes of knowing, and negotiating permeable species boundaries. Animal kinship (not subjugation) and remembrance (not dismemberment) must become an imaginative aspiration as well as a practical one.

Testimony 2

Act Two:
The Humanimal Body

Since the Female Self is the Otherworld to the patriarchs, their intent is to close us off from our own Selves, deceiving us into believing that these are the only doorways to our depths and that the fathers hold the keys.

-Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*

All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others.

-George Orwell, *Animal Farm*

The word "humanimal" exemplifies a linguistic invention which can be employed to break down assumed species categories. In Act Two, I will explore the notion of a humanimal body. The term can be used to describe a creature which is (supposedly) half-human and half-(nonhuman) animal. I take the wolf-girls depicted in Bhanu Kapil's *Humanimal* as my primary example. But I also understand humanimal to describe other hybrid bodies, especially bodies deemed lesser or subhuman on account of their presumed otherness. Ironically, the term can also be said to describe all human bodies, since humans are an animal species; in this way, it highlights the falsity of the binary by exposing degrees of overlap and relation in a wide variety of human and nonhuman creatures.

British-Indian poet Bhanu Kapil invokes the semi-historical, semi-mythological story of the Bengali wolf-children, Amala and Kamala, in her text *Humanimal: A Project for Future Children*[26] (2009). In my reading of *Humanimal*, using the framework of a vegan poetics, I will

[26] For the sake of concision, I will refer to the work as *Humanimal* (without its subtitle).

argue that the poetic figures of the wolf-girls model a radical disruption of the human-animal binary and yields generative insight into interlocked histories of violence, shaking seemingly unshakeable paradigms of speciesism, patriarchy and colonialism. A vegan poetic reading of *Humanimal* not only highlights the need to develop an ethic of care across difference (including differences of species, sex, race, class and physical ability) but *demands* it. Studying the construction and function of species relations in the story of the wolf-girls, as portrayed by Kapil, can help us to revise our reading of all animal bodies, from industrially farmed animals to mythological beings to disenfranchised humans. Kapil begins to develop the language and form to carry out such a revision and in this way enacts a vegan poetic *writing* practice. Her prose poetry in *Humanimal* mirrors the hybrid body of the humanimal being; it lends shape, presence and agency to the wolf-girls, so as to vivify, and in doing so provides a powerful counter to the attempted regulation and erasure of their autonomous animal forms. When pairing a vegan poetic reading practice with a respective writing practice (or example of such), we can witness the way in which the two mutually enrich each other, linking forms of radical literary engagement as well as modes of resistance.

In the first section of Act Two, I discuss the origin of the "wolf-girls" story and the way in which it highlights speciesist, anthropocentric and discriminatory paradigms through which bodies get coded as "other." The wolf-girls embody multiple categories marked as other; they are wild, animal, female, and penniless. They were also probably disabled or neurodivergent subjects, as I will discuss shortly. *Humanimal* navigates not only identity categories, but also temporal and spatial scales—ranging from colonial-era India, to postcolonial England, to present-day, often jumping from one verb tense to another within the same scene. Kapil creates a web of interconnections between various stories, bodies, memories and societies, disrupting any

fixed or linear reading of the humanimal. This navigation across multiple scales of knowing and being is key to the application of a vegan poetics. Only by examining patterns of violence across different contexts can we rupture the structures that uphold that violence.

A stated purpose of *Humanimal*, according to its speaker-poet, is to "make a body real." In this way, the text is engaged in the restoration of the absent referent—in animating (through poetry) the (hum)animal body, which has been rendered absent, violable, depraved, disposable and/or killable. What are the capacities and limitations of a poetic writing practice to carry out this goal? And how can the application of a vegan poetic reading lens highlight the presence of (hum)animal bodies and carve out pathways to their liberation? In the second section of Act Two, I explore gendered examples of caretaking, namely representations of human and animal mother/father figures throughout *Humanimal*; these examples help us to define and activate an ecofeminist ethic of care. This ethic of care stands in stark contrast to the various forms of altering to which humanimal bodies are subjected. In the case of the wolf-girls these forms of altering are carried out by obstructing, often forcefully, their natural and desired ways of being (for instance, the way they look, eat, sleep and walk), by claiming ownership through the predacious human gaze, and by the physical abuse of their bodies. This physical abuse is not just standard violence, but the purposeful breaking and moulding of humanimal form so as to "slic[e] them free" of animality—to *re*-form the wolf-girls to fit a conventionally desired human shape. Kapil fights back, at the level of language, repeatedly breaking then re-forming linguistic and imaginative conventions in order to oppose anthropocentric and patriarchal orthodoxy.

In the third and final section of Act Two, I explore Kapil's portrayals of humanimal resilience and resistance. To begin, I call attention to the poetics of the humanimal "swerve"—borrowing this term from Joan Retallack's *The Poethical Wager* to describe an action or motion

that instigates a process of revision to previous habits of thought, often in a nonlinear fashion. The wolf-girls manifest the notion of the "swerve" at the level of the body, which is the primary site of contestation in *Humanimal*. To what degree, I ask, can and does the humanimal being resist capture/erasure, and what role might practices of reading and writing play in interrupting the self-replicating cycle of abuse? One role of language is to delineate border-markings (for instance, through use of species categorizations like "human," "nonhuman," and "animal"). My reading of *Humanimal* provides examples of border-markings that obstruct and obscure pathways to liberation; it then highlights Kapil's attempt to shatter those border-markings and to rewrite the story of humanimal bodies through poetry. The scale of the project is far-reaching and the stakes are high; since all humans are humanimals, this application of a vegan poetics to the study of humanimal form unmasks consequences not only for cross-species relations but for the way in which we read/write our own bodies—within, or sometimes despite, the dominant forces intent on fixing us in place.

Otherizing the Humanimal

The Origin of the "Wolf-Girls" Story

From Romulus and Remus, to Kipling's Mowgli, to the Lobo Wolf Girl of Devil's River, legends and myths of children raised by wolves have recurred throughout a variety of Indo-European cultures and time periods. Associations between children and wolves have also been applied in nonfictional contexts; for instance, homeless orphans abandoned during the war and evacuation of East Prussia in the 1940's were labelled *wolfskinder*, or "wolf children" (Wagener). The term "feral children" has been used to describe child victims of abuse and

abandonment, as well as to explain the purportedly animal-like characteristics and behavior of children with disabilities or congenital defects. Amala and Kamala are often referred to as "feral children" or the "Bengali wolf-girls."

The poems of *Humanimal* are in conversation with several source texts, as well as Kapil's own experiences traveling to Midnapure, the site of the girls' capture and care, including original photographs of the girls and namely the diary of Joseph Singh, published in *Wolf Children and Feral Man* (with Robert Zingg) in 1942, over a decade after Kamala's death. The diary provides an almost day-by-day personal account of Singh's observations and experiences; however the authenticity of Singh's story has been widely disputed in more recent decades. In *L'Enigme des Enfants-Loup* (2007), French researcher Serge Aroles discusses ways in which the diary (and the girls themselves) functioned as a commercial asset for Singh, who was struggling to sustain his orphanage financially, and the possibility that the diary was written long after the fact—not in real-time or even during the girls' lives as Singh claimed (Amala died at age two after less than a year under Singh's care, and Kamala died nine years after her capture at approximately age seventeen).

Testimonies published in the 1950's describe Singh beating Kamala, possibly in order to make her perform "wolfish" acts in front of visitors. Aroles theorizes that both girls had neurological disabilities; he believes Kamala may have had difficulty walking and communicating due to Rett Syndrome.[27] In poverty-stricken, colonial-era India, children with severe disabilities were often abandoned, and so Aroles hypothesizes that the girls may well have been orphans. As recounted in *Humanimal,* Kapil encounters the enduring pathologization of

[27] Rett Syndrome is a genetic neurological disorder, usually affecting females from a young age, that can impair one's speech and movement. Repetitive hand movements are a common symptom as well as difficulty walking. The condition was first described in 1966 by pediatrician Andrea Rett (long after the lives and deaths of Amala and Kamala).

poverty among children during her visit to Midnapure. In a church garden, village children offer to show her the graves and she takes their "sticky paw[s]" in her own. Quickly interrupted by the prelate, Kapil is told to stay away from the children because they are "very dirty" and could give her an "infection"—"Get away, children!" he cries; "*I'll skin you alive!*" Here, we witness not only the pathologization of the poverty-stricken, but their association with animalistic qualities, as the prelate refers to the children's "paw[s]" and threatens to skin them as one might butcher an animal.

Kapil's research and writing project is motivated not only by an interest in the story of Amala and Kamala, but also by the story of her own father's upbringing. Raised by a widow-mother in extreme poverty during the late 1930's and 40's, Kapil's father was one of sixteen children, only seven of who survived into childhood. Among the myriad violences he suffered, in *Humanimal* Kapil maps the scars on her father's leg from a street beating. Again, we encounter the notion of body as testimony; a scar serves as a literal embodiment of experience (in this case violence), permanently written onto/into the body. Superimposing the photographic image upon a map of a London neighborhood (Kapil's father eventually moved to England and became the first Asian headmaster in the United Kingdom), Kapil navigates multiple scales of violence—conjuring for her reader a striking manifestation of British colonial violence marking the individual body.

This body, which I argue is the humanimal body, resides at the center of this (and any) applied vegan poetic reading practice. In the case of the wolf-girls' bodies, who grow sick from the human food they fail to digest, Kapil asks, "Is everything inside the body a kind of liquid, a way of taking information from site to site?" Indeed, throughout the book, the humanimal body acts as a site (or rather many sites) of movement, negotiation, entanglement, attachment,

estrangement, memory, power, and resistance. Remembering her father's seemingly premature death (in his fifties) in a British hospital, Kapil recalls the doctor telling her privately, "his body was clearly ravaged by the debilitating effects of poverty, early malnutrition and the multiple musculo-skeletal traumas that he appeared to have sustained as a child…it is a miracle he lived this long. He should really have died as a child." Herein we encounter the pathologized body (pathologized as a direct result of violence and oppression) and a simultaneous resilience by way of that very body.

A vegan poetic practice not only engages discourses of the body (such as pathologization), but also pays particular attention to the peripheries of that body. And it is peripheries that *Humanimal* markedly inhabits—of bodies, perspectives, stories, genres, times, places, spaces and species. The book is fittingly written in a hybrid form, as Kapil blends contemporary free verse with undercurrents of mythical folkore, historical documentary and personal memoir to create a flowing yet fragmented longform prose poem. The poem moves intermittently "from site to site"—from fractured notes on her experiences at Midnapure, to memories of her father and past, to old photographs and scenes from Joseph Singh's journal, to the imagined thoughts of Amala and Kamala—as if drifting in and out of a dreamscape that's slightly out of focus.

The False Hierarchies of Speciesism

The dim periphery between human and animal bodies is immediately invoked by the title *Humanimal*, which reminds and reconnects readers to our own positionality. Humans are after all animals themselves. We share ninety-six percent of our genome with chimps (The Chimpanzee Sequencing and Analysis Consortium), though we would be no less animal if it were less; and,

while we often use "animal" and the language of animality as a pejorative, evolutionary and cognitive science establish the biological fact that *homo sapiens*, a member of the *hominid* family, are undeniably an animal species. Though used by Kapil to describe specific bodies situated at the border of separate species categories, "humanimal" accurately describes every human body.

The well-documented opposition between the terms "human" and "animal" has been employed to segregate, enslave, exploit and murder human and nonhuman beings throughout history. Generally speaking, the more "animal" a human body—that is, the closer to the border between human and nonhuman species a body is regarded by those with power—the less rights that human is likely to be granted and the more oppression that human is likely to undergo. Examples abound—from indigenous peoples looked upon as "brutes" and "savages," to black slaves legally considered three-fifths of a person, to World War II prisoners of war subjected to vivisection. Animalistic language continues to be frequently used by those in power in order to debase and devalue individuals and groups of their choosing. In a recent essay, Carol J. Adams tracks "The Sexual Politics of Meat in the Trump Era" (2019), which includes examples of Trump and other powerful men using animalistic (and usually misogynistic) language to objectify women: "bitch," "Piggy," "pussy," "dog," "cow," etc.

The collapsing of the supposed human-animal distinction frequently serves as either an underlying premise for violence toward some humans or a violence in and of itself. As discussed in Act One, we can draw a parallel between the killability of animal lives and that of human life, such as collateral damage in war. John Sanbonmatsu contends that the two are not only linked but that speciesism is *the* source of social injustice: a "politics which does not place our enslavement of other beings at its center, conceptually and politically, cannot possibly succeed:

'speciesism' is not merely one more 'ism, but in fact lies at the root of every form of social domination." National and international statistics on violent crime strongly support the link between violence toward animals and violence toward humans. According to the National District Attorneys Association's 2014 guidebook, violence toward animals is a predictor that an abuser may become violent toward people. Forty-three percent of school shooters have animal abuse in their background (Arluke and Madfis). Animal control and humane investigators are often the first responders to violent homes; animal abuse is more prevalent in homes that experience child abuse and domestic violence (Ascione and Shapiro); and the co-occurrence of multiple forms of violence increases future violence (Hackett and Uprichard).

Dominant cultural attitudes and practices that illustrate speciesist prejudices against nonhuman animals, including hierarchies of killability, do not only apply across human-animal lines, but also across animal-animal lines. Some animals are more killable than others. The most obvious example is that most American "pet owners" (a term that indicates a great deal of objectification and domination) deeply value and care for their dogs and cats yet think nothing of eating the killed body of a cow or a pig. The distinction between wild animals and domesticated animals presents additional evidence of the dominant hierarchical positioning humans apply to different animal species. In the upcoming example of the wolf-girls, their "owner" (Singh) attempts to domesticate the so-called "wild" animal—to "make human," or rather to extricate the human by obliterating that which is regarded as animal. In our contemporary industrial context, domesticated animals (with some notable examples such as dogs and cats) are some of the most oppressed and least protected beings, while—at least among wilderness and conservation circles—wild animals are often deemed worthy of certain protections, status and/or respect. The Endangered Species Act, the protection of public lands, and specified hunting seasons and

regulations are notable examples.[28] In some sense, wild animals are considered of "pure" nature (or: capital-*n* Nature), whereas animals bred for human exploitation, whether as pets or through industrial farming, are not "natural" ecological subjects; rather they are supposedly of the human sphere, bred for the sole purpose of suiting our modern, consumptive "needs" and desires, and therefore deemed unworthy of the natural freedoms of, say, a polar bear or a bush elephant.[29] This particular brand of speciesist thinking is an argument based not on intelligence or sentience, but on eco-purity. And, of course, such thinking also tends to operate upon a false nature-culture divide, thoroughly debunked by post-structuralist scholars and ecocritics alike.

Wolf-Girls as Ecological Others

Speciesist hierarches are a means of passing authoritative moral judgements about the non-value of any given body. The story of the wolf-girls provides an example of such moral judgements, but it also complicates and erodes binaries like human-nonhuman, wild-domestic and nature-culture. The wolf-girls' value (as passive objects) stems from their (supposed) novelty as uniquely hybrid creatures; but, illogically, their persecution (as threatening subjects) also stems from their hybrid status. In the case of Amala and Kamala, domestication of the supposed wild animal interestingly *both* increases and decreases that body's presumed value.

(Normative) human lives are inherently considered more valuable within the social hierarchy and so, in Singh's view, animal qualities must be excised out of the girls, as a malignant tumor might be excised from a body; but, ironically, as the girls become more

[28] Of course, even these examples are far from clear-cut. Debates persist over whether feral cats, for example, should be killed to protect birds. After successful lobbying from the agricultural sector, Idaho recently signed into law a controversial measure funding contractors to kill up to ninety percent of wolves in the state in order to "protect" livestock (*NYT*).

[29] Again, there exist notable exceptions (trophy hunting, for instance).

"human," they also become less economically valuable to Singh. Visitors travel to the orphanage to see the girls perform their (hum)animality—walking on all-fours, consuming raw meat and howling at the moon. The exploitative gazes of these (allegedly paying) spectators, reminiscent of zoo-goers, reflect a simultaneous fascination with and disgust at these "other" beings. Amala and Kamala's behavior—whether genuinely deemed "wolfish" or (more accurately, according to Aroles) attributed to symptoms of disability—is likewise regarded with disgust by their human caretakers. Kapil quotes from Singh's journal entries in *Humanimal*: a feral wolf-child is "freakish," "a hideous-looking being," "this other disastrous thing."

Singh's original descriptions of the mother-wolf interestingly bear no marks of such disgust; in *Wolf Children and Feral Man* he writes, "[her] nature was so ferocious and affection so sublime. It struck me with wonder. I was simply amazed to think that an animal had such a noble feeling surpassing even that of mankind—the highest form of creation…" (7). A sense of purity pervades Singh's characterization of the mother-wolf—though it must be acknowledged that this purity doesn't prevent Singh's violence toward the wolf; just moments after Singh is "struck [with] wonder" at the mother-wolf, his men pierce her through with arrows, killing her. Nevertheless this perceived purity sets up a strange duality with regard to the humanimal spectrum: to appear and behave entirely animal is "noble" and natural, and to behave entirely human (a standard to which even Singh himself ironically fails to live up to, as I will discuss shortly) is "normal," civilized and natural. But to inhabit a liminal borderland between the categories of (neurotypical) human and (nonhuman) animal is to elicit cultural disgust and ultimately to warrant rehabilitation or fixing.

Sarah Jaquette Ray discusses the phenomenological pattern of human disgust toward certain bodies in *The Ecological Other* (2013). Exploring the intersections of disability, the body and the environment, Ray argues that

> the environmental movement deploys cultural disgust against various communities it sees as threats to nature. […] Disgust shapes mainstream environmental discourses and vice versa, and it does so by describing which kinds of bodies and bodily relations to the environment are ecologically "good," as well as which kinds of bodies are ecologically "other." […This] discourse of disgust enforces social hierarchies even as it seeks to dismantle other forms of hegemony. (1)

Because of their hybrid status, the wolf-girls become what Ray calls "ecological others"—impure, dirty, unnatural subjects (distinguished from "good ecological subjects" such as the mother-wolf). In addition to being impure, their atypical bodies and behavior are perceived as downright threatening (to Singh and company) in their non-conformity. Critical disability theory scholar Hannah Monroe discusses medicalized constructions of normative behavior and non-conformity in "Post-Structural Analyses of Conformity and Oppression" (2019). She states,

> Discursive constructions of normalcy are often maintained through the medicalization of non-conformity. We can observe the dominance of the medical discourse in the twentieth century through the vast amount of social phenomena that have been medicalized as opposed to de-medicalized. (62)

Building on the work of disability studies scholars and activists such as Mike Oliver, Dan Goodley and Anne Mcguire, Monroe highlights how differences have been "pathologized to be objects of social control"; dominant discourses interpret disability as "a dangerous deficiency that needs to be protected against." Much like the dirty "paws" of the Midnapure children from which Kapil is told to back away, the perceived threat Amala and Kamala pose to Singh and company is perhaps commensurate only to their actual vulnerability. Singh seemingly inhabits the role of both protector and oppressor—protecting the girls on account of their biologically human status (in his journal, he claims the other men wanted to shoot them, but he alone,

recognizing the girls to be human, dissuaded them), while oppressing them on account of their animalistic behavior. Their supposed impurities are indeed pathologized and then medicalized (right in line with Monroe's assessment of dominant twentieth century medical discourse); because the girls come to be defined by their humanimality, their (dis)abilities become "objects of social control." In this way, Singh attempts to neutralize any threat they pose to social-cultural paradigms and the value judgements those paradigms impose.

Violations of Humanimal Being

The Body's Eviction

Now turning more closely to Kapil's text, I will demonstrate how an applied vegan poetics works to actively resist the promotion of (false) environmental, animal and human standards of bodily purity and conformity, as well as hegemonic discourses of the body that serve to devalue and debase (and ultimately erase or make killable) living subjects. Late in *Humanimal*, Kapil[30] makes explicit the purpose of her text:

> [to] make a body real. This is a text to do that. Vivify.

Indeed the bodies of Amala and Kamala have been rendered lifeless, absent or unreal in a number of ways. Hearkening back to Adams' threefold explication of how live bodies are translated into absent referents, the girls have been made absent literally (through death) and metaphorically (through the imaginative repurposing of Singh's storytelling—both to the

[30] I refer to the prose poem's primary speaker by the author's name because of the self-expressed memoir style, but of course the reader should keep in mind the inherent distinction between the construction of author-as-character/speaker and the author herself. As Retallack states, "any I in poetry is by definition persona" (6).

"audience" of voyeuristic visitors and in his diary entries years later). Thirdly, they have been made absent definitionally (through terminology); Kapil repeatedly invokes Singh's language and imagery when he describes the girls prior to their capture as "two white ghosts." Perhaps no image captures the notion of absence and lifelessness better than that of a ghost, as it renders the humanimal being materially bodiless, almost invisible and already dead.

The de-vivfying or ghosting of the humanimal being is repeatedly described by Kapil as an eviction, a term which implies the forced expulsion of a subject from her home. Recalling the death of another child—one of her father's many siblings ("One of the boys pushed the girl off the roof")—Kapil writes,

> In the quick, black take of a body's flight, a body's eviction or sudden loss of place, the memory of descent functions as a subliminal flash.

We might apply such flight (metaphorically) to the wolf-girls as well; translated into ghosts, they undergo "a body's eviction" as well as a "sudden loss of place" (literally taken from their "place" in the jungle). "Evict[ed]" from both their bodies and their home, Amala and Kamala are placed in the orphanage—which Kapil repeatedly refers to (again drawing on Singh's language in his diaries) as the "Home." By always calling it "the" capital-*h* Home, she calls to mind the literal shelter of a residence or property (as opposed to a place of belonging) and moreover an institutional facility (this usage typically being applied to a facility housing the vulnerable or debilitated, such as an elderly "Home" or an asylum).[31] In this way, Kapil illuminates the girls' "eviction" from an embodied home (body and jungle) in favor of an institutional (and monetizable) one (the orphanage).

[31] We might also note that the word *ecology* (or more specifically the prefix *eco*) stems from the Greek *oikos*, which is roughly translated as "home," but also "family," "house," or "property" (which in ancient Greece would typically include slaves) (*OED*).

In order to "vivify" that which has been made absent, Kapil expresses a need for (re)embodiment:

> To write this, the memoir of your body, I slip my arms into the sleeves of your shirt. I slip my arms into yours, to become four-limbed.

Though "four-limbed" associatively conjures the image of the wolf-girls walking on all-fours, Kapil reminds us here that both humans and wolves are "four-limbed," making this a moment of true humanimal embodiment. In fact, the "you" to whom she refers above invokes not just the wolf-girls but also Kapil's father, as well as the "future child" she periodically addresses (all three are called forth in the immediately preceding lines and images). This blurring of separate identities, storylines and temporalities (past/present/future) occurs frequently throughout *Humanimal* and is another example of the capacity of poetry to engage non-linear thinking. Recognizing the body/poem as a site of imaginative association and memory, Kapil creates a poetic mosaic of humanimal presence. However, she is also wary of memory—"A scar is a memory. memory is wrong. The wrong face appears in the wrong memory."—and particularly this tendency of memory to amalgamate different individuals and experiences. Remembering running through the corridors of her school as a child, she writes,

> I have a vivid memory of a frieze of gold and silver spray-painted coffee beans, arranged to form the spirals of a galaxy on a huge sheet of black paper. It must have been many pieces of paper, stapled together. I forget.

Recognizing that the mind has falsely made whole these separate entities, the speaker-poet critically probes the ensuing struggle between seeking a requisite embodiment (of wolf-girls as well as all "other" beings) and accepting a very real, sometimes impassable estrangement between separate individuals, contexts and memories. In the room where Kamala mourned her sister's death, Kapil

> sat on the edge of the bed and tried to focus upon the memory available to me in the room, but there was no experience.

A "body's eviction" has indeed occurred, and in this moment Kamala proves unreachable; embodiment is not possible, meaning Kapil cannot write "the memoir of [her] body," cannot "slip my arms into yours, to become four-limbed." In this moment, the poetic imagination fails to make whole, to re-vivify across time-space; it holds space only for loss, absence and disconnection. Kapil's speaker-poet mourns not only the loss of the wolf-girl, but the limitations of a poetic practice.

Humanimal Mother, Humanimal Father

Though a poetic practice cannot fully undo the eviction of Amala and Kamala from body/home/memory, I argue Kapil succeeds in exposing the ubiquity of the humanimal state of being. She achieves this through connecting to her own four-limbed-ness (her own humanimality) and the humanimality of those memories and accounts she *can* access. Though Amala and Kamala seem uniquely situated upon a periphery or threshold between realms, humanimal characteristics mark each and every body in the book.

Singh[32] is no exception. He eats "quickly and sloppily, like a dog"; when tracking the wolf-girls, "[i]n his hide, Joseph shivered"; and on one occasion at the orphanage, he even bites Kamala as punishment. These animalized descriptions carry out an ironic reversal, in which Singh, self-professed enforcer of civilized culture and humanness, and opposer of all that is animal, appears remarkably animal himself. Literally stalking the girls as a predator stalks his prey, "[i]n his hide" Singh acts downright "wolfish." And later, forcing them into human form, I

[32] In Hindi *sin̐gh* translates as "lion."

argue he becomes less human himself—or rather, he displays a gross lack of humanity in his treatment of Amala and Kamala.

The goodness (or to use, again, inadequate anthropocentric language, the *humanity*) of the mother-wolf (at least as the journal entries describe) and the predation of Joseph Singh provide two very different models of caretaking, guardianship and parenting. Singh marvels at how the wolf "bestow[ed] all the love and affection of a fond and ideal mother on these peculiar beings, which surely once had been brought in by her […] as food for the cubs" (7). The mother-wolf could actually be said to inhabit the vegan body in this instance, as she seemingly recognizes sovereign beings across species lines and implements an unequivocal ethic of care (i.e. nurturing the girls alongside her own cubs). In Kapil's iteration of the story, upon separation and for months afterward, the wolf-child longs for her animal mother:

> I want my mother. With one crack in the stuff of her she was gone.

Mourning her adoptive mother-wolf's murder (remembering the sensorial "crack" of the gunshot) and that mother's enduring absence, the wolf-child has clearly become re-orphaned by way of forceful eviction from jungle home/mother and insertion into human civilization; we are reminded, as Deane Curtin acknowledges in "Compassion and Being Human" (2014), that an ethic of care is not based on relation to uniquely human traits.[33]

In addition to the figure of the wolf as mother, Kapil offers up another narrative of maternal care by way of the river as mother-figure. Encountering a local Bengali man molding clay figurines by candlelight, Kapil asks after the meaning of this activity, to which he replies, "'Dushu.' 'What is it for?' 'The river'"; Kapil's interpreter translates,

[33] Curtin argues that a care/empathy/compassion-based approach to ethics is less anthropocentric and thus more inclusive than an ethic of rights; "it values the diverse ways that women and men tend to organize their moral experience" (39). Rights-based animal rights advocates like Tom Regan would disagree, highlighting an ongoing tension between the two philosophies.

> "Sarasvati. She is our mother and we give her back to her mother. The river is our mother. I take her to the river."

The figurine is an embodiment of Sarasvati (or Saraswati), the Hindu goddess of art and learning; it also refers to the ancient Sarasvati river, now dried up but considered by some Hindus to abide in metaphysical form. In this sense, Kapil encounters yet another mother who has been made (physically) absent. Despite this eviction, through the creation of the figurines, the man carries out a symbolic restoration of the absent referent; and through the giving of the figurines, he carries out an ethic of care—this time enacted from child to mother—manifesting a relationship of compassion and reciprocity. The perception of the river as sacred and maternal provides another heavy contrast to Singh's sacrilegious treatment of the mother-wolf (despite recognizing her supposed nobility and care) as well as to the notion of Singh himself as a parent-figure or caretaker.

In fact, Singh exemplifies a crooked fatherhood not only in his role as adoptive parent-figure to Amala and Kamala, but also in a religious sense—he is "Father" or Reverend Singh, or as Kapil describes him, "A tall, extremely handsome Father, sidetracked from his Mission." Kapil revisits this deviation from religious or spiritual righteousness, painting Singh's venture into the jungle to capture the wolf-girls as a sinful violation of wilderness: "he transgressed a wild space." The religiously tinged diction used in this line casts the jungle as a sacred place not to be entered (at least not in Singh's manner). A murky humanimal divide marks the separation between the realms of the human and the wilderness; and while the edges of this borderland space are never explicitly defined, Singh clearly oversteps. Here we witness how the predatory intrusion of the Father contrasts the nurturing care of the various mother figures throughout *Humanimal*. Speciesist practices and violations of bodily sovereignty/sanctity are inherently tied up with patriarchy.

Liminal Light and Colonial Altering

Descriptions of borderland, transitional and liminal spaces recur throughout *Humanimal*, usually inhabited by the wolf-girls. These spaces are sometimes literal—as when Kamala "keen[s] and shuffle[s] for many days at the perimeter of the Home" mourning the death of her sister—, sometimes imaginary—Kapil herself purports to end up "somewhere on the edges of the story"—and frequently comprised only of transitions of light—such as a depiction of the forest in which "Perimeter space transfuses moonlight." Kapil (and Singh in his journals) emphasize Amala and Kamala's aversion to the sun and preference for dark or night-time. Singh attributes this to their animal identities, wolves being nocturnal animals; he claims the girls can see in the dark. This becomes further evidence of their supposed backwardness or deficiency (even though seeing in the dark is clearly an *ability*, not a disability). Kapil's treatment of light and dark over the course of the book, upon close inspection, not only disrupts speciesist thinking but also illuminates broader patterns of interconnected eco-violence (ecocide).

Kapil repeatedly associates the girls with the moon throughout *Humanimal*. Mythologically and astrologically the moon is often associated with divine femininity, the female body and motherhood (in contrast to the sun as a masculine energy or figure). Kapil, remembering a particular moon from her childhood and relocating it to the jungle in India, also characterizes the moon as dangerous and fear-inducing; "Have you ever seen pink moonlight? It is frightening. It is a cousin to shadow, just as a wolf is to a dog." Through this image of moonlight, Kapil identifies the notions of both femininity and animality as threatening to normative conceptions of the human (particularly "wild" animality; for instance, the

aforementioned wild wolf is a threat whereas the domesticated dog is not). The climax of Singh's violent "transgression" occurs fittingly under moonlight:

> The humanimal conquest is a moonlit capture. The moonlight illuminates the termite mound where the wolves have hollowed out an underground cave with their beaks. Sub-red, animal wolves and human wolves curl up with their mother, in sequence, to nurse. When the babies fall asleep, the mother slips out into the jungle. As she crosses the blue clearing, Joseph cocks his gun and aims, the culmination of weeks of hunting. There is a dazzling break in the darkness.

This moment of heightened humanimal encounter is marked by multiple crossings-over; the wolf-cubs and wolf-girls have crossed from above into the underground cave, the mother-wolf crosses the blue clearing, and finally Singh's bright gunfire crosses into the darkness—shattering the safety that darkness provides and starkly, violently contrasting the soft, maternal light of the moon.

Singh's transgressive crossing-over mirrors histories of industrial and colonial violence enacted upon the Indian landscape. Kapil elucidates at the end of the book,

> the humanimal moment occurs most powerfully at dawn, when the eyesight adjusts to the light of the upper rooms of the jungle.

Dawn is of course a transitional juncture, from night to day, from dark to light. But within this seemingly beautiful, natural image of light breaking through the upper canopy of trees, there lies a great deal of violence. As Kapil points out earlier in the book, the British colonization of India brought on a destructive alteration of the native Indian forest, home to sal trees which, when exploited, brought a great deal of profit to the colonial government. Kapil explains how

> the British erased sections of the forest, then re-planted it like a Norfolk copse, brutally. Linearity is brutal. Yet, now, the jungle is more luminous and spacious than it would have been naturally.

When placed in this historical context, the light in "the upper rooms of the jungle" constitutes a symbol of incursion and predation, marking colonization's "brutal" effect on the Indian landscape (and people). Staring at the "perimeter" from her verandah, Kapil affirms,

> Here, I have a private view of a corrupt, humanimal landscape, a severed fold.

Importantly, the "humanimal moment" is not just an embodiment of the brutal entanglement between animal and human, between native habitation and violent colonization, but is "most powerful" at dawn "when the eyesight adjusts to the light…" It is this adjustment of sight that is particularly horrifying; an acclimation to a home or space forever altered, violence becoming normal to the human eye—perhaps even beautiful, as an image of early morning light cascading through the tops of trees.

Exposing anthropocentric and Eurocentric readings of the jungle, Kapil reminds us, "A forest is a bed for animals." In contrast to colonial conceptions of a forest as resource and revenue supply (what might today be termed "natural capital" or "ecosystem services"), as well as to Singh's notion of a building/institution such as the orphanage as "Home," the image of the forest as bed invokes a sense of refuge and care—not dissimilar to the notion of river as mother. Such natural spaces, in the eyes of the wolf-girls and the Bengali clay artist, constitute sacred caregivers, integral to a compassionate, ecofeminist conception of home and to a life-sustaining relationship with nature. The colonial altering of the jungle disturbs this relationship, as we can see from the pain it causes animals:

> A forest is a bed for animals. When the rains come each June, these animals make nets in the upper branches, suffering nightly, twitching, from an incomplete, lunar darkness. It's the time before electricity, those are not birds. They are wolves…

In the story of Amala and Kamala, Joseph Singh plays the colonizer; through his "hunting," "conquest" and "capture" and in the action of "cock[ing] his gun," Singh's masculinity and dominance over the jungle environment and the living beings inhabiting that environment are on display. This masculinity and dominance carry over into the human world; in the orphanage, like the animals in the upper rooms of the jungle, the girls also "[suffer] nightly, twitching, from an

incomplete, lunar darkness." Time and time again, we witness the interconnections between violence done unto land/ecosystems, violence done unto nonhuman animals, and violence done unto humans (especially female humans).

Breaking, Blaming and Claiming the Humanimal

In studying patterns and paradigms of violence, it is important to examine how (alleged) justifications are constructed. In the example of the wolf-girls, Singh exerts violence under the pretense of humanizing them. At the orphanage they are beaten and mutilated: "Joseph took Kamala's hair in his fist and cut it off, close to the skull"; "They strapped her down" and shaved her arms and legs; "Accused by an orphan of biting, Kamala is called into Joseph's study where he bites her back. Beats her with a bamboo wand, then pricks her in the palm with its tip"; "The doctor breaks Kamala's thumbs then wraps them in gauze"; "They dragged her from a dark room and put her in a sheet. They broke her legs then re-set them." These violences (among many others) are done to the wolf-girls' bodies in the name of therapy, rehabilitation and care—to "slic[e] them *free* of the wild animal" (emphasis added)—yet this so-called care lacks any trace of consent, empathy for suffering, or regard for bodily sovereignty. Just as the colonizers violently alter the native jungle, Singh violates and colonizes the bodies of the two wolf-girls, carrying out a brutal "eviction" that leaves them anything but "free."

In Kapil's iteration of the story, Kamala indeed begins to feel as though portions of her animal body have been dismembered or amputated. Upon being punished for a tiny, innocuous inattention, forgetting a prayer book, she recalls,

> I had a tail. I have a hymn. My frayed blue hymnal I left in the box by my cot and the Father smacked my side with a wand.

Her use of past tense—"I *had* a tail"—implies a present-day absence of this animal embodiment. Kamala's mention of Singh as "the Father" suggests that she does not identify Singh as *her* father, but rather a dominant, masculine authority figure ("*the* Father") who brandishes power in the form of abuse. This particular scene bears a striking resemblance to one later in the book, in which another father-figure carries out violence toward children under his care. Kapil remembers her own father, a school headmaster in England, beating a young black boy:

> As a child, I was waiting just outside my father's office, kicking my legs on a chair as I read *Bunty*, my weekly comic. I was waiting with a tall black boy of about twelve, already six feet tall. "What did you do?" "Nuffink." Without warning, both incredibly fast and in slow motion, my father came out of his headmaster's office with a cane. Within moments, the boy was writhing on the carpet, doubled up—"Please sir!"

The boy's race is starkly apparent in Kapil's description,[34] but the recollection also places emphasis on his self-declared innocence—"'What did you do?' 'Nuffink.'"[35] Just as Kamala's only crime in the aforementioned scene is to forget her prayer book by her cot, here the gross disproportion between the brutality carried out by the abuser and the supposed wrongdoing of the victim exhibits a pattern of hegemony across multiple contexts and time periods. To be vulnerable in the world (i.e. to be a child, to be black, to be female, to be wolfish…) is to be already culpable and therefore killable; to be made ghost—inhuman, near-invisible and already dead—in the eyes of the powerful.

The violent objectification and erasure of the humanimal body is also carried out by the gaze of those eyes. When Joseph Singh comes upon the cave of wolves in the jungle, before carrying out any physical assault, he lays claim to the girls by means of looking;

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[34] See the introductory chapter for a brief discussion of and recommended reading on the animalization of the black body, especially as a pretense for acts of violence and dominance (this largely falls beyond scope of my dissertation project).

[35] This line alludes to Dicken's *Bleak House* (in which a street sweeper boy states repeatedly "I don't know nothink").

> The cave was littered at its entrance with bones. The porters gave him their coarse, white woollen shawls and he threw them over their forms. Two girls. "*I saw them first*." (emphasis added)

In the eyes of their captor, the girls don't even have bodies yet—only "forms"—as the male gaze wields its claim of ownership. This act of visual objectification is later replicated by visitors who flock to the orphanage to regard the humanimal as spectacle:

> […] villagers from the settlement of Midnapure came regularly to the orphanage, lining up at the gate to catch a glimpse of the two jungle children. For a few minutes a day, Joseph's wife, the Home's Mother, let them in and they swarmed to the room where the youngest girl was failing. They watched her fade and jerk in her cot, the spittle coming down over her chin.

By watching Amala's "failing," the visitors—many of who would pay to view the wolf-girls, according to Singh's 1923 report—participate in a public act of exploitative voyeurism, one in which, as in a zoo, (hum)animals are cast as objects for consumption by the human gaze.[36] Kapil, while viewing a photograph of Amala, imagines a rejection and repudiation of the voyeuristic gaze;

> I looked into Amala's eyes in the photograph but she looked away and began to cry. She destroyed the paper. She killed her face.

Herein the imagined wolf-girl, upon being scrutinized, carries out the obliteration of selfhood herself—"She killed her face"—seemingly as the only available means of protection (or escape) from such a gaze. Singh, the villagers and Kapil herself all demonstrate an intense fascination with the wolf-girls, even as they carry out varying levels and forms of voyeurism and/or violence.

The number of stories, legends and accounts of feral children throughout recorded human history leads us to ponder why humans are so enraptured by the notion of a humanimal body. Kapil offers one possible clue when she writes,

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[36] We can draw parallels to present day examples of voyeuristic exploitation of animals—for example rodeos, aquariums and zoos.

> I saw their tiny black eyes squinting through the fence. I saw the tiny mirrors sparkling on their hems. Were they wolves?

The description of the eyes as "tiny mirrors" suggests the manifestation of a self-reflection. When these onlookers regard the wolf-children, do they see something of themselves? Does the humanimal reflect something within all of us, the book seems to ask—some inner wildness or hybridity, or rather a deep-seated ontological uncertainty as to who or what any body really is: "Were they wolves?"

Humanimal Resilience and Resistance

The Humanimal Swerve

Kapil presents three central outcomes of the violence depicted in *Humanimal*. Amala's literal death comprises the first. In seeking to fix or mold the girls into a more human (by his measure) form, Singh causes irreparable damage; they become sick from the food and medicine given to them in the orphanage, their bodies emitting red worms. Amala ultimately dies from the "fine yellow power" meant to clean out her kidneys. We might include the mother-wolf under this outcome (death) too—though Singh likely views her death as a sacrifice or necessary means to an end, whereas his attempts to rehabilitate Amala fail (even by his own metric).

The second possible outcome is an eventual and partial submission to dominance. This outcome is demonstrated by Kamala, who does eventually begin to eat human food, to stand and walk on two legs a little, and to socialize with other human children at the orphanage (she ultimately spends approximately nine years under Singh's care before dying of tuberculosis

around age seventeen). Kapil also quotes Singh's diary, in which (after almost four years at the orphanage), Kamala apparently associates some amount of safety with her caretaker/captor:

> Nov. 18 Locked out of inner compound; extremely frightened, takes refuge in haystack. Tries to open door by force, fails. I called to her…instead of shunning my company, (she) now sought it.

Whether we should attribute this change to Stockholm syndrome or to the fact that, with her mother-wolf and wolf-sister long dead, Singh has become by this point the only caretaker or "family" Kamala has (save perhaps Singh's wife and the other children in the orphanage), or whether we should believe it at all, it is clear that Kamala undergoes a partial transformation during the nine years she spends in human co-habitation.

A third and final possible outcome of violence inflicted upon a child/humanimal/Other is exhibited in Kapil's account of her father's metamorphosis. After enduring oppression and violence as a child, he ultimately escapes poverty and moves to England to become the first Asian headmaster in the United Kingdom. However, this seemingly resilient ascent to (partial) power (I say partial, because hegemonic systems and racist culture in England likely rendered him less than equal to his white British counterparts) gave rise to the (re-)infliction of the very same social dominance and physical violence to which he was previously a victim. Beating the pupils under his care, such as the young black boy discussed previously, Kapil's father participates in a seemingly endless cycle of violence toward children and/or the vulnerable.

None of these three outcomes of violence present a happy ending or a breaking of the cycle of violence, but Kapil does periodically entertain the notions of resilience and resistance on the part of humanimal bodies and victims of oppression. A primary example of the body as a site of resistance is Kamala's mourning over the death of her wolf-sister. Drawing on Singh's recordings, Kapil describes how after Amala dies, Kamala refuses to eat or drink; she "wants to be with [the] corpse" and "smells all the places [Amala] used to frequent." "[K]een[ing] and

shuffle[ing] for many days at the perimeter of the Home," Kamala carries out an embodied practice of bereavement and remembrance, demonstrating her enduring attachment to her sister's presence, even after that presence has been erased through death. I classify Kamala's bereavement process as embodied because it is physical in nature; her desire to be near the literal body of her sister, the sensorial impulses (smelling), and finally her choice to mourn at the "perimeter," as if to return to that liminal space where the humanimal moment can most easily and powerfully be located, all suggest an embrace of and desire for physical humanimal presence/identity and for self-imposed estrangement from the purely human world (exemplified by the Home, food and drink, human company, etc.)

The body is the predominant site of contestation in *Humanimal* and is repeatedly coded as such. At one point, Kapil describes Kamala, whose body is being forcibly trained to look and behave humanly, as a "swerve":

> Her two arms extend stiffly from her body to train them, to extend. Unbound, her elbows and wrists would flex then supinate like two peeled claws. Wrapped, she is a swerve, a crooked yet regulated mark. This is corrective therapy; the fascia hardening over a lifetime then split in order to re-set it, educate the nerves.

In thinking about coded and metaphorical representations of the animal and humanimal body, we might compare the "crooked yet regulated mark" of Kamala's bound body in this passage to the linguistic descriptions of farmed animal bodies in Kirkpatrick's "Calf" discussed in Act One—the calf "Curled like a comma" and the cow "formidable / as a paragraph." These descriptions draw parallels between the animal body and the body of a text. While Kirkpatrick's speaker-poet codes the mother cow, "formidable," as autonomous and powerful in her bodily form, here the bodily form of the wolf-girl is broken ("split") and "correct[ed]" to fit Singh's definition of a human. This human form is defined on both the level of language/vocabulary and physical shape (the positioning of the arms, legs, etc.). Like language, the physical form—or "mark"—must be

"train[ed]" and "regulated"; the disobedient nerves must be "educate[d]." Kapil's invocation of "educa[tion]" situates this particular instance of cruelty within extensive histories of violence that are/were framed as (re-)education. Examples include boarding schools for indigenous children in North America (which sought to eradicate their language and culture) and labor education campus in Holocaust-era Germany. Language and symbols comprise the dominant mode of institutionalized education, and the regulation of language is intimately bound up with the regulation of bodies. In the eyes of her oppressor, the crooked "mark" of Kamala's body must be straightened; the inherent wickedness of her very existence demands "corrective therapy."

The poem itself provides something of a counterpoint to the gross abuse of Kamala's body; a poem is both bound and unbound, a regulated and unregulated form. Verse is often highly disciplined language, but—particularly in the contemporary forms Kapil adopts (free verse; prose poetry; associative, collage-like storytelling across multiple scales of spacetime) —it also galvanizes rule-breaking and allows for nonlinear modes of expression. In this way, over the course of *Humanimal*, Kapil's speaker-poet attempts to "[u]nbound" the body of the wolf-girl and to *un*-"educate" her own understanding of humanimal form. In the above passage, she refers to the liminal humanimal body, under duress, as a "swerve." While Kapil applies the word "swerve" literally—Kamala's body resembles a particular "crooked yet regulated" shape—we might also apply Joann Retallack's use of the term in reading this passage (and *Humanimal* at large). In *The Poethical Wager*, Retallack states,

> Life is subject to swerves—sometimes gentle, often violent out-of-the-blue motions that cut obliquely across material and conceptual logics. […] they afford opportunities to usefully rethink habits of thought. (1)

She then wonders, "How can one frame a poetics of the swerve"? I propose that a vegan poetics is one way to frame such a swerve. Kamala, for example, particularly in her moments of

resistance and in Kapil's final depiction of her, emboldens the speaker-poet to "rethink habits of thought," especially those that uphold standards of linearity, purity and cycles of violence toward other beings. *Humanimal* ultimately encourages us to, as Retallack puts it, identify

> a certain poetics of responsibility with the courage of the swerve, the project of the wager—what I call a poethical attitude. Swerves (like antiromantic modernisms, the civil rights movement, feminism, postcolonialist critiques) are necessary to dislodge us from reactionary allegiances and nostalgias. (3)

Indeed, through figures such as Kamala, a vegan poetics carries out one such dislodgement.

Kapil describes another swerve-like moment of embodied resistance, this time based on a real image of Kamala:

> There is a formal photograph that survives in anthologies of this period; the wolfgirl seated, center front of a row of orphans, at Joseph's feet. The eyes of the good children do not waiver. When the photographer shouts from under his black cape—1, 2, 3—our girl is the only one who looks up at a raven passing overhead, shaking her head like a dog on a rope, to howl. "Owowwoow." Joseph kicks her hard, his face completely blank for the camera, but it is too late. It is 1924. The photograph will be blurry. Two faces blossom from one thin neck.

In this remarkable, albeit inadvertent or instinctual, moment of resistance, Kamala subverts both the domination of Singh, who attempts to control her through violence, and the immobilizing gaze of the camera, which seeks to fix her in time (through a photograph) as one body, one identity, one thing. Her movement resists, successfully in this instance, any single, conforming expression of selfhood; she performs a literal "swerve." The action could be interpreted as evidence of her allegiance to animal instinct/identity (that which Singh is trying to quash); she is clearly more interested in the raven flying above than in posing for the human photographer/photograph. In a congruent reading of this passage, the resulting image of "Two faces blossom[ing] from one thin neck" reflects Kamala's dual identities as human and animal; or perhaps the doubling gestures toward the enduring presence of her lost wolf-sister Amala. In any case, the outward illustration of Kamala's nonconformity against the backdrop of the "good

children" reminds us of the distinction Ray makes between bodies deemed ecologically "good" and those deemed ecologically "other." Kamala's otherness in this instance disrupts and dislodges "reactionary allegiances and nostalgias" for a traditional formal photo; her blurry, multiplicitous face(s) project the very "courage of the swerve."

Border-Transgression and Letting Go

Returning to Retallack's question of how to frame a poetics of the swerve, I argue Kapil ultimately uses poetry as a tool for imagining, engaging and connecting social resistance at multiple scales. We can draw parallels between the wolf-girls and our speaker-poet when Kapil recalls the racism (carried out through animalized language) she experienced during her own childhood; returning to London from India, the children on her street call her a "little black pig" and a "Paki snake-eater." She reflects,

> When I grew up, I wrote about the bloodstream of a child as intermingling with that of an animal. Within an environment, the glide path of this child was soundless. When conditions fluxed, I built a flux gate. I made a cut in the trees and let her go.

In thinking about how to constructively and radically rehabilitate our cultural and ecological relationships, Retallack claims, "we learn the most about what it can mean to be human from border-transgressive conversations" (2). It is exactly this type of conversation that Kapil instigates for herself and her readers through poetry. By following "the glide path" of the humanimal child, the speaker-poet carries out a "border-transgressi[on]" of her own—but one, I argue, that contrasts the "transgression of a wild space" executed by Joseph Singh. Kapil uses the figure of the humanimal body to "build a flux gate"—to create, through poetry, a liminal space or threshold between realms.

What is the purpose of this threshold? Kapil's imaginary act of making a "cut in the trees" and letting the humanimal child go directly echoes, in reverse, an earlier line in *Humanimal* in which she quotes Singh: "I cut a hole and removed her from the cave." While Singh cuts open a door to capture, Kapil's "cut" enables free movement for the humanimal. Thus, a "hole"—the form of absence as presence—acts as a forceful eviction and a liberatory rupture, respectively. In the open field of the poemscape, the writer has the ability to rearrange her world; for instance, Kapil takes the pink moon from her childhood and puts it in India:

> I put it inside the jungle like the light given off by certain animals even in the dark. Self-illuminate. And watched it rise.

Likewise Kapil, by opening a hole through which to let her humanimal girl go, alters the readily available environment—rejecting linear temporalities and fixed spatial boundaries. In light of the parallel between this hole and the one cut by Singh, are we to understand this act on the part of the poet-figure as an imaginative restoration, the undoing of the "body's eviction" and the attainment of redemptive freedom for a body violated beyond any possibility of reparation—except perhaps through poetry? If it is, Kapil seems to check this impulse swiftly:

> I wanted to write until they were real. When they began to breathe, opening their mouths in the space next to writing, I stopped writing.

Though Kapil achieves her goal of creating a text to "vivify," to "make a body real," she refrains from stepping any further into the lives of her literary subjects, as if to allow them an agency of their own. She can't—or won't—write their story for them. This too is the careful line a vegan poetics must walk in representing nonhuman animals in literature—we must bring them into view as sovereign beings of their own right, increase the legibility of their bodies/lives, and cultivate an ethic of care across species lines; but we must not let our anthropocentric bias or literary longings circumscribe their existence.

In her treatment of myriad wolf stories throughout *Humanimal*, Kapil participates in literary border-transgression—blending different legends, fables and fairy tales and placing them in dialogue with the story of Amala and Kamala:

> Animal myths, like that of a human consumed by a wolf, depend upon a girl. She loses her way one day, disoriented by the gathering shadow at the edges of a copse. Something glints deeper in, and she pursues it, imagining it to be candlelight in the window of a hut. But it's a tooth. No. I can't see her to completion, opposing myth which is life-like: pre-ecdystic, a transformative state. In this re-telling, this girl is gone forever and I'm not sure how she eats. I'm not sure how she survives the night.

The release of a girl from even the writer's line of sight seems to serve as a rightful alternative to the imaginative restoration Kapil is at times tempted to enact; it is not an ostensibly happy or just ending—in fact, it's not an ending at all; "I can't see her to completion"—but the girl retains her own agency, her own story. This anti-ending upholds a distance between any one mind/body and an-other being, seeming to argue that not every estrangement must be breached. Rather than a means of telling the story of a humanimal girl, the book becomes a means of letting her story go—accepting such expanses of alterity and rejecting knowledge or occupation of a body as a condition for nonviolent coexistence.

The Humanimal in the Mirror

Kapil's presence as both speaker-poet and character/literary subject in *Humanimal* further complicates the question of authorship and the power that authorship wields over the subjects it seeks to vivify. Retallack explains, for instance, the problem of pronouns:

> Reciprocal alterity, as ethical and epistemological destabilizing principle, reveals itself in the problem of pronouns. However much one (or is it I?) may try for clarity, the conversation will never arrive at the apotheosis of the insider. Neither will it arrive at the status of reliable narrator. My implied "I am" as I write is as other to myself as any other that is an I whom I/we can never fully know. (5)

Amid this implicit self-othering lies poetry's power *and* its limitation. Even as Kapil "slip[s her] arms into" the humanimal body through writing, a disassociation from self occurs. This disassociation allows her to vivify the humanimal body for readers and arguably to practice empathy by means of the imagination; but however much she researches the story of the wolf-girls and writes her own version of that story, she will never dissipate the alterity of an-other being, never "fully know" Amala, Kamala, or the "I" (or I's) of which she speaks.

Perhaps people like (and are simultaneously horrified by) stories of feral children because they epitomize "reciprocal alterity," bringing to light the fact that stories of the Other are almost always stories of the self. In a story purportedly about two wolf-girls who died almost half a century before Bhanu Kapil was born, it seems to be no coincidence that the poet repeatedly slips into the story of her own family history:

> I want to make a dark mirror out of writing: one child facing the other, like Dora and little Hans. I want to write, for example, about the violence done to my father's body as a child.

Is this what Kapil is writing about all along? By writing about the violence done to children—to Amala and Kamala by Joseph Singh, to the young black boy by her father, to the wolf cubs trying to sleep in the incomplete darkness of the upper canopies of the jungle—Kapil seems to be arranging a series of mirrors in which her own story, connected to the story of her father, becomes increasingly apparent.

The mirror motif recurs intermittently throughout *Humanimal*, reaching its climax when, looking into an actual mirror, Kapil recognizes her own alterity as well as her own humanimality:

> A face […] condenses on the surface of the mirror in the bathroom when I stop writing to wash my face. Hands on the basin, I look up, and see it: the distinct image of an owlgirl. Her eyes protrude, her tongue is sticking out, and she has horns, wings and feet. Talons. I look into her eyes and see his. Writing makes a mirror between the two children who perceive each other. In a physical world,

> the mirror is a slice of dark space. How do you break a space? No. Tell me a story set in a different time, in a different place. Because I'm scared. I'm scared of the child I'm making.

"Reciprocal alterity" is at its height in this scene, as Kapil experiences a disassociation from self; she regards her reflection in the mirror simply as "A face"—not *her* face, but something entirely other. Her own otherness takes the shape of her father—"I look into her eyes and see his." As writing becomes a process of mirror-making, Kapil—"scared"—can jump from story to story, time to time, place to place; but a version of the humanimal child seems to occupy each and every one. *Humanimal* gradually turns the mirrors toward each other, so as to make the children talk—fostering a "border-transgressive conversation" of sorts, across time and space through poetry; pursuing some small transcendence, a "slice of dark space" safe from the harshly lit and rigidly defined "physical world." Toward the end of the book, Kapil writes,

> A border is felt in the body as fear and sometimes…no, I cannot speak for her now.

It is no wonder "the child [Kapil is] making" induces a feeling of fear; the child provides a mirror in which we regard our own reflection. In other words, we fear ourselves, or rather our own alterity—wild as any animal.

In *Ecocriticism on the Edge*, Timothy Clark discusses the reading of historical texts through a present-day ecocritical lens: "Ecocritical reading cannot just be some act of supposed retrieval, but now becomes also a measure of the irreversible break in consciousness and understanding, an emergent unreadability" (62). Clark specifically points to and attempts to correct several anachronistic readings of nature poetry from the twentieth century,[37] but his notion of an "emergent unreadability" applies with striking resonance to Kapil's text.

[37] See Clark's analysis and rereading of "Mid-August at Sourdough Mountain Lookout," by Gary Snyder (*Ecocriticism on the Edge* 47-70).

Humanimal intentionally engages in modes of anachrony—not only in her spatial and temporal fragmenting of various storylines, but also in the simple fact of basing a prose poem on a historical text widely dismissed as disingenuous (i.e. Singh's retrospective journal entries). If Singh's diary constitutes a premeditated misreading of Amala and Kamala's story, Serges Aroles performs a more accurate, or at least evidence-based rereading, and Kapil performs an imaginative one. All three texts, however, ultimately encounter the "irreversible break in consciousness and understanding" to which Clark refers. As Kapil discovers through her travels and writing project, even in an imaginative poemscape, the bodies of Amala and Kamala are ultimately unreadable—and perhaps unwritable. After letting go of her imaginary wolf-girl, Kapil stops herself; "no, I cannot speak for her now." This is a border she does not ("cannot") transgress. Is the emergent unreadability of the humanimal body, as represented by the girl's vanishing from the speaker-poet's view, indicative of the child's vulnerability or her power? And what are the implications for humanimal and animal bodies, broadly speaking?

To answer these questions, we turn to Kapil's vision of the "future child" to which the book—titled *Humanimal: A Project for Future Children*—is professedly devoted. Placing a tiny, circular mirror in the darkness of the jungle, the speaker-poet purports to see the "open face of a child":

> Future child, I slip one hand under the curve of your skull and another beneath the vine of your neck.

The "skull" gives no hint toward either a human or animal child, but the "vine" of the neck reveals the child's body become (symbolically, or perhaps literally) jungle in Kapil's hand. Is this child—"future child"—the child Kapil earlier claims to be "making"? Is she the amalgamation of all these girls—some mythical, others real, half-known, half-imagined? They accumulate in the speaker-poet's mind:

> A girl is a dot arising in space, and the girl after that, and the next.

And the speaker-poet is one too:

> I am a brown dot and one brown arm, obscured by iridescence; your singular, limbed progeny.

Perhaps, through Kapil's humanimal project, in the border-transgressive conversation, each dot may look and speak to the next—"future child," or their "progeny"—wondering what that future holds and if the humanimal story will repeat itself again and again in an endless cycle of linked violences and linked expressions of resistance.

In one such regenesis, at the end of Humanimal, Kapil imagines the story of an unnamed orphaned girl beginning again at the end of her prose poem. She depicts a human mother abandoning her child at the edge of a village, "an ancient story." By night, the child enters the forest and Kapil writes,

> this is a text to keep her safe and so I followed her into the jungle. […] inevitably, when I woke up, she was gone.

In her desire and efforts to keep the girl safe, Kapil seeks to establish an ethic of care through writing. This attempted care, motherly in nature, recurs upon the girl's imagined homecoming (years—and one page—later):

> A girl returns to her jungle home, shedding her dress at the perimeter. […] I stay awake all night on the tip of love, a test of sight's force. How come you love her too? Do you have a child? Do you want a baby? These are the wrong questions but they pass the time. They make a body real.

It is the connections between different stories, different children, that bring the girl's body to life and cultivate the rippling love from which an earth-wide ethic of care stems—"a test of sight's force." The courage displayed each time a girl enters and re-enters the forest echoes her first traversal, in the "ancient story," of the threshold between human and animal worlds:

> Near night, she stood; the child stood, undying, already partially metallic in her effort, her resiliency, and went in.

But even as the child is "undying" and "resilien[t]," in each iteration, the violent abduction always recurs;

> With nets or sheets, shawls and ropes, they get her and bring her down. For humanimals, this is a destiny that cannot be averted. Each time she crosses, in truth or fiction, she breaks the tracery of delicate glass threads that marks the border. A border is felt in the body as fear and sometimes…no, I cannot speak for her now.

If "this is a destiny that cannot be averted," does the "Project for Future Children" bring any hope for that future or toward those children? Reading this passage carefully, the reader will note that it is not the border itself the girlchild keeps breaking, but the "tracery of delicate glass threads that *marks* the border" (emphasis added). For all the crossings-over it depicts, *Humanimal* seems to suggest in these lines that it is not the border that needs breaking but rather the border's (mis)marking. Language is powerful in this respect; while it cannot "break a space," language *can* mark (and re-mark) that space. Though, like Kapil, we "can't see her to completion," the poem's description of the humanimal girl's repeated resistance upon each border crossing—"break[ing] the tracery" a little more each time—provides hope that one day the glass marking the border will be obliterated and the border will no longer be "felt in the body as fear."

In fact, if we return to the opening page of *Humanimal*, Kapil describes her own fear, taking notes on feral childhood in a "double envelope, fluid digits, scary":

> A feral child is freakish. With all my strength, I pushed the glass doors shut, ignoring the screams of the vendors inside, with a click. I clicked the spaces closed and then, because I had to, because the glass broke, I wrote this.

Does the composite presence of each humanimal body in Kapil's traveling line of dotted girls, as they cross over, ever prove strong enough to break the endless cycle of abuse? If it does—as Kapil seems to suggest when she writes "the glass broke"—then the book affirms poetically that,

marked only by fear, the border between captivity and freedom is in essence as breakable as "delicate glass threads." Though our captors would have us believe otherwise, systems of enslavement (of humans, animals and the earth) are not immutable. Kapil demonstrates, through her poetry, how the power of the humanimal body can by harnessed through writing. If texts of meat gain authority through the reproduction of their meanings, then stories of humanimal presence and resistance interrupt this mimetic cycle. Poetry dismantles linear dogma and swerves the dispossession of body/self/being. In its pursuit of emancipatory forms of linguistic expression, *Humanimal* also taps into the poetic tension between limitation and limitlessness; just as Kapil's speaker-poet does not or cannot speak for the "real," "vivif[ied]" wolf-girls, poems cannot speak for nonhuman animals. A vegan poetics must recognize and acknowledge the limits of its own horizon line in this way—even as the practice seeks to shatter unjust border-markings between species and to re-mark a humanimal existence in which all beings are respected as children (and "future children") of the earth.

Testimony 3

Act Three:
The Human

> *Man is fundamentally an animal. Man shows by his maliciousness, his inability to live in peace with his kind, his wars, that what distinguishes him from the other animals is only his unbounded sadism and the mechanical trinity of the authoritarian concept of life, mechanistic science and the machine. If one looks at the results of civilization as they present themselves over long periods of time, one finds that these contentions of man are not only erroneous; more than that, they seem to be made expressly for the purpose of making man forget that he is an animal.*
>
> -Wilhelm Reich, *Mass Psychology of Fascism*

> *Ourselves? But that's cruel. To snap us as we are, before we've had time to assume...And only, too, in parts….*
>
> -Virginia Woolf, *Between the Acts*

In Acts One and Two, I have demonstrated, through my readings, some of the ways that a vegan poetic practice illuminates violent erasures of nonhuman animals and representations of their presence, as well as the persistent failure of human-animal species lines (or their delineation) to hold up. This is not to say that species categorizations do not exist as a biological and evolutionary reality, but rather that they are not a suitable tool by which to determine the inherent value of an individual. In order to unpack and dismantle anthropocentric views of living beings and to apply a vegan lens to poetic representations of nonhuman animals, one must also consider what is meant by the term "human," since much of the oppression carried out upon nonhuman bodies (and some human bodies) is enacted on the basis of their nonhumanness. In the context of the humanities, the ontological nature and boundaries of the human category are no

less difficult to define than those of the animal. Our practice of vegan poetics must therefore tackle the question of the human, its relationship to poetics, and ultimately whether humanness is a difference that makes a difference.

A vegan poetics recognizes the myriad ways in which the "human" is a problem[38]—from the disconnection between human as an objective category and a description of species-being, to the frequently self-contradictory status of the human (for example, in near-constant violations of "human rights"), to the fact that the industrial ruling class of humans is extremely harmful from an environmental perspective (in terms of the survival and wellbeing of other species, as well as of humans lower on the social hierarchy). Upon recognizing that the "human" is a problem, we are confronted with a difficult question about how to move forward—should we do away with the flawed species category of human altogether, or are there worthwhile ways to practice a vegan poetics that at once acknowledge the deep-seated problems with the human *and* build toward a lived poetic practice as an expression *of* the human, not in spite of it?

Posthumanists might argue that the capacity to make poetry isn't necessarily a unique property of humans; rather it is a human form of something shared with other species, a human expression (or imitation) of something inhuman.[39] In this way, poetry provides a particularly useful space in which to examine the breakdown of species hierarchies and to explore species relations, in part because poetry technically functions as an inhuman medium. All poetic figures are made of language (a human and a nonhuman in a poem are equally inhuman), and thus, within its own bounds, a poem models the dissolution of the human category distinction. On the other hand, while poems themselves aren't human, they are the product of human creativity,

[38] By the "human" here, I mean the term and meaning(s) it delineates, not the actual individual/species.
[39] For example, Tobias Menley's *The Animal Claim: Sensibility and the Creaturely Voice* (2015) grounds poetry in its resonance with the animal voice and Eduardo Kohn's *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human* (2013) provides an account of language deriving from the imitation of birds, creatures and water.

human language and human creation. In this sense, they are the ultimate expression of our species' capacity to *humanize* through making—whether shelters, rituals, meals or art. A vegan poetics understands such work as an expression of human capacity to acknowledge and respond to the ethical and ontological status of other beings in ways that derive *from* our unique position as humans.[40]

In analyzing our own troublesome species category, I begin Act Three by considering several misreadings of the human. The first section is grounded in a reading of Jorie Graham's *Never*, which depicts key examples of human-to-human disrelation, as well as the sometimes unrecognizable boundary between human and nonhuman forms. In the poem "High Tide," the reader witnesses how the perceived subjecthood of an-other being expands and contracts depending on the perspective of the beholder. In my discussion of the poem, I contemplate the relative illegibility of any given body, as well as the question of love and its relationship to justice. In awakening to her own inability to distinguish between animate subjects and inanimate objects, Graham's speaker is confronted with her disconnection from what it is to have a body, in this case a human form. Over the course of the poem, she begins to model, on an individual level, the rereading of other bodies so as to cast off egocentric assumptions and to reflect the intrinsic illegibility and self-sovereignty of those bodies. In this sense, the speaker could be said to initiate a vegan poetic reading practice of her own.

In the second half of Act Three, I will move from interrogating the question of individual human form to the question of collective, or species-level, human form. I begin by discussing the notion of the Anthropocene, which has become one of the most dominant species-level narratives in the realm of Environmental Studies and Environmental Humanities. For this purpose, I look to

[40] Likewise veganism can be understood as one expression of *humanity*—withholding one's own appetites or conveniences in acknowledgement of the ethical status of other creatures.

the prose-poetry essay "#Misanthropocene 24 Theses," co-authored by Juliana Spahr and Joshua Clover, its representation of humans and their relationship to nonhuman species. My reading of this text explores the notion of a collective human form in order to eke out some of the implications of a misguided species grouping (or misuse of that grouping). While engaged with environmental criticism, a vegan poetics stands in opposition to a worldview like the Anthropocene because the Anthropocene situates the human at the center of the earthly narrative (even if it does so in order to criticize harm caused by humans), whereas a vegan poetics de-centers the human in pursuit of a non-hierarchical web of species relations.

Finally, I perform a reading of Juliana's Spahr's poetry collection *That Winter the Wolf Came*, which explores the corporeal displacement of the human form—collective displacement at the hands of hegemonic forces seeking to stamp out people's movements, as well as individual displacement that occurs through the merging of human and nonhuman materials in the body. In their work at large, Graham and Spahr are both engaged in contemporary ecopoetics, including direct critiques of ecological destruction and industrial violence. Spahr has also been directly involved in political and activist spaces, which is reflected in *That Winter the Wolf Came*. For this reason, the collection is particularly useful for contemplating the function as well as limitations of poetry in building and sustaining social movements. The application of a vegan poetic lens to these readings of poems emphasizes the amorphous, inconsistent and sometimes hollow quality of the "human," its inability to uphold any justifiably superior quality and the ease with which it can be emptied of meaning or occupancy. The readings do, however, build toward a reclamation of meaning and language—an open vision of the "human" that does not rely on dominion over other beings.

Unsurprisingly, I do not answer the impossible question of what it means to be human in Act Three (or elsewhere). But poetry provides a useful mirror nonetheless. Like our reflection, the poem both is and isn't us, is and isn't human, both inhabits and is separate from the body; it offers a formal site of linguistic mediation and meditation. In order to reenvision the animal and the relation of humankind to that which is and is not other, we must look equally hard at the fallible implications of our own species identity. My readings in Act Three explore several engagements with and expressions of the human—from the material human body, to the perceived essence of a human being, to collective conceptualizations of the human. Through my analysis of the poems, I wrestle with some of the problems and contradictions of the human category and argue against using it as a barometer by which to attribute status, value or attachment. Ultimately, neither this Act nor a vegan poetics contends that the "human" is meaningless or that it should be discarded altogether. The project of a vegan poetics is in some sense a process of revision—the creation of linguistic sites in which to reinhabit, differently, the space of knowing (or unknowing). While poetry cannot solve the problem of the human, it can and does provide that space, and the readings I discuss in Act Three begin to redefine expressions of relationality within and across species.

Misreading the Human

Jorie Graham's poetry collection *Never* (2002) engages entangled human perceptions, and misperceptions, of environment and place. The unfolding edges of the category of human often emerge from poems as murkier and less certain of themselves than before. Evoking Stacy

Alaimo's new materialist concept of trans-corporeality,[41] Graham's human frequently proves inseparable from the so-called natural world as well as from synthetic objects. Likewise, human agency grows muddled in light of heightening climate crisis and mass extinction; humans act upon the earth—"Footsteps bent the grass / a bit / to get us here"—, while also being acted upon—"Elsewhere a people now is being forced / from home." Much of human life in the contemporary era, as portrayed by the collection, is characterized by ruin and loss. Graham's use of branching syntax[42] draws heightened attention to the dangers of fixed metaphor and the attribution of singular meaning to any scene or body. In "The Taken-Down God," her speaker visits an Italian chapel and observes the birds:

> […] up in the archways, finding purchase
> carrying back and forth the bits of twig and something white. From here I'd say
> it is a piece of veil—but it was plastic from a shopping bag. We
> would like someplace to 'live.'

Graham's speaker inhabits a rooted human perspective—"From here…"—that proves retrospectively to be unreliable; her desired metaphor (of a godly statue's veil set free and perhaps even welcomed into nature by way of the birds) gives way to the all-too-appropriate reality—albeit an omnipresent metaphor for the so-called Anthropocene—of a plastic bag.

Misreadings, such as this this one, prompt Graham's speaker to revise her outlook and language, in search of meaningful inhabitation of the human form. The speaker's revised testimony of the flying object is followed by a profession of collective desire: "We / would like someplace to 'live.'" Acknowledging this feeling of homelessness, whether literal or figurative,

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[41] In *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (2010), Alaimo argues, "imagining human corporeality as trans-corporeality, in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world, underlines the extent to which the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from 'the environment.' It makes it difficult to pose nature as mere background, as Val Plumwood would put it, for the exploits of the human since 'nature' is always as close as one's own skin—perhaps even closer" (2).

[42] In *The Art of Syntax* (2009), Ellen Bryant Voight uses this term to describe poetic syntax that extends beyond/out of the main clause, creating the effect of an accumulative building within sentences.

the speaker suggests a loss has occurred. The perceived presence of the veil proves unsustainable in the face of plastic reality. And a loss of imaginative refuge parallels a more literal loss or lack of an inhabitable home. A vegan poetic reading of Graham's work highlights the displacement of the human—whether from bodily home, shelter/abode, or planetary home. As the human becomes increasingly entangled with nonhuman objects and increasingly alienated from fellow members of her species, meaning drains from the word and category. Absence abounds. Disrelation comes to define our readings of other beings.

Entangled Subjects and Objects

Moments of misrecognition frequent the pages of *Never*. The speaker has difficulty recognizing objects; the white veil is revealed to be a plastic bag. She also has difficulty recognizing herself, remarking in "Afterwards," "we do not resemble ourselves." This difficulty in distinguishing subjects, objects and even the self comes to a head in "High Tide," in which the speaker confuses living subject with inanimate waste object. The poem begins[43]:

> She held a sign that said Emergency [nothing else].
> Handwritten in pencil on the corrugated strip of boxtop.

Soon thereafter the speaker describes this person further:

> She: a woman of sixty: long gray and
> Matted hair, many grays, also some blue in it

In the speaker's daily encounters with the gray-haired woman, she is provoked to contemplate the degrees of connection and separation between two bodies, two experiences, as well as their relative scale and materiality within the broader scene:

> two women: one holding one word [all caps] up [torn gloves, wool layers
> frazzling] [moving her eyes as I move away]: then street: then

[43] In quotations from "High Tide," bracketed contents are Graham's, not mine, except in the case of bracketed elipses *[...]* (to delineate an omission of Graham's text).

> abstraction of her: then her back there laughing once out loud,
> me tossing a quick glance up at the sky, me crossing
> the street. I feel scribbled-in. Something inattentive has barely written me in.

Seeing herself through the lens of writing—as small, marginal, "scribbled-in"—the speaker seems to experience a momentary diminishment of subjecthood; she feels reduced to a sidenote, a product of some "inattentive" existential force. In this way, she experiences, on a personal scale, the subsiding of an egoism largely familiar to humans at the species scale. In fact, even as it raises the frightening possibility of our own extinction (arguably due to our own collective "inattenti[on]"), the Anthropocene narrative casts humans as the stars of the planetary show—an all-powerful geophysical force that feels anything but "scribbled-in." On the other hand, as animal and human rights scholars alike have evidenced, anthropocentric worldviews have a tendency to diminish or erase—often violently—the subjecthood of vulnerable bodies. The speaker in "High Tide" notes the transformation of the gray-haired woman—or rather the details of her material presence: sign, gloves, frazzled wool, movement of eyes—into the "abstraction of her."

This moment of shift in the human mind—the abstracting of a person or being—constitutes an important phenomenon, as we think about and compare the translation of nonhuman animal bodies into abstract concepts such as "bacon" or "leather." In his foundational work *The Case for Animal Rights* (1983), Tom Regan espouses an abolitionist position with regard to treatment of nonhuman animals. Regan argues that nonhuman animals inherently possess moral rights due to their subjecthood:

> An alternative to viewing being-alive as the relevant similarity [between human and nonhuman animals] is what will be termed *the subject-of-a-life criterion*. To be the subject-of-a-life, in the sense in which this expression will be used, involves more than merely being alive and more than merely being conscious. […] individuals are subjects-of-a-life if they have beliefs and desires; perception, memory, and a sense of the future, including their own future; an emotional life together with feelings of pleasure and pain; preference- and welfare-interests; the

> ability to initiate action in pursuit of their desires and goals; a psychophysical identity over time; and an individual welfare in the sense that their experiential life fares well or ill for them, logically independently of their utility for others and logically independently of their being the object of anyone else's interests. Those who satisfy the subject-of-a-life criterion themselves have a distinctive kind of value—inherent value—and are not to be viewed or treated as mere receptacles. (243)

The failure to recognize fellow animals—human and nonhuman alike—as subjects-of-a-life ultimately allows for the violation of moral rights. In the example of Graham's poem, the speaker scrutinizes her own shifting recognition of the subject/objecthood of living bodies and their parts. Her perception of the gray-haired woman's material presence is frequently fragmented by the speaker's frame of reference; what begins as a description of "She: a woman of sixty" splinters into parts—hair, eyes, laugh—and then, upon increased physical distance (and later misapprehension), grows abstract. Her perceived status as both fellow human and living subject seems to expand and contract in relation to the speaker's field of vision. Likewise the felt subjecthood of the speaker herself shifts, taking up more or less space in response to the fleeting interaction (or lack thereof).

Such disparity between a subject-of-a-life herself and a subject-of-a-life as felt, perceived or acknowledged by another being underscores the innate unknowable nature of individuals. In thinking about the estrangement of Graham's speaker as her subject/object of witness grows abstract, as well as the various border-makings interrogated by a vegan poetics (human/nonhuman, subject/object, nature/culture, etc.), it is useful to juxtapose Graham's descriptions of a living being (one such subject-of-a-life) with those of inanimate objects. In a subsequent section of the poem, the speaker describes rubbish and debris washed up beachside after high-tide:

> […] seaweeds of various thicknesses and drynesses, all
> intertwined, some wrappers, shiny, bleached—
> strips of mylar, flimsier [translucent] plastic blues—yarn, twine—spines of

> strange bits of
> fish, and carapaces—parts of birds or were they shells—
> actual glass and fishing lures that looked like glass—
> all grained-up in the sand and clay that
> swirled-up round in ground-winds—nothing extruding—
> all woven tight and rolled and braided-up […]
> […]
> […] Nearby
> her rolled-up sleeping bag and other bags. A liquid thing,
> her *here*.

In this section, we can note the entanglement of natural objects such as seaweed, carapaces and clay with the manmade fishing lures, glass and plastics, as well as the speaker's inability to distinguish some objects from others—"parts of birds or were they shells"—in the tightly woven enmeshment. In a literal configuration of trans-corporeality, the nature/culture divide is collapsed. The components of the enmeshment also bear resemblance to the descriptions of the gray-haired woman; her "corrugated strip of boxtop," "matted hair," "torn gloves," and "frazzling" all exhibit outward markers of trash or brokenness. A juxtaposition also illustrates parallels between the blue of the woman's hair and the "plastic blues" of the "braided-up" trash, between the "strip of boxtop" and the "strips of mylar," and between the "rolled-up" sleeping bag and the "rolled" dead/discarded matter. Descriptions of waste objects (such as wrappers and carapaces) reveal only subtle distinctions from those of non-waste objects (like the sign which, though made from discarded material, serves a function: it communicates the meaningful message "Emergency") and descriptions of objects reveal only subtle distinctions from those of the human subject. The sleeping bag and belongings (the woman's "home" in some sense) are a partial exception, being described as a "thing" but also as a place: "her *here*." This place is portable and liquiform, and yet present ("*here*"). It is ironically the subject who has been literally displaced that inhabits this spatial (semi-)presence, in contrast to the speaker-witness who feels marginal or "scribbled-in[to]" the story. Nevertheless, the lines between object ("thing"),

presence (“here”) and human subject (“she”/”I”) remain exceedingly unstable in the eyes of Graham’s speaker.

Reading Unreadable Subjects

Despite the estrangement the above descriptions suggest, as “High Tide” progresses, the speaker further explores a perceived connection between herself and the gray-haired woman, a connection enabled in part by physical proximity:

> […] If I get very close,
> I feel a wish between us like
> a silver thing. Sadness, yes, in our
> one gaze [at certain points as you
> approach it becomes one] [the ends of each long
> separation
> knit] [right there]

In this way, the speaker purports to experience the vacillation between a connection or unity (in longing and sadness) and the “separation” between two strangers. The supposedly shared gaze momentarily entangles or “knit[s]” two subjects-of-a-life together, as the seaweed becomes intertwined with plastic wrappers. Of note in this section (and in the poem at large) is that the reader at no point gains access to the gray-haired woman’s point of view; it is therefore impossible to share the speaker’s certitude when she describes the “linked up gaze”:

> […] I cross her gaze. We lock in thought, of that I am
> sure.

Here the speaker overlooks the illegibility of the gray-haired woman by disregarding the possibility that she may have another experience—one in which the two women are not in fact “lock[ed] in thought” but are perceiving the encounter in decidedly different ways.

What we might term “emergent unreadability” (once again, borrowing Timothy Clark’s language) with respect to the gray-haired woman becomes starkly and suddenly apparent to the

speaker in a moment of heightened (mis)recognition in the second half of the poem. Making her way back from a 5am emergency room trip in cold late November, the speaker sees the gray-haired woman "sleeping there, her long thick grouped-up hair over the brick / sidewalk, / the top fold of the sleeping bag flapped back." Bending gently to her "to fold / the blue flap back over the freezing face":

> […] accidentally
> I graze her cheek. So far does the mind go, I fill
> with the sensation of having
> goodness—actual goodness?—fill with my
> *thinking it good*
> out to the very edges of my hand—touching her cheek—feel love?: it's not
> a cheek, it's paste—or gum and some admixture—
> pull the hair back and it's not hair, it's wool and phloxed-up
> random yarns, old woollen caps stuffed in a stocking
> face, with gum laid on—or is it latex paint—onto
> the cheek, making a chin: it is a puppet: it is a place
>
> *
>
> holding a place: it is an eclipse of: of holding
> on: of *on*: or *in*: or what a *here* can be
> if what one is
>
> is finally reduced to *here*

In this moment of recognition, the speaker is finally able to realize that her reading of the gray-haired woman is a product of her own experience and imagination. Our relations to other bodies, other subjects-of-a-life, are just that: relations—relational to our own unique, embodied experience of the world. We make it up—"So far does the mind go." In discovering that the human body she bends to is not a body at all but an agglomeration of inanimate materials (paste, wool, gum, etc.) forming a puppet, a placeholder, the certainty of the scene the speaker witnesses and the connection she feels quickly dissolve.

The speaker's reading of reality and that reality itself are revealed to be disparate entities; so too, the poem gestures toward a nebulous difference between "actual goodness" and the

sensation, feeling or thought of goodness. Experiencing the sensation of goodness, the speaker first questions—"actual goodness?"—, then corrects—"my / *thinking it good*," and describes the limitations of this embodied, yet bounded, sensation; she is only able to feel and think as far as she can reach—"out to the very edges of my hand." In this way Graham literalizes the boundary between two bodies, two disparate lenses through which to regard the scene. Upon contact with the presumed human body, the speaker again questions, "feel love?" This question directly precedes the imminent discovery of the gray-haired woman's absence and her replacement with a set of lifeless waste objects. Graham's use of punctuation, particularly the colon between "feel love?" and the speaker's discovery suggests that the speaker's own self-indulgent feelings may (at least in part) color her ability to see clearly or to encounter subjects/objects on their own terms. This example of moral projection and clouded perspective has deep implications when thinking about human cultivation of improved species relations. Assessments of human virtue and moral judgements about our own treatment of animals (and each other) are always subject to human bias, perhaps especially when they stem from emotions such as love.

Applying a vegan poetic framework to our reading, we might consider speciesism as a scaled-up form of love—love for a select few species, and especially for one's own species, above others. Emotional qualities such as compassion, kindness and empathy are often associated with veganism, and while there are certainly spiritual and psychological dimensions to practices of nonviolence, a rights-based vegan philosophy/practice is not rooted in feelings of goodness or love; it is based in justice. Subjects-of-a-life possess inherent rights independent of human love or lack thereof. Individual love (from one human being to another, or from one human being to one nonhuman animal being) is discriminatory by its very nature.[44] I love my

[44] I distinguish "individual love" from broader spiritual notions of love; a general love for all creatures could of course be considered nondiscriminatory in theory. *Ahimsa*, for example, is sometimes understood along these lines,

dog, for instance, but I do not believe that her worthiness of life and protection is a consequence of my love for her. Rather these are moral rights. As Reines writes of the cow, "It is not that you have to worship her. You just have to not kill her."

Anthropologist Naisargi N. Dave has written extensively on the affective-political dimensions of intimacy and human-nonhuman relations. In "Love and Other Injustices" (2015), she strongly critiques the conflation of love and ethics within animal activism, instead proposing an ethnographically informed "ethic of indifference." To love is to differentiate, Dave argues: "love is an injustice, because when we love it is the one or ones who are special to us that we save." In "High Tide," the speaker's feeling of misinformed goodness and love toward the gray-haired woman mirrors broader attitudes of human exceptionalism that often drive Anthropocene narratives in the sense that they partially or totally blind the reader to the agency and rights of other (non-"special") bodies or beings. Such feelings become, as the poem states, "an eclipse of"; the absence of an indirect object after the preposition mirrors through (un)grammatical language the absence, or "eclips[ing]," of those bodies from view. Graham's speaker experiences indifference only retrospectively—in her admission of the instinctive narcissism driving her perceived but ultimately unsubstantiated connection to the gray-haired woman, as well as the speaker's goodwill toward the supposed subject. True indifference marks the realization that Graham's speaker is in actuality blind to the difference between a human being and a pile of inanimate trash; upon first look, she cannot distinguish between subject and object, or human and nonhuman.

The process of subverting violent paradigms and constructions of difference—unblinding ourselves to the biases that color and limit human imagination and relation—is a process of

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though technically it is an ethical principle (not a feeling) and is typically translated as "nonviolence" or "noninjury" toward living beings (not compassion or love).

revision. To revise is to *look again*. Poetry, I argue, is especially suited to such a practice; poems like Graham's, frequently trouble fixed perspectives, surface-level interpretations and linear thinking. The reading/writing of a poem is a uniquely human pursuit, and thus (like the poem's speaker discovers) cannot traverse material divides between human and nonhuman experiences; but poetry's ever-evolving capacity to negotiate such limitations and to re-envision subjects, objects and their relations positions it as a tool for un-learning. Poetic creations are not human; though, as Milton wrote, they are not "dead things, but do contain a potencie of life" (999). To read a poem is to study the human and human's "making." The humanities at large, Dave posits,

> are essential, we argue, because they are about 'that which makes us human.' Lest this sound like simple narcissism, we insist that the commitment is necessarily, we say, to investigate how we encounter the Other, including the most vulnerable among and beyond (which is to say, beneath) us.

Here Dave highlights one of the potential dangers of a vegan poetics; that is, the possibility that its steadfast commitment to ethics—especially to an "ethic of indifference" at the species level—risks furthering the very exceptionalism it aims to resist. From a human perspective, how do we ethically and accurately investigate our relationship to the Other without replicating the dynamic Graham's poem reveals? No doubt, at the species scale, we (humans) are the speaker—"*thinking it good*," thinking ourselves moral, and yet unable to extend unconceited judgement further than the "edges of [our] hand[s]." I argue that the application of a vegan poetics to reading/writing invites (but not guarantees) moments of re-vision, re-discovery and re-cognition; like Graham's speaker, we are invited to revise our conception of the Other to better reflect our own ignorance. Dave challenges humanists (and posthumanists) to consider: what if we "cared a little bit less about our own survival?" The Anthropocene narrative would likely shift or succumb to a less human-centric vision of planetary health and coexistence, better enabling us to see the cow as a

cow, the plastic wrappers as plastic wrappers, and the human, perhaps, as an animal—unexceptional, unsuperior, and exceedingly fallible.

On the other hand, neither veganism nor a vegan poetics asks us to overlook or depreciate regard for human suffering. The subversion of an anthropocentric superiority complex in fact fosters clearer recognition of "different" bodies, and thus enhances justice struggles (and often empathy and compassion) both across and within species—including for our fellow human animals. Returning to the question of what it means to be human, we might consider whether the speaker's so-called "humanity" is deepened by her attempted goodness, whether it is diminished by her blindness, or if it is ever called into question at all—after all it is the gray-haired woman's humanity that is momentarily eclipsed by the speaker's gaze. Projecting her own vision of humanity onto the conglomerated, inanimate dummy, the speaker undermines her own perceived connection—"We lock in thought, of that I am / sure." Ultimately the poem becomes a site of breakage; the apparent linkage is broken, as Graham shows how we can never be sure. Our reading of an(y) other body must always traverse some level of disrelation—the well-trained reader locates an "emergent unreadability."

As discussed in Act Two, Timothy Clark uses the term "emergent unreadability" to describe breaks in consciousness and understanding, specifically emphasizing how environmental interpretations of poetry are products of their cultural and scientific moment. Using the lens of a vegan poetics, we might apply the concept of emergent unreadability to individual animate bodies—for example, the break Graham illustrates between two bodies (their supposed linked up gaze; their locking in thought). The poem narrates an emergent readability of both human and nonhuman bodies—applying the concept not retrospectively across decades or centuries but in real-time interactions, through the present act of poetry-making and poetry

reading. In this way, the poem constitutes a transformative act, dislodging (at least in one small moment) the false egoism of anthropocentric relations and the presumed readability of other bodies.

Graham's gray-haired woman does offer one highly "readable" expression in the early stanzas and sections of the poem: "She held a sign that said Emergency [nothing else]." But even this (literally) readable text could be interpreted in innumerable ways. Most obviously, the gray-haired woman is seemingly experiencing an "emergency" herself, since she is sleeping on the street. But given the context of the poem and Graham's collection at large, it could also be a reference to the state of climate "emergency"; it is, as the title and later stanza note, "high tide"—both literally on this strip of beach and globally, as sea levels rise to unprecedented levels and threaten the existence of peoples and ecosystems. Whether the text is a statement of fact, a plea for help, or a warning, we don't know and can never be sure. In this way, upon re-vision, emergent unreadability characterizes even the most legible object (language), let alone the human subjects in the poem. At the end of the first stanza, the speaker recounts:

> […] I
> wrote my name firmly. Extruded meaning—unmistakable
> thing.

A name being a basic marker of identity and expressed differentiation from other (differently) named and unnamed subjects, it is fitting that the speaker "extrudes" or thrusts out the meaning behind such a "firm" composition of identity. The readability of a name, image or body is dismantled by what unfolds in the subsequent stanzas. By the end of the poem, the speaker "look[s]" again to signifiers, such as a name or representation, and finds the opposite of firmness or fixed identity:

> […] I'm looking through a wind that's like a wall for
> a proper name: for identification: representation:

> divine emptiness: it's been 21 minutes:
> crashing, the wave deposits its gift: difference: indifference:
>
> and the long sepulcher: identity: open

Not only does the speaker now fail to identify any "proper name," but the "sepulcher" or burial seems to constitute her recognition of far-reaching emergent unreadability—"divine emptiness"—of self, of Other and of nature. The wave's "gift"—"difference: indifference"—encapsulates the very ethic of indifference Dave posits ("indifference to difference itself"). While the resounding note of unreadability and indifference upon which "High Tide" ends leaves both speaker and reader in a state of relative detachment or alienation, it is also a note of "open[ness]"—perhaps an openness to approaching future interactions with keener attention, less projection, and greater opportunity for coexistence.

In Search of a Human Form

My reading of Graham's "High Tide" has emphasized examples in which the individual "human" has been evacuated of differentiation, meaning and relation. A vegan poetic practice has revealed the individual human to be in some sense an unreadable subject. In this section, I will consider the question of a collective human form. Since vegan poetics is bound up not only in lived singular human practices but also collective projects of movement-making. As previously discussed, the original objective of the pioneers of modern veganism was to save mankind. We must therefore interrogate the shape and significance of that unified entity, insofar as it exists. I begin the section by engaging the so-called Anthropocene narrative—not to dismiss the usefulness of adopting a species-level framework entirely but rather to situate the risks and complications of such an undertaking in the context of my project. A vegan poetics is interested

in species-level representations of sentient relation—the language that defines a species and the distinctions between individual, autonomous subjects-of-a-life within that species. My readings of Juliana Spahr's poetry collection *That Winter the Wolf Came* and her prose-poetry essay "#Misanthropocene 24 Theses," co-authored with Joshua Clover, trouble the dominant (and often speciesist) language of the Anthropocene, wrestle with the absence of meaningful identification with our own species-being, and attempt to describe the shape of a not-yet-fully-present collective liberation movement. Through the readings, I model poetic inquiry into the long-term project of reoccupying the human form for the better.

Misanthropocentric Rifts

In *The Human Planet* (2018) Mark A. Maslin and Simon L. Lewis describe the Anthropocene as an "interlacing" of human and Earthly history:

> Combining the Greek word for 'humans' and 'recent time,' scientists have named this new period of time the Anthropocene. It describes when *Homo sapiens* became a geological superpower, setting Earth on a new path in its long development. The Anthropocene is a turning point in the history of humanity, the history of life, and the history of the Earth itself. It is a new chapter in the chronicle of life and new chapter in the human story. (5)

Critics across multiple disciplines, including both sciences and humanities, have debated the use of the term.[45] Some find it unhelpful because, by situating humans at the center of modern Earthly history, the narrative of the Anthropocene perpetuates (and potentially increases) the very anthropocentric, egoistic mindsets that have resulted in such calamitous consequences as the climate crisis, ecological destruction, species extinction and the existential threat(s) to humankind in the immediate present and future. Furthermore, the argument for the human

[45] See, for example, "The Geology of Mankind?: A Critique of the Anthropocene Narrative," by Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg (2014), and responses such as those from Dipesh Chakrabarty and Lewis and Maslin.

species as a geological superpower overlooks the disproportionate contributions of various peoples and accordingly the uneven impacts of the crisis across diverse human communities. To contemplate any single species-level human form is to perform an exercise in abstraction, and thus to run the risk of erasing or disregarding certain human subjects.[46] While multiple viewpoints (such as at the planetary and individual scale) are not mutually exclusive, the Anthropocene narrative stands diametric to the project of a vegan poetics which seeks to recognize the inherent value and rights-bearing status of all subjects-of-a-life. In short, the Anthropocene narrative centers humans, whereas a vegan poetics de-centers humans.

In their prose-poetry diatribe "#Misanthropocene 24 Theses" (2014), Juliana Spahr and Joshua Clover riff on the misdiagnosis that is the Anthropocene story of humans, rebranding it as the *mis*anthropocene:

> […] this is the truth of things not the avant-garde not the gallery not the caterpillar that is not your moustache not even the Miami blue butterfly caterpillar which is the next caterpillar to go extinct *ohhhhh Miami* but the rifts that now make up roughly seventy percent of all social life and you feel the rifts as truth because the hatred is real the hatred is an objective force like debt is an objective force and the wage and the heat and the end of the world are objective forces and the rifts are in this sense objective and you call this objectivity the misanthropocene.

Spahr and Clover's depiction of the "rifts" that comprise human connection ("social life") suggests an alternative experience to that of the speaker in Graham's "High Tide"—her false certitude in the "linked up gaze" and the "lock[ing] in thought" between two bodies. Here, social rifts are "fe[lt] as truth," marking the era of the misanthropocene as one of clearly perceived/felt disconnection (as opposed to obscured disconnection/false connection). Likewise, "the end of the world" is characterized not as a tragedy of self-inflicted human downfall, but by objectivity or

[46] In the context of the climate crisis, those human subjects are predominantly in the Global South.

indifference. Rifts[47] also manifest in Spahr and Clover's misanthropocene in the form of the longstanding socioeconomic inequity characterizing modern society under global capitalism:

> We would all like to be violet-haired pure honey-smiling Sappho hanging out at all hours of the day and night in the air conditioned $83200 a night Royal Penthouse Suite at the Hotel President Wilson with twelve bedrooms and twelve marble bathrooms plus a wraparound terrace with views of the Alps singing the praises of Anaktoria. The misanthropocene has proven to be a time when this is possible for some and not for others.

In this passage and throughout the "24 Theses" of the prose-poem, Spahr and Clover's misanthrope speaker(s) express a mixture of hostility and humor, or perhaps rather a hostile humor/humorous hostility. "Misanthropy" itself is arguably a speciesist outlook, as the term suggests a hatred or mistrusts for humankind and thus blankets a diverse and disparate set of peoples into a single abstract form.

On the other hand, Spahr and Clover's incisive revision of the term "Anthropocene" cuts through narratives of human arrogance specifically by critiquing a kind of pseudo-academic, pop-culture obsessed, neoliberal strain of thought; even as their first "thesis" opens "First of all. Fuck all ya'll," "all" doesn't seem to delineate a species-wide devaluation. Rather the speaker(s)' hostility, however tongue-in-cheek, is pointed and often self-directed:

> fuck this list with its mixture of environmental destruction and popular culture smugness […] and fuck us for sitting here reading you a rock banjo joke while the New Mexico meadow jumping mouse went extinct

Self-mocking gives way to an underlying lament at the core of the misanthropocene. The speaker(s) not only lament (and chastise "us" for) the loss of the jumping mouse, but moreover the invisibility of the jumping mouse's erasure—its being eclipsed by self-serving human priorities as flippant as "a rock banjo joke." Nonhuman animals—from the blue butterfly

[47] See also Karl Marx's *Capital, volume 3* (1894) and John Bellamy Foster's recuperation of "metabolic rift" in *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature* (2000) as it pertains to Marx's ecological theory.

caterpillar to the meadow jumping mouse to the yellow legged frog—pepper the pages of the "24 Theses," as if to catalogue a series of losses materializing outside the anthropocentric line of vision; "Fuck everyone who has bought a big bag of ant poison," the speaker raves, "because ants have a social stomach and you are one selfish motherfucker if you can't let them have the very small amounts of food they want to share equally among themselves." In the prose-poem, human relations to nonhuman animals are characterized by disregard (the jumping mouse), selfishness (the ants), or domination—"how the UC Davis website notes that gophers are nongame mammals which means that anyone can control them at any time and in any legal manner." Perhaps the most tragically ironic example of human treatment of nonhuman animals presented in the prose-poem is the example of abstract objectification inadvertently turned into physical violence:

> [The misanthropocene] makes endless small plastic representations of the African jungle or plains animals and fish ingest them and vomit them up or don't and there they sit in their stomach and then they die.

This characterization of the misanthropocene links the hegemonic use of representation of the nonhuman with literalized physical violence inflicted upon those nonhuman bodies—the risks of undiscerning plastic metaphor are made real in the sickness and death of the fish.

Juxtaposing the plastic representations of animals with examples of poetic utterance incites us once again to consider the ethical commitments of metaphor and their relationship to form. As the speaker(s) of "#Misanthropocene 24 Theses" acknowledge, it is impossible to capture through linguistic form

> The sheer scale of the misanthropocene. Our minds feel small and inert. Once every fragment seemed to bear within it the whole. Now the whole being too large for the mind to see stands before us always as a fragment.

Fragmentation, as a poetic form or syntactical construction, draws attention to its incompleteness, to what gets left out, to precisely what the fragment is not. In this way, the

fragment lends presence to absence and implicitly acknowledges the limitations of any single poem or representation—gesturing beyond ”the very edges of my hand.” Formal fragmentation is thus a generative tool for carrying out a vegan poetic writing practice, which seeks at once to break (or fragment) dominant constructions of language and to direct our gaze toward the absent referent. While the Anthropocene risks consuming disparate versions of the human species into a false collective, the poetic fragment navigates multiple scales of material absence/presence, linguistic deconstruction/construction and affective loss/love.

(Dis)locating the Human

I have argued that the Anthropocene is an egocentric misrepresentation of species-scale human identity, and that even as the “misanthropocene” productively illuminates how anthropocentric language and ways of life mistake the nature and form of the human, it nevertheless paints a bleak picture for the future of most earthly beings. With that future in mind, how can and does poetry tell the story of human struggle for liberation and help rebuild a human identity from the ground up? In other words, how are poems engaged in movement-making? The vegan social movement emphasizes relations between species, but it is naturally bound up with myriad struggles to free human animals from subjugation. In this way, the movement pursues an identity in which humans are not positioned at the center of the universe or at the top of a species hierarchy, but as sovereign subjects in their own right. In order to scale up individual expressions of liberation, solidarity and relation, a vegan poetics must navigate between the language of individual subjects and that of the collective, a difficult task in an age characterized by so much disconnection. Juliana Spahr’s *That Winter the Wolf Came* (2015) inquires into the multi-scaled aspects of the “human” and creates language to describe the fragmenting of the individual human

from an imagined or experienced collective identity. Thematically, the book contemplates the speaker-poet's participation in the Occupy Wall Street protest era of 2011-2012 and the ensuing dissipation (or evolution) of that movement. My reading of poetry from this collection will destabilize the language of a unified humanity, highlight the infiltration of the dislocated human form by anti-life forces, and ultimately consider the role of poets in fighting for the (r)evolution of the human.

In "Brent Crude," the speaker-poet describes a feeling of shared vision in the imperfect but communal assembly; the protesters are "Ununited but together." The singular body merges literally and figuratively with the collective form:

> My body is unremarkable, not at all singular, as I walk up to join these other bodies.

This feeling of collective identity and form ebbs and flows throughout the pages of *That Winter the Wolf Came*, sometimes deeply felt by the speaker-poet and at other times giving way to a stark singular experience of estrangement. For instance, a few pages and prose stanzas after the speaker-poet experiences the togetherness described above, the protest is broken up. The speaker-poet recalls walking out of jail afterwards:

> I have been let go provided I do not fail to disperse. I walk out with thirty others […] We walk out one by one, even if in twos or threes or more. We are not together.

Here the speaker-poet encounters fragmentation of human solidarity/togetherness as a condition of her release. Clearly when it comes to adopting an adversarial role against the state, the collective human form proves far more threatening than the individual human form.

Throughout the collection, Spahr chronicles the slow "dispers[al]," both forced and organic, of the whole into fragments and laments the ephemeral quality of human togetherness.

In the penultimate poem, "It's All Good, It's All Fucked," the speaker-poet reflects upon a similar duality of singular and plural existence, with singularity winning out in the end:

> We were together but we were in it alone at the same time. […] And we knew history. We knew we would not be together long.

Furthermore, the dissipation of the collective body leads the speaker-poet to question whether that collectivity ultimately proves temporary or if it is was illusory in the first place.

> I am unsure of my metaphors. Were we wolves? Were we even we?"

In the context of this project, Spahr's "unsure" metaphor of the wolves here echoes the (more literal) species confusion in Kapil's *Humanimal* (in which the speaker-poet asks, "Were they wolves?"). In Spahr's poem, the confusion is tied not to cross-species lines but to intra-species identity. The speaker-poet's doubt in even the temporary feeling of unity is marked by a deep existential despair: "Does it even matter?" Her inability to determine the suitable metaphor and to make meaning of experiences ultimately contributes to yet a greater sense of dislocation and disrelation.

In some instances, a difficult and drawn-out fragmentation of individual from congregation succumbs to an outright erasure of that congregation. A literal eclipsing of the movement occurs when a central site of the street protests is replaced (too fittingly) with a symbol of the very power the protests railed against:

> The police know, as they move through the park yet one more time, that they will win and a building will be built on the space. […] They push over bookshelves, open up boxes and look inside, tear into tents, awkwardly, the poles springing. They are there only to see if any humans remain. Tomorrow the bulldozers will push the debris into big piles and load it into trucks. […] When the park is cleared and the building is built, it will headquarter an oil company.

This scene exhibits a somewhat apocalyptic quality—in the level of carnage, the sense of inevitable loss ("they will win"), and the ghostly search for humans amongst the rubble. The hints of human extinction (on the local level of the park space) connect, at least metaphorically,

the annihilation of a people's movement to the annihilation of the species at large. The violence is twofold—firstly, human erasure by means of the literal bulldozing of the park space and, secondly, displacement (and replacement) by means of the building of the oil company headquarters. Through this eclipse, the movement (at least in its physical form) is made absent; and the oil company headquarters, a central feature of the misanthropocene era, is made more visible, more present and more powerful.

An ongoing struggle between absence and presence endures throughout much of Spahr's collection, often playing out by way of the poetic fragment. In "Went Looking and Found Coyotes," the speaker remembers the togetherness of that winter—huddling under a tarp to ward off the rains—as:

> A list of skirmishes.
> A feeling of it being nothing. No wait, something. No see, nothing.
> Possibly something. No. Nothing.

Much like Graham's speaker has difficulty distinguishing between subject and object, here Spahr's speaker expresses confusion between (or wavering dissuasion over) a collective movement as presence and absence—"something" and "nothing." The majority of the collection is written retrospectively, after the Occupy movement has (by some accounts[48]) petered out. The use of past tense heightens the speaker's struggle to affirm, even retrospectively, the felt presence of this particular human collective. The name Occupy Wall Street fittingly gestures to the very notion of presence—to *occupy*, as in to occupy a body or a space; to be ostensibly and materially present in that body or space.

Spahr's speaker-poet does not refer to the movement as such in the poems however. In "It's All Good, It's All Fucked," she refers to the movement using the term, "Non-Revolution":

[48] Some would argue the Occupy movement did not peter out but evolved/changed form; nevertheless, it is not presently visible in its original form at the time of the book's writing.

> […] by the standards of bodies, Non-Revolution's is fine but not exceptional. That is the point. That is why Non-Revolution is called Non-Revolution, why they have revolution as a possibility in their name but it is a modified and thus negated possibility so as to suggest they are possibly neither good nor fucked. Still something about Non-Revolution's smell and body had gotten into me. It was thin except when it was not. And not slight except when it was. It had this odd patch of hair on its lower back. Except when it didn't. And it tasted slightly sour, off. Except when it was sweet, on.

The movement is thus described by the speaker through the language of absence by its failure to qualify as a revolution. Furthermore, she describes it as a human "body," encountered through the bodily sense of smell, taste and touch. However, despite the speaker's attempts to pin down the body through description, this individualized metaphor for the collective repeatedly fails to hold up—"except when it was not"; "Except when it didn't." In this way, the speaker's language draws attention to the disparate forms of individual and collective human identity.

In "Tradition," individual bodily experience, too, is defined by way of negation: "this other thing that once was me, this not really me."

> I lie with not really me all day long,
> […]
> I make a milk like nectar,
> a honeyed nectar of capacitor dielectrics, dyes, and electrical insulation
> and I pass it on every two hours to not really me.
> Not really me is a ram perched on a cliff above a stream,
> unable to be quenched by the flame retardant in furniture.
> Not really me comes near
> and takes a nectar of insulated pipes, and some industrial paints.
> […]
> […] not really me wakes
> after drinking the pharmaceuticals and photo chemicals

While the collective human form is earlier erased and eclipsed by the oil company headquarters, here the singular subject experiences a displacement of self from and by the self; the individual form is infiltrated, or occupied, by the presence and intake of toxic nonhuman substances—industrial paints, drugs, electrical currents and flame retardants. While Graham's speaker in "High Tide" proves unable to distinguish between inanimate waste object and an-other human

subject, here that indistinguishability is turned upon the self. The site of contestation is no longer "other" but one's own body. Spahr's speaker has reached a point where she can no longer recognize herself, except by means of absence and othering. The toxic markers of the industrial environment confuse and complicate her defined human identity; they also literally act upon the body, sickening and adulterating it (and thus enacting another layer of slow violence and erasure).

These examples of displaced human form—eclipsing of both collective and individual subjecthood—mirror at the level of language an ontological pattern of difficulty in recognizing and defining the human. The speaker demonstrates more proficiency in identifying bodies, peoples and subjects for what they are *not* than for what they *are*. In animal and environmental studies, nowhere is this phenomenon more apparent than in the language we use to delineate the species line. As discussed in the introductory chapter, throughout this work, I have referred countless times to "nonhuman animals," marking these subjects by their lack of humanness, or their non-presence. More generally, we also fail to recognize the human when we use the all-too-common rhetoric of a human-animal binary, neglecting to acknowledge that humans are themselves an animal species. As animals are made absent by means of violent commodification (into food, clothing and sources of entertainment), humans too are increasingly commodified—namely by way of labor within capitalism, as well as sexual function, but also arguably through the literal commingling of our bodies with commodified objects. Spahr's "song of not really me" attempts to catalogue and then to quantify how absent the human absent reference has become as a result of industrial ways of life and the capitalist structures of power that determine those ways of life:

> not really me will sing a song of rebuke,
> sing the song of not really me, the song that
> goes like Salutations to brominated fire retardants of Koppers Ind.

goes like Salutations to water/oil repellent paper coating of 3M
goes like Salutations to wiper blades of Asahi
goes like Salutations to bike chain lubricant of ClarianInternational
goes like Salutations to wire and cable insulation of Daikin
goes like Salutations to pharmaceutical packaging of DuPont
goes like Salutations to nail polish of Dyneon
goes like Salutations to engine oil additive of Agrevo E
goes like Salutations to hair curling and straightening of Agsin Ptd. Ltd.
goes like Salutations to insecticide and termiticide for empty green-
houses of Chevron Chemical
goes like Salutations to greenhouse flowers of Monsanto
goes like Salutations to insecticide to kill fire ants of Rigo Co.
goes like Salutations to plasticizers of US Borax Inc.
Not really me's song will go on and on.
[…]
It will have eighty-five company names in it.
It will have twenty-one chemical functions in it.
It will have ninety-seven products in it.
It will have two hundred trade names in it.
Not really me's song will rotate through these names in all their
combinations.
And then it will end with another part that is as long as the first and
inventories the chemicals that not really me does not yet know.

The "song of not really me" illustrates with precision how the human form is pervaded by forces of capitalism, colonization, extraction, mechanization, toxification and commodification. Corporate conglomerates occupy the body of the human, cumulatively leading to a partial displacement of individual and collective self at the hands of hegemonic industrial powers. These powers operate at the level of the collective (for example, the oil company headquarters replaces the sustained gathering of protesters), but also at the level of the individual daily experience—through intimately encountered (and often inhaled, absorbed or ingested) objects like pesticides, bike chain lubricant, drug packaging and nail polish. The epoch of the so-called misanthropocene amounts in some sense to the categorical welcoming-in—"Salutations"—of the anti-human. It is anti-human because the effects of objects such as those Spahr lists are literally toxic to our bodies and our quality of life. The "song of rebuke" suggests an admonishment of this process as it unfolds and as the names of companies, chemical functions and products further displace the

selfhood of the speaker. The yielding outlines of the human form grow fainter as the speaker depicts the literal consumption of commodities:

> […] my cakes of nuts and raisins
> are cakes of extraction of crude petroleum and natural gas,
> for my apples are filled with televisions and windshield wiper blades.

Through consumption, exposure and/or occupation, over time the human becomes the not-really-human.

Liberating the Human

In the final sections of "#Misanthropocene 24 Theses," Spahr and Clover move from the modes of criticism and lament to those of solution-building and revolutionary education. The speaker(s) declare,

> This is how the misanthropocene ends. We go to war against it. My friends go to war against it. They run howling with joy and terror against it. I go with them.

The proposed war on the misanthropocene, as described in the theses, is impassioned, even violent. The speaker(s) advise: "This is how to set an oil well on fire"; "Here is how to take out the electrical grid"; and "Here is how to capsize container ships." The proposed war is a war on commodification, resource extraction and capitalism, but also through progress toward the broader goal of abolition with which the prose-poem ends:

> Here is how to kill a policeman here is how to abolish culture here is how to knock down a Boeing AH-64D Apache Longbow here is how to loot a grocery store here is how to levitate the Pentagon. Sappho Sappho Sappho not by chanting.

The speaker(s) call for nothing short of social revolution—an outright rejection of conditions imposed upon life by hegemonic forces such as the fossil fuel industry and the military. The anarchist and abolitionist resonance of these final lines indicates a strong alignment with veganism as a political philosophy, which argues for the liberation of all animals, including

humans, and the recognition of their inalienable rights as sovereign beings. In their calls for the decommodification of subjects-of-a-life and the casting off of structures of oppression, there are fundamental parallels between human and nonhuman animal abolition movements.[49] To apply the lens of a vegan poetics to works that advocate against the conditions imposed in/by the misanthropocene is to seek out the unification and victory of fragmented liberation movements, or what many intersectional scholars and activists refer to as "total liberation."

Key in thinking about the purpose and capabilities of a vegan poetics long-term is the question of what role poetry plays in material liberation struggles. At the end of *That Winter the Wolf Came*, Spahr's speaker-poet wonders aloud about the type of poem she has composed:

> This is not a coterie poem.
> Is it a milieu poem?
> Can it be a movement poem?

Both *That Winter the Wolf Came* and "#Misanthropocene 24 Theses" clearly argue that the conditions of the misanthropocene have (further) eroded the fundamental identity and integrity of the human—or at least the clarity with which we might view any discrete human form. However, these poems also provoke the reader to consider what it would mean to reclaim the self and to reoccupy the embodiment(s) of collective human form. The notion of a "movement" offers one way to think about such a collective human form. In advocating for a social revolution and grasping for a "movement poem," the speaker inquires into the relationship between poetry and activism. What exactly would distinguish Spahr's work as a "movement poem," and more broadly, what role can and do such poems play in carrying out the social revolution they describe and demand? "#Misanthropocene 24 Theses" ends with a kind of mantra:

> Sappho Sappho Sappho not by chanting.

[49] Of note here is Brian A. Dominick's work on vegan anarchism (or "veganarchism"), "Animal Liberation and Social Revolution" (1997).

The invocation of Sappho specifically calls back the notion of fragment, both fragment as a poetic form and the fragmented experience of humanness in the misanthropocene—for instance, Spahr's speaker witnesses the literal dissolution of the protesters as they are broken up and as the movement seemingly peters out; and Graham's speaker experiences a fragmented reality as she regards the apparent shape of a sleeping woman. No poetic figure calls to mind the formal fragment more than Sappho. The threefold repetition of her name resembles an appeal to Sappho (or her legacy) as a poetic deity or spirit guide, perhaps in light of the fragmentation imposed upon her work by time and history—work that survives and yields meaning despite immense loss. Enduring fragments offer a clue about the function of poetry in restoring a sense of self in the contemporary era—a means of harnessing absence in order to restore presence. However, the closing line above clearly states that it is "*not* by chanting" (emphasis added) that one carries out revolution—abolishes culture, knocks down an attack helicopter, loots a grocery store or "levitate[s] the Pentagon." Thus, even as it ends by chanting, "#Misanthropocene 24 Theses" recognizes the limitations of language and underscores distinctions between poetry and direct action/activism.

While poems offer a site of affective and ontological exploration across and within species lines, as we see in the examples from Spahr and Graham, humans often have difficulty extending the empathetic imagination beyond the singular self. This doesn't bode well for a more just contemplation of species-level identity and relation. The challenge of scaling up relational identifications is in part why a vegan poetics must be carried out as a disciplined practice and with regard for both material and imaginative orientations. In "Transitory, Momentary," Spahr's speaker models the navigation between these two as she recollects a song sung in a bar late one

night. In her own version of a reading practice, she contemplates the absent whole through the presence of the part:

> The song reflects and refracts the oil in ways both relevant and trivial in how it tells about what happens when one lets go, when one gives up the tongue. It might be that there is nothing to epiphany if it does not hint at the moment of sweaty relation larger than the intimate.

It is this "relation" of the intimate to the unfamiliar—Spahr and Clover describing the impending extinction of the Sierra Nevada yellow legged frogs: "their vulnerable skin our vulnerable skin"—and of the individual to the collective that poetic fragment illuminates for readers. One function of a "song" or poem is to facilitate this navigation of scale. Such moments relate lived human experience to the Other and illuminate the connections between different forms of oppression and different experiences of life and loss—so as to lay the imaginative groundwork for inter- and intra-species connection and, ultimately, mobilization or movement-making.

Judging by these works, Spahr clearly remains skeptical about attributing too much power to poetry just by nature of it being poetry; once again, it is "not by chanting" that the war against the misanthropocene will be won. Returning to the central question of this project, we might ask, in light of Spahr's skepticism: what can poems *do*—not just say—in the world? The question of whether the text of *That Winter the Wolf Came* can be "a movement poem" remains up for debate at the close of the collection. What seems clear, however, is the capacity of poems to provide linguistic flexibility and multi-scaled space for (re)defining the human experience. If the story of the Anthropocene is about how powerful and dominant the human species is, then the misanthropocene stems from human feelings of fragmentation, alienation and powerlessness—"there is nothing that can be done to get rid of this thing that you need to get away from"—and the ensuing despair over the experience and/or anticipation of loss. In "Transitory, Momentary," Spahr writes,

> in this time song holds loss. And this time is a time of loss.

Poems help us relearn how to feel. This particular facility of song/poetry is a vital reason why a vegan *poetic* practice is especially needed in order to dismantle anthropocentrism, extend moral rights and cultivate an ethic of care across species lines—and ultimately to rewrite human relations to the earth and all beings who inhabit it. Spahr and Clover capture in one example of human vulnerability how the inclusion of unfamiliar nonhuman bodies in our scope of relations might actually allow for greater exploration of affect, especially grief, in a way that human culture does not:

> you can't bear to think about whatever it is that is only realizable as the family
> the debt the cat and thinking about the almost extinct soft fur lined cheek pouches
> [of the yelp pocket gopher] at least lets you feel.

This moment of imaginative intimacy seems not only to reorient the recognition of loss away from pure anthropocentrism, but also to animate and make visible the nonhuman body of the gopher. When more readily available modes of experience ("the family the debt the cat") prove to be inadequate sites of contemplation for that which "you can't bear to think about," holding imaginative space for the material presence of the "almost extinct" gopher unlocks a more (affectively) liberated dimension of human experience. Grief for an-other being enables "you" to momentarily reoccupy your own embodiment of self and species. In other words, the poetic language of species relations offers an opening through which to relocate what is human.

Testimony 4

Postscript

And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

-W. B. Yeats, 'The Second Coming'

I began this dissertation by recognizing that I would not have become a vegan if I had not first learned to be a reader. Even as I know this to be true—a testament to the power of language and imagination—in carrying out this definitional inquiry into a vegan poetics, I have repeatedly stumbled in trying to account for the ostensible insignificance of poems in the context of animal slaughter and suffering. Even (perhaps especially) to a poet, a poem can seem marginal against the enormity of material violence. Maybe, as a poet myself, I want the poem to *do* more than it can or does. Of course, it is not *only* up to poets to liberate animals, and the influence poetic texts have on social movements is only one facet of their value; as I have demonstrated throughout, a vegan poetics has myriad implications outside the sphere of activism. By forming language in new and revised ways, and in conjunction with the lens brought *to* the text by any given reader, poems both elucidate and complicate the earthly experience of human-being (being human)—that "texture of the uniquely felt life" Doty describes.

A vegan poetics asks a lot of the poem, as well as of the reader: nothing short of dismantling the discriminate patterns of thought and speech that underpin most of human history. However, the task at hand pales in comparison to what those patterns ask of us. Jorie Graham names one such demand in her ecopoetic collection *Sea Change* (2008). In the poem, "Just Before," she writes:

> […] & the bees thrum the hillside, & all the blood that has been
> wasted—all of it—gathers into deep coherent veins in the
> earth
> and calls itself
> history—& we make it make
> sense—
> & we are asked to call it
> good.

Though a vegan poetics may not single-handedly take down the animal industrial complex, undo the centuries of bloodshed or put an end to speciesism at large, in carrying out this practice, we refuse "to call it / good." We stumble, determinedly, through our poetry and criticism, toward ever more sufficient words by which to align our poetics with our ethics. And through that process, we rewrite the moral assumptions upon which our lives and language operate.

The founders of The Vegan Society could be said to have created a social movement as a result of "reading" the material events that unfolded before their eyes (i.e. witnessing the horrors of the Second World War and the parallels between the killing of humans and the killing of animals). Their monumental social project, like this (much smaller) literary one, was a humanist project at a time of planetary crisis. In thinking about the existential nature of such crises and the scale of their violence, the poet provides forms in which to contemplate the seemingly unbearable, uncontainable or unknowable dimensions of being alive. In Graham's "The Violinist at the Window, 1918," the speaker describes another artist-figure, this time a musician, contemplating the responsibility of such mediation. Not unlike the vegan founders after World War Two, the violinist stands at the window after the First World War,

> […] ready to
> look out if asked to
> by his
> time,
> ready to take up again if he
> must, here where the war to end all wars has come
> to an end—for a while—to take up whatever it is
> the spirit
> must take up

Today (many more wars later), humanity and all earthlings stand at another precipice; through industrial agriculture, militarism and capitalism, a small number of humans have carried out a near-omnicidal, earth-wide assault on life. The figure of the violinist is once again called upon to compose, for feeling humans, a melody.[50] The violin is an instrument often associated with lament, a form certainly occasioned by the present era of widespread human and nonhuman suffering, unprecedented species extinction, and loss of "home" in all its iterations. Whether we are peering through the lens of a window, a camera, or a poetics, the artist-figure mediates multi-scaled human-being and lends form/voice to loss (presence to absence).

The poet, in particular, stands at the edge of *language*, uniquely disposed to make the linguistic "call[s]" to which Graham earlier refers (to call something "good"). While not a moral authority or arbiter of truth, the poet creates and shapes the language by which we negotiate and name our relation to each other and to the nonhuman world. By reading poems, we position ourselves at the window:

> open these heavy shutters now, the hidden order of a belief system
> trickles to the fore,
> it insists you draw closer to
> the railing—lean out—

In the context of a vegan poetics, we are confronted with a murderous "belief system," indeed one that orders us to "lean out" over the railing, almost to the point of suicide—both metaphorical and literal, as we witness ecological crisis and the threat it poses to the survival of the human species. To expose this "hidden" belief system, as a vegan poetics aims to do, is an equally risky move—a different "lean[ing] out," a swerve. For to fail is to be crushed or

[50] *Melody* comes from the Greek *melos*, meaning "song," and the Latin *oda*/*ode* (from Greek *ōidē*), meaning "lyric poem."

consumed by the "order," despite one's best efforts to resist. Graham captures the stakes of such moments in history, writing toward the end of the poem:

> […] I am standing in
> my window, my species is ill, the
> end of the world can be imagined, minutes run away like the pattering of feet in summer
> down the long hall then out—oh be happy, &
> clouds roil, & they hide the slaughterhouse

Through the mediating window of a poetics, the poet-figure (now paralleling the position of the violinist earlier in the text) confronts that which has been "hidden" or made absent: the never-ending nature of war, a dangerous belief system, the slaughterhouse. Unwilling "to call it / good" or to "oh be happy," the poet-figure instead acknowledges, "my species is ill, the / end of the world can be imagined." For the violinist in 1918, for The Vegan Society founders in 1944, and for the contemporary ecopoet and ecocritic, the end of the world can indeed be imagined. A vegan poetics acknowledges this sense of enclosure and impending loss (as well as the fact that for countless slaughtered beings, the world already *has* ended); but it also makes a project, through language, of imagining an alternative.

If the human "species is ill," then the recognition of that illness makes the work of healing possible. The collapse of any system necessitates the building or "making" of a new one. Here, we return to the origin of poet as maker. Where we encounter an absence or inadequacy of language to name our present planetary condition and to imagine liberatory relations to our fellow species, it is up to a vegan poetics to invent, or "make," that language. Especially with regard to nonhuman animals, a tension emerges between linguistic representations as mere imitations of living subjects[51] and the newness or deviation of thought/feeling that poetic language can birth. We must acknowledge that words, however powerful, are removed from

[51] We can trace such dialectic back to Aristotle and his notion of *poiesis* as an imitation of *physis*.

material animal being, even as we pursue new forms of imagined animal presence. Graham refers, in her poem, to a "plagiarized humanity." Especially when it comes to defining the human, we must remain alert to false visions of human goodness in our language and activism (larger cages, "green" resource extraction, higher tech bombs). Just as forms of oppression (like the ones discussed throughout this work) mirror one another as they target each day/year/century's chosen Other, these false imitations of goodness do not serve to interrupt the cycle of violence.

With the notion of the poet as maker in mind, the "The Violinist at the Window, 1918" can be said to end by centering that very poet-figure:

> […] we go closer—the hands at the end of the body
> feel in their palms
> the great
> desire—look—the instrument is raised—
> & this will be a time again in which to *make*—a time of use-
> lessness—the imagined human
> paradise.

As the poet's pen (like the violinist's bow) constitutes one "instrument" for making, Graham's reference to uselessness echoes my own periodic doubts (as well as those aired in several of the works I have covered) about the power of poetry to transform material conditions. Her formal treatment of the word—"use-/lessness"—suggests several different meanings. Prior to the line break, the reader is invited to consider a time of "use"; this could delineate productive or valuable forms of making, but it also echoes historical resonances of "using" (i.e. exploiting) earthly materials and living creatures (veganism opposes "animal use" in this sense). Reading through the enjambed line break, we might consider a time of "uselessness," which evokes the incapacity of poets or makers to *do* enough in the face of such extreme devastation. Finally, we can take the broken-off segment of the enjambed word on its own and entertain a time of "lessness," perhaps envisioning a shift away from consumption-based systems of destructive

human-being. The multiple meanings in this example highlight intrinsic tensions within language usage and reflect the unfixed nature of poetry as a particular mode of mediation. If this is indeed to be a time of "making" different species relations, our language must remain open to exploration, possibility and play—even as it demands ethical precision.

As for the "imagined human / paradise," veganism is in some sense a utopian project. But it is also a real one—carried out at the level of the body, its soft feathers or damp fur. The choice to eat a plant over an animal is materially realizable, as the choice to name our relation to other beings in one form over another is realizable. As a vegan poetics expands and redirects the literary possibilities of species representation and relation, it must continually negotiate the border-crossings between the imagined space of a poem and the material spaces in which poems do (and do not) circulate. Even as poems undertake the process of imagining a "paradise"—human or otherwise—they equip and encourage us to extend the work of "making" beyond the pages of books.

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