

Animating Creaturely Life

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Animating life—What’s the deal with this particularly blatant tautology? Life, creaturely or otherwise, would not be life if it weren’t already animate; animacy is the defining characteristic of life. As we learn from the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term “animacy” can refer to a) the general “quality or condition of being alive or animate” or b), of its use in linguistics, to the “fact or quality of denoting a living thing” and the “classification or ranking of words or their referents on this basis” (“Animacy, N.” 2016). In *Animacies*, Mel Chen draws on the work of cognitive linguist Mutsumi Yamamoto and quotes the latter’s definition of animacy as an “assumed cognitive scale extending from human through animal to inanimate” (2012, 8). Animacy shows remarkable cross-linguistic similarities regarding its significance for a language’s grammar and syntax. And yet, although the concept is of quite some importance to linguistics, Chen points to the lack of consensus about its precise meaning and the way it “seems almost to flutter away from the proper grasp of linguistics, refusing to be ‘pinned down’” (9). One way to understand animacy is as a seemingly inherent “quality” (of “aliveness”) of beings or words; however, as Chen emphasizes (again quoting Yamamoto), it is also through our *perception*

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of animacy that we actively “*invest* a certain body (or body of entities) with ... animateness” (8 [emphasis added]). This latter aspect of animacy evokes interesting questions about the intricacies of language and life, about our ways of perceiving and storying and making sense of the living world of which we are a part.

For Chen, however, the implications of animacy are relevant well beyond the more specific issues of linguistics due to the way in which “the alchemical magic of language” (23) is bound up with the materiality of social relations (of power). In this sense, echoing the work of Judith Butler (2009), we might argue that our perceptions of animacy are involved in the kinds of discursive framing that shape the conditions of possibility to ethically apprehend particular forms of life *as* life, particular groups of living beings *as* living beings. Animacy, that is, is something distributed unequally among and within the spheres of the human and the nonhuman (as well as the living and the non-living), and this differential attribution of animacy that linguists term “animacy hierarchy” is not simply and “naturally” expressive *of* such distinctions but rather is actively involved in their construction and perpetuation. As Chen puts it, the hierarchization of animacy can be understood as a kind of

political grammar ..., which conceptually arranges human life, disabled life, animal life, plant life, and forms of nonliving material in orders of value and priority. Animacy hierarchies have broad ramifications for issues of ecology and environment, since objects, animals, substances, and spaces are assigned constrained zones of possibility and agency by extant grammars of animacy. (2012, 13)

It is not hard to imagine, then, how the politics of animacy remain inseparable from questions of ethical considerability, especially if we take into account that what animacy does is not merely distinguish between what is living and what is not (which is, of course, itself never something beyond the realms of politics and ethics) but introduces and maintains internal differentiations and gradations within the category of the living itself. Aliveness is thus not simply defined in monolithic contradistinction to what is devoid of life but by a hierarchy of forms and modes of being alive.

What implications can we draw from Chen’s broad interpretation of animacy and its ethico-political efficacy for conceptualizations

of creaturely life as well as the kind of postanthropocentric critique we might be able to articulate by conceiving human–animal relations in this way? Three points warrant discussion in this regard. First, Chen’s arguments suggest that “animating creaturely life” is indeed not as much of a tautology as it might seem. Quite evidently, the concept of creaturely life is marked by a certain ambivalence: On the one hand, it points toward (the need for) a common ethico-ontological foundation, however tenuous or provisional, that allows us to address the relationality of human and animal ways of being-in-the-world; on the other, there is an irreducible diversity surrounding, and at times challenging, the notion of creaturely life as something that we share with the multiplicity of earth others with whom we co-inhabit this planet. What Chen’s arguments point to, however, is the fact that this diversity cannot be understood simply in terms of an egalitarian pluralism of life forms and lifeways and is instead crucially shaped by existing asymmetrical relations of power. If the living are differentially animate(d), those beings that find themselves on top of the scale maintained by the kind of linguistic–discursive biopolitics exemplified by animacy hierarchies sustain their exalted position in contrasting relation to a host of others whose lives and lifeways are supposedly determined by, and expressive of, an inferior or diminished form of being in and relating to the world—others who are less *vital*, both in the sense of their “liveliness” and capacity for agency as well as their political significance and ethical considerability.

Such hierarchizations of life remain inseparable from “the cosmopolitical problem of what we inflict on animals” (Stengers 2011, 397). Historically speaking, only recently have an increasing number of humans in the Western world and elsewhere begun to more fully understand and appreciate nonhuman creatures as “subjects of a life”—to use Tom Regan’s well-known term—and to challenge their violent relegation to a “thingified” status in regimes of property and production. A critique of these conditions must be attentive to the fact that processes of deanimation are not only involved in the more direct sense of a making killable of particular (“classes” of) beings but also in “the terrible violence of *making live* ... when the possibility of living well is actively blocked” (Haraway and Wolfe 2016, 229 [my emphasis]), a form of violence that is in many ways specifically expressive of what Jacques Derrida calls the “*unprecedented* proportions” (2008, 25 [original emphasis]) of animals’ subjection to ruthless technoscientific intervention in biopolitical capitalist modernity. In any case, conceptualizations of creaturely

life—lest we commit the fallacy of thinking this concept in terms of a mere repository of earthly life forms that is somehow “prior” to or outside of history and politics—must take into account the animating and de-animating trajectories by which the relations between humans and other species continue to be shaped as well as the histories of human exceptionalism and anthropogenic violence against nonhuman beings in which they are involved. As much as we might want to—and I think should—invest the notion of creaturely life with a normativity centered on fostering modes of transspecies and interspecies conviviality, especially regarding the relations between humans and other species, we must also acknowledge that this normative outlook remains haunted by the still-prevalent realities of exploitation, oppression, and violence that shape these relations in Western and other societies. Thus, insofar as conceptualizations of creaturely life are to be understood in terms of normative ethical theory, they must both articulate a critique of established institutions as well as practices of human–animal relations *and* offer alternative visions and imaginings, the “unheard-of thoughts about animals,” the “new languages, new artworks, new histories, even new sciences and philosophies” for which Matthew Calarco calls in *Zoographies* (2008, 6).

In their own discussion of the concept of the creaturely, Pieter Vermeulen and Virginia Richter highlight the subversive potential of creaturely life as something descriptive of “a modality of life” that defies the rigid classifying operations and bounded identities integral to the knowledge projects of Western modernity, something that is “always affected by others from which it cannot fully shelter itself; only intermittently can it compose itself into the stability of an individual, a totality or a cosmos” (2015, 3). In this sense, creaturely does not necessarily refer to an actual creature or some kind of fixed ontological status (of “creatureliness”), it can also, and perhaps more productively, be understood in terms of a plane of relational, embodied becoming-in-the-world that interweaves human and nonhuman lives across the bewildering differentiability of specific modes of existence or as a “zone of exchange between man and animal in which something of one passes into the other,” as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari put it in *What Is Philosophy?* (1994, 109). Although thinking in terms of the creaturely has by now become a fairly prominent way to approach human–animal relations and the question of the animal in its intersections and inevitable co-articulation

with the question of the human (in addition to the journal issue guest edited by Vermeulen and Richter, see, for example, Santner 2006; Pick 2011; Herman 2015; Uhall 2016; Pettman 2017), I would argue that it is important to keep in mind that such concepts should be understood less in terms of a new “paradigm” but as provisional, experimental tools that help us think about the possibilities of re-encountering nonhuman creatures postanthropocentrically beyond the limitations of the human exceptionalist tradition. In this sense, and to borrow the words of anthropologist Tim Ingold, animating creaturely life through our discursive, imaginative, and material–(inter)corporeal practices means cultivating ways of “being alive to the world, characterized by a heightened sensitivity and responsiveness, in perception and action,” to nonhuman beings, lifeways, and environments (2006, 10).

The second point I emphasize here concerns the way in which the category of the *human*—scarcely less problematic than the *bêtise* of “the animal,” although not for exactly the same reasons—can or should be encompassed by the notion of creaturely life. Our postanthropocentric endeavors of challenging the history and exceptionalist politics of what ecofeminist philosopher Val Plumwood (1993) has termed the “hyperseparation” of Western Man from the rest of existence must remain critically attentive to the fact that Man is itself a product of the politics of animacy that structure and hierarchize the discursive-material space of the human and shape the highly unequal relations within and between different groups of humans, their access to vital resources, their socioeconomic mobility, their protection from violence, even their very survivability. In a 2012 article, Butler captures the difficulty of this task of grappling with the different modes of “derealization” through which humans and other living beings are positioned outside the sphere of ethical and political consideration:

To understand the obligation we are under, we would have to distinguish between those humans who are regarded as living, and those who are not. But also, ... we have to distinguish between a variety of living organisms and those living organisms called human. These are already two very complex sets of tasks, and they demand that we reconsider what is meant by the derealization of a [human] life – an ethical problem that belongs to an anthropocentric scheme – and the anthropocentric view of life that derealizes other living organisms. Neither is acceptable, which means we need to navigate a path that does not founder on one rocky shore or the other (12).

To the extent that the notion of creaturely life constitutes a critique of and seeks to move beyond the narrative of Man to rethink the human as a specific expression of the broader currents of life that both constitute and exceed it, we must take into account that ontologies of the human are never constituted in simple and straightforward contradistinction to the generic figure of “the animal”—and, vice versa, that the conceptual substance of animality is not exhausted by its relation to a generic notion of “the human”—but that humanity is itself structured in terms of a hierarchized continuum in which supposedly inferior forms of human life are frequently exiled into the precarious borderlands of hum-animality. Chen’s argument that racism and other forms of epistemic and physical violence are crucially involved in the construction of “deflated animacies” (26) underlines the fact that ideas about humanity, animality, as well as human–animal difference, can thus never be accounted for solely regarding the epistemic formation we call “species.” Alexander Weheliye, for example, reminds us “how deeply anchored racialization is in the somatic field of the human” (2014, 4), while Scott Michaelsen, in a study on the origins of American anthropology, employs the term “species-racialisms” to address the “long connection between racialisms and analogies between animals and people of color” (1999, 76) that continue to inform American and other histories. Accordingly, when thinking (about) creaturely life, we must be wary not only of the *bêtise* of “the animal” but also of the danger or temptation of relying on a problematic idea of the universality of “the human”—an idea that is, more often than not, articulated from, and indeed underwrites, the privileged position of Man as a being whose rhetoric of universality conceals “his” own particularity in terms such as race, gender, class, or ability. Whether the focus is on the analysis and critique of historical or contemporary forms and techniques of dehumanization or on the equally important question—“What different modalities of the human come to light if we do not take the liberal humanist figure of Man as the master-subject but focus on how humanity has been imagined and lived by those subjects excluded from this domain?”—we must take into account that not “all human subjects occupy the space of humanity equally” (Weheliye 2014, 8, 4) and that this space is *always already* defined by much more than ideas about species difference and hierarchy. In this sense, although certainly evocative of the workings of historical and contemporary racisms, the idea of “dehumanization” may itself be somewhat misleading in the way it implies a kind of demotion from an a priori state of humanity

proper that does not, in fact, exist. Conceptualizations of humanity and animality are never simply the result of a process by which species becomes “inflected by” or “charged with” ideas about (for example) race. Rather, the epistemic interpenetration of these concepts is crucial not only to the historical transformation but to the very *emergence* of ideas about the human, the animal, and the difference between them, which means that understanding conceptions of species as somehow primary or foundational regarding historical constructions of humanity is epistemologically and politically problematic in its failure to take into account their constitutive intersectionality.

Finally, the third point I would like to discuss concerns this question: What is at stake in writing (about) creaturely life, and, more specifically, how can issues of animacy and narrativity, of animating and storying, be thought of as interconnected? How do the discursive–imaginary practices of storying creaturely life differ between, for example, genres of writing or academic disciplines? Do we need to make use of the combined potentials of different narrative modes or disciplinary approaches to tell the kinds of “lively stories” that Thom van Dooren and Deborah Bird Rose argue are crucial to our ethical engagement “with the multitudes of others in their noisy, fleshy living and dying” (2016, 91)? Although it is now increasingly being discussed regarding the ethico-political demands of the Anthropocene, the question of how our ways of storying are able (or not) to signify and do justice to the intricacies of animal life and being is, of course, not exactly new. It informs, for example, Henry David Thoreau’s thoughts in his journal entries dated February 17 and 18, 1860, in which he reflects in some detail on the “very lively and lifelike descriptions of some of the old naturalists” (2009, 603), reserving particular admiration for Conrad Gessner’s five-volume *Historia Animalium* (1551 to 1558) and Edward Topsell’s *Historie of Four-footed Beastes* (1607). Commenting on the mytho-zoological character of these works (Topsell’s book is in large parts an English translation of Gessner’s earlier work), whose pages are populated by a colorful ensemble of factual and fantastical creatures in the tradition of the medieval bestiary, Thoreau writes that although some of the creatures presented there perhaps only roamed the wilderness of the human imagination, these writers nonetheless had “a livelier conception of an animal which has no existence ... than most [contemporary] naturalists have of what passes before their eyes” (605). They had “an adequate idea of a beast, or what a beast should be ..., and in their descriptions and

drawings they did not always fail when they *surpassed* nature” (604–605 [original emphasis]). Most importantly, Thoreau laments the inability or unwillingness of many of his scientific contemporaries to convey an idea of what he refers to as a creature’s *anima*:

I think that the most important requisite in describing an animal, is to be sure and give its character and spirit, for in that you have ... the sum and effect of all its parts, known and unknown. You must tell what it is to man. Surely the most important part of an animal is its *anima*, its vital spirit, on which is based its character and all the peculiarities by which it most concerns us. If you have undertaken to write the biography of an animal, you will have to present to us the living creature, *i.e.*, a result which no man can understand, but only in his degree report the impression made on him. (605–606)

What Thoreau’s journal entries articulate is less a critique of science as such but his dissatisfaction with the rigid classifying practices and deanimating tendencies of post-Enlightenment natural history, its failure to adequately take into account the “vital spirit” of an animal on which its specific life story should be centered: “A history of animated nature,” Thoreau insists, “must itself be animated” (606).

One might discern a residue of anthropocentrism, or at least a certain parochialist preoccupation with sameness, in Thoreau’s emphasis that animal (hi)stories should present to us the animal in “all the peculiarities by which it most concerns us” and that in our accounts of animals, as in our accounts of other humans, “we shall naturally dwell most on those particulars in which they are most like ourselves,—in which we have most sympathy with them” (607). But, I would argue, what Thoreau’s remarks (also) point to is that animating/storying creaturely life is not only about animating the lives of individual beings or species but also, and perhaps even more importantly, about animating *relationality* as such, a relationality that is lost or marginalized in human exceptionalist narratives and their conventional treatment of nonhuman creatures as inferior (non-)beings, as mere props on the stage of human becoming. Thoreau admires the “old naturalists” for their “fertile” imagination and for the fertility their works “assign[ed] to nature” (607) suggesting, perhaps, that the way we encounter—and enable ourselves to *re-encounter* (Ohrem and Calarco, forthcoming)—the animacy of the nonhuman world is not so much in the somewhat clichéd image of an “observer” or

“listener” but by way of an imaginative–affective investment that allows us to render visible the many resonances between and the mutual interpenetration of human and nonhuman worlds and ways of being.

Many of us share a desire to relate to other(-than-human) creatures, although our being-in-relation with more-than-human forms of life is and has always been a lived reality well before it can be articulated as a desire or even as a “choice.” What we should talk and think and write about, then, is the ethical practice of cultivating modes of relating, of re-inventing and re-visiting their parameters and enhancing the possibilities, of embracing the constitutive importance of the more-than-human nature of the human’s being-in-relation that is so often disregarded or disavowed in narratives of Man’s manly independence. As Thoreau’s remarks imply, an important avenue for us to relate to other beings lies in relating their stories or, more to the point, in allowing and inviting them to participate in *our* stories—which are, however, never really our stories at all, unless we subscribe to a solipsistic idea of the human “storytelling animal” as a being that animates a passive world through techniques of representation that only ever lead back to the cognitive and imaginative resources of the human mind. In fact, an increasing number of scholars now consider storying as something that cannot be limited to the sphere of the human. Joshua Russell, for example, in discussing what he refers to as “animal narrativity,” argues that not only should we think of narrativity “as part of our own animality, a process through which we participate in multi-species relationships and communities,” but that we need to broaden our concept of narrativity to include the more-than-human world, in particular regarding “the qualitative, felt sense that stories are present in animal bodies, gestures, and relationships” (2016, 146).

Animating creaturely life is about acknowledging that nonhuman beings also live storied lives in storied places, that storying “cannot any longer be put into the box of human exceptionalism” (Haraway 2016, 39; also see van Dooren and Rose 2012). It is about our “efforts to inhabit multiply storied worlds in a spirit of openness and accountability to otherness” and about modes of storying that are

open to other ways of constituting, of responding to and in a living world. In this context, stories are powerful tools for ‘connectivity thinking.’ Unlike many other modes of giving an account, a story can allow multiple meanings to travel alongside one another; it can hold open possibilities and

interpretations and can refuse the kind of closure that prevents others from speaking or becoming. (van Dooren and Rose 2016, 85)

If we accept, as van Dooren and Rose do, that our ways of storying the world are inseparable from our imaginings and efforts (or lack thereof) to facilitate modes of creaturely conviviality, it becomes clear that the poetics of storying should be of crucial concern for postanthropocentric ontology and interspecies ethics. Susan McHugh, for example, arguing for a “narrative ethology,” writes that the latter suggests an “irreducibly relational ethics, a way of valuing social and aesthetic forms together as sustaining conditions of and for mixed communities” (2011, 5). In turn, it might be through storied imaginings of multispecies futures and interspecies becomings that the ethical import of the kind of relational ontology that may be crafted around concepts such as creaturely life can find its most powerful expression as an ever-more urgent alternative to the long history of human exceptionalism. Unsatisfied with the “dominant dramas” of the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene, Donna Haraway recently suggested the Chthulucene “as a needed third story” in which the seemingly limitless and potentially self-destructive terraforming powers of the human are not allowed to take center stage even in a mode of rueful lamentation (2016, 55). Rather than once again marginalizing nonhuman beings by relegating them to a passive position at the receiving end of the devastations caused by Man’s cataclysmic agency, in Haraway’s Chthulucene “human beings are with and of the earth, and the biotic and abiotic powers of this earth are the main story” (55). The Chthulucene is about making kin, and practices of making kin both require and provoke new imaginings and ways of storying, demanding that we “learn somehow to narrate—to think—outside the prick tale of Humans in History”—“we *must* change the story,” Haraway insists, “the story *must* change” (40 [original emphasis]).

For Walter Benjamin, the power of story in part lies in its sustainability—It “does not expend itself” but “preserves and concentrates its energy and is capable of releasing it even after a long time”—and in its ability to integrate different subjective experiences into a broader collective sense of meaning: “the story submerges the thing [of which it tells] into the life of the story-teller, in order to bring it out of him again” (2002, 148, 149). What should be clear, however, but often remains unexpressed given the mostly affirmative use and connotations of the concept, is that storying is not per se an emancipatory practice somehow

“naturally” allied to the forms of progressive politics with which we might want to associate it. After all, practices of storying also continue to be among the sustaining conditions of violent, exclusionist models of identity and belonging and facilitate the deanimation of supposedly “inferior” lives and lifeways by weaving individual experience into the collective vision of intersecting reactionary master narratives of race, nation, hegemonic masculinity, and/or human exceptionalism.

In different ways, the contributions that make up this first section of the volume are concerned with the ethico-epistemological and ethico-ontological underpinnings of the task of telling the kinds of lively stories that are evocative of the constitutive relationality and interdependency of creaturely life. Although we might tend to associate the terms “story” and “storying” with specific forms or genres of writing (such as literary fiction), I would argue that there is no exclusive, perhaps not even privileged, mode of animating/storying creaturely life and that we should experiment with a broad and inclusive notion of storying in order to be able to address the intricacies of life and coexistence in a postcolonial, globalized world in which the way into an uncertain future is paved by a multiplicity of intersecting and always more-than-human histories. Arguably, an important aspect of telling lively stories includes critical reflection about what enables us to tell such stories in the first place. Lively stories, that is, require lively theory, and rather than thinking storying and theorizing in oppositional terms, they should better be understood as co-animative. As Linda Vance puts it: “Just as theorizing is a form of storytelling, so too is storytelling a form of theorizing. Our theories reflect our beliefs—our stories—about how the world works; our stories about how the world works lead us, consciously or not, to the creation of theory, as we repeat and revise them” (1995, 175).

In the first chapter of the section, Kelly Oliver argues for a more sustained ethical engagement with the fact that all living beings are inhabitants of earth and bound to earth qua their existence *as* living beings. In dialogue with American biologist Edward O. Wilson’s well-known “biophilia hypothesis,” which postulates a human “urge to affiliate with other forms of life” (Wilson 1984, 85), Oliver develops the concept of “terrabilia” through a discussion of ancient Greek distinctions between different forms of love—*philia*, *agape*, and *eros*—all of which contribute to terrabilia as “love of the earth and of other earthlings.” Terrabilia, Oliver argues, is characterized by an awareness that the earth that is our *home*—a home that always to some extent remains unknowable,

unfamiliar, and uncanny in its intricate relational complexity—is also the home of myriad other earthlings, which means that thinking about creaturely life and interspecies relations demands critical attention to narratives of home in our attempts at self-definition and our ethical and political projects as well as regarding the way they envision and foster modes of “creaturely cohabitation.” Such a kind of ethics also must take into account that even though we live and interact with other creatures on a shared planet, we do not share the same *world(s)* with them: The bond to earth is a singular one for each species or community of beings (and perhaps, on a much smaller scale, even to each individual being), an issue Derrida grapples with in some detail in *The Beast and the Sovereign*. Drawing on Derrida’s discussion of “poetic majesty” and the “poetic *as if*,” Oliver argues that thinking and acting “*as if* we inhabit the same world, *as if* cohabitation is possible” constitutes an important perspective for an earth ethics that is oriented toward what Donna Haraway (2003, 7) envisions as “barely possible but absolutely necessary joint futures” of humans and other creatures.

Not unlike Oliver’s, my own contribution is also interested in the kinds of worldly relationality that inform her perspective on “creaturely cohabitation.” The underlying question that guides my chapter is how our implicit or explicit conceptions of embodiment and our corporeal ontologies shape the prospects of thinking relationally about humans and other living beings. I pursue this question with a focus on, and in the form of a critical engagement with, the increasingly prominent idea of “vulnerability” and its role as a conceptual bedrock in which a distinctly postanthropocentric ethics can be grounded. Although the lens of vulnerability enables us to articulate a powerful critique of anthropogenic environmental devastation and violence against other creatures, my concern is with the specific form of embodied relationality suggested by a perspective centered on the negative aspects of exposure, injurability, and finitude. Rather than the somewhat impoverished concept of “embodiment as exposure,” which informs not only traditional ideas about what it means to be vulnerable but also recent postanthropocentric perspectives, I argue that we need more lively corporeal ontologies that can help us envision a more affirmative ethics of human–animal relationality in the Anthropocene. Drawing in particular on feminist work on vulnerability, I argue that we need to rethink this concept with a more sustained attention to the richness of bodily life instead of a restrictive focus on the shared passivity of exposure—in terms of a radically ambivalent

openness to the world and other bodies on which our very existence as living beings depends and which allows us to think of creaturely embodiment in terms of a “with-sphere” through which we can relate to other, nonhuman beings.

Echoing Haraway’s influential concept of “becoming-with,” Elizabeth Pattinson’s chapter offers insights into the powerful capacities of “healing-with” enabled by our intimate coexistence with companion animals. Using a postanthropocentric autoethnographic approach that does not limit itself to the traditional preoccupation with “writing” the human subject, Pattinson focuses on her experience of recovering from surgery (performed to remove a section of intestine damaged by Crohn’s disease) regarding the significance of the relationship with her growing puppy, Bruce, as an integral part of the healing process, understood here not as a “single-species event” but characterized by the affective resonances between human and companion animal. Pattinson is interested in and experiments with a mode of writing that goes beyond a writing *about* relationships in a descriptive sense and is “attuned to what relationships feel like, how they happen, what is passed between the entangled parties and continually transforms both.” The interrelationality of “healing-with” is foregrounded even more emphatically when, two weeks after her own procedure, Bruce himself requires immediate surgery after he swallowed a safety pin that threatens to severely damage his intestinal tract. Suddenly, Pattinson writes, the “*worlding* of a sick body” became a shared experience, as both human and canine—with “matching zipper stitches up and down our bellies”—slowly work their way back to the normal rhythms of their shared life.

Randy Malamud’s chapter is centered on a discussion of Nick Park’s Academy Award-winning animated short film “Creature Comforts” (1989) with a perspective on the questions the film raises not only about the boundaries that (supposedly) separate humans and animals but also, and more specifically, about the possibility of communicating across these boundaries. Park’s film can be described as a deconstruction or critique of zoo life in the form of interviews with a range of zoo creatures who are asked about their living conditions, their experiences in captivity, and their memories of their old homes and lives. What makes Park’s film so distinctive, however, is that he uses clay animals who are voiced by means of real-life recordings of humans in ways that translate resonantly onto the captive animals depicted in the clay figures, thus creating a productive ambivalence about which creatures—human or nonhuman, human and

nonhuman—the film and its title actually refer to. As Malamud argues, Park’s innovative fusion of human and animal comments on freedom and constraint, as well as its transposition of human words about human situations into nonhuman words about nonhuman situations, shows how close human and nonhuman worlds are and how they might be traversed and connected with forms of interspecies communication. As a “transspecies and bio-universal concept,” the idea of “creature comforts” refers to the little things that make us feel comfortable where we live, in our respective home or habitat, i.e., those small details that make home home. Park’s short film, Malamud argues, provides an intriguing model for how to communicate about this, and even though it is obviously an imaginative model, it comes with ethical implications that we are (or should be) susceptible to precisely because our basic needs and desires are not so fundamentally different to those of many other creatures.

As Jessica Ullrich reminds us, animating creaturely life in a sense also requires us to “animate” creaturely death. Although this might seem like a dubious move from tautology to necromancy, our attitudes toward and the ways in which we deal with animal death are reflective of the ways in which we treat and value them as living beings in their various relations to humans and regarding their “functions” in human culture and society. As Butler (2009) argued with a focus on the life of specific (marginalized) groups of humans, “having” or leading a life which is regarded as “grievable” is inseparable from one’s ethical and political considerability as a *living* being. In direct or indirect conversation with Butler, the grievability of *nonhuman* life has also become a topic of discussion among scholars and artists interested in the ethics and politics of human–animal relations (see Taylor 2008; Stanescu 2012; Redmalm 2015). The artist Linda Brant, for example, recently started a fundraiser for the installation of a monument dedicated “To Animals We Do Not Mourn” in Hartsdale Pet Cemetery, New York. As Brant explains on her web site, the monument will be the first in the United States to publicly “honor animals that are not typically regarded as grievable [sic]” and is intended as “an expression of loss, mourning and compassion for these anonymous individuals.” Ullrich’s chapter poses a similar challenge to an anthropocentric (Western) tradition in which the loss of nonhuman life usually lies beyond the cultural conditions of grievability. As a result, mourning animal death is often still regarded as inappropriate and sometimes even as ridiculous or obscene. Ullrich’s chapter is focused on a number of art projects that deal with the individual loss of a beloved canine companion and with ways of remembering and celebrating a

shared, interspecies life (in the case of the artists Eija-Liisa Ahtila and Kathy High) or (in the case of photographer Yun-Fei Tou) with ways of rescuing from complete anonymity the many shelter dogs who are killed daily around the world. As Ullrich shows, in their experimentation with different forms of narration and representation, in the way in which they give nonhuman beings a distinct presence (or even a voice) and by endowing their lives with significance, these artworks are expressions of the potential of art to engage in the work of mourning beyond its traditional anthropocentric limitations.

The final article of the section, by Tom Tyler, delves into the ever-more-popular world of videogames. A traditional and well-established structural element of most videogames is their reliance on a repeat-to-win mechanic that allows struggling players to instantly restart the game after their virtual demise to try again (from an earlier point). Although losing is still an inevitable aspect of videogames, and although players regularly find themselves confronted with all kinds of virtual obstacles and enemies, the repeat-to-win mechanic ensures that progress and victory are usually only a matter of time. In contrast, the examples of videogames Tyler is interested in diverge from this model and impose or encourage a way of “playing like a loser”—thrown into hopeless scenarios, chased by animal, undead, monstrous or other hordes of relentless adversaries, with endless, procedurally generated levels that offer no way to actually complete the game, triumph or mastery are neither possible nor the point, and so “winning” means doing a little better, surviving a little longer, than the last time. Drawing on Val Plumwood’s reflections on her harrowing experience of being attacked by a crocodile, Tyler explores how such videogames force the player to adopt a “perspective,” rather than the predatory angle of heroic characters subduing or destroying virtual environments and creatures. Playing like a loser means becoming prey as players inevitably and repeatedly find themselves in the role of the underdog: vulnerable, weak, exposed, and destined to lose.

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