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Teaching Animals in the Post-Anthropocene: Zoopedagogy as a Challenge to Logocentrism

Anastassiya Andrianova

Abstract: *This essay examines a theory and practice of zoopedagogy that encourages exploring non-logocentric mode(s) of communication while promoting environmentalism, critical thinking, and empathy.*

*‘Do you really believe, Mother, that poetry classes
are going to close down the slaughterhouses?’*

‘No.’

‘Then why do it? You said you were tired of clever talk about animals, proving by syllogism that they do or do not have souls. But isn’t poetry just another kind of clever talk: admiring the muscles of the big cats in verse? Wasn’t your point about talk that it changes nothing? It seems to me the level of behaviour you want to change is too elementary, too elemental, to be reached by talk. Carnivorousness expresses something truly deep about human beings, just as it does about jaguars. You wouldn’t want to put a jaguar on a soybean diet.’

‘Because he would die. Human beings don’t die on a vegetarian diet.’

—J. M. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*

Since Nobel laureate Paul Crutzen popularized the term “Anthropocene” in 2000, we have been hearing about the devastating effects of anthropogenic pollutants which cause the translocation and annihilation of wildlife species and have increased the species extinction rate in tropical rain forests by up to ten thousand fold (Crutzen 17). Factory farms are responsible for much of the anthropogenic impact on the environment and wildlife. Building on Peter Singer’s *Animal Liberation*, Jonathan Safran Foer, in *Eating Animals*, urges us to end factory farming because that would also “help prevent deforestation, curb global warming, reduce pollution, save oil reserves, lessen the burden on rural America, decrease human rights abuses, improve public health, and help eliminate the most systematic animal abuse in world history” (257). We can intervene to help animals survive beyond the Anthropocene by redirecting our resources away from the rearing of animals for human use, slaughter, and consumption and toward a more ecologically sustainable model. This entails a radical reevaluation of the human-animal relationship and of human needs in light of those of nonhuman animals and the environment.

That this must be done is philosopher Donna Haraway’s point in *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016). Haraway insists that the name Anthropocene no longer fits our “transformative” age in which human exceptionalism, individualism, and other pillars of Western Enlightenment have been debunked; a “multi-species muddle” offers a better framework for thinking about the complex and messy

ways in which humans are linked to other species (30-31). What others have labeled the Post-Anthropocene, she calls the Chthulucene wherein *Homo sapiens* is but one species enmeshed, like the tentacles of the *Pimoida chthulhu* spider, with multitudes of others. Anna Tsing opens her 2015 book, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, with a similar critique of the Anthropocene, a misnomer for what has less to do with Anthropos' biological species than with the rise of capitalism—hence, the Capitalocene; the latter “entangles us with ideas of progress and with the spread of techniques of alienation that turn both humans and other beings into resources,” while, at the same time, “obscuring collaborative survival” (19). Haraway and Tsing urge us to “stay with the trouble” and work together on strategies for “collaborative survival,” rather than surrender to either faith in easy technofixes or bitter cynicism and despair, the two most common responses to “the horrors of the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene,” and with a new focus on our “multispecies muddle,” think not just about other critters, but also *with* them (Haraway 3).

In this article, then, I argue that as humanities teachers, we can help raise students' awareness of animal rights¹ and of the anthropogenic environmental degradation facing human and nonhuman beings alike, by promoting inquiry and writing which interrogate the human-nonhuman boundary, challenge human exceptionalism, and expose speciesism, which Singer defines as “a prejudice or attitude of bias in favor of the interests of members of one's own species and against those of members of other species” (6). Studies of animal life can help combat the so-called “anthropic principle,” to use Victor Stenger's term, “according to which the universe is a purposeful creation uniquely suited for intelligent life, meaning us” (de Waal 22). A zoopedagogical approach that brings animal studies into the classroom can help students develop critical thinking and empathy; it can also help us think more broadly about the paradox of a humanities not dominated by human exceptionalism, but open to other(ed) voices.

Yet, how can we escape the limitations of (human) logocentrism and engage in collaborative conversation with (nonhuman) animals who do not speak and for whom words do not serve as an expression of external reality? Ludwig Wittgenstein's remark, “If a lion could talk, we could not understand him” (“Wenn ein Löwe sprechen könnte, wir könnten ihn nicht verstehen,” 190), has been criticized by animal studies scholars for erroneously asserting the impossibility of understanding and communicating with animals. It is unfortunate that Elizabeth Anscombe's commonly accepted translation of “könnten...nicht” as “could not” supports such interpretations: that lions cannot speak or have nothing to speak of/about, their *umwelts*, or “surrounding worlds,”² being too different from ours or entirely nonexistent. What if, however, it is not lions but humans who are lacking in something? A non-speciesist reading points to human, rather than

1. I use animal rights, rather than animal welfare, as per the distinction outlined by PETA: whereas “animal welfare” presupposes the use of animals for human benefit provided humane guidelines be followed, “animal rights” implies “that animals, like humans, have interests that cannot be sacrificed or traded away just because it might benefit others” (“What is the difference”).

2. This is Jakob von Uexküll's term for the individual ways in which each organism senses the environment (de Waal 7).

animal, deficient inability to understand. By combining critical pedagogy, as outlined by Paulo Freire, with animal studies and theatrical techniques, I have developed an in-class exercise that asks students to speak without using words (or ASL cues), as a challenge to logocentrism and an invitation to explore alternative mode(l)s of communication. By sharing this exercise with other teachers, my goal is to implement Haraway and Tsing's call to think-*with* and develop interactive, collaborative strategies that will not terminate in individual assignments or courses, but continue to shape students' ethics beyond the classroom.

This experiment in integrating academics with environmentalism is not without risks. In trying out zoopedagogical approaches in my literature classes, I have encountered both openness and resistance to animal rights, revealing cognitive dissonance in students' thinking about who they are and what—or *whom*—they eat. Yet, the most contentious, uncomfortable discussions are, perhaps, also the most conducive to students developing empathy and honing valuable skills of critical thinking and ethical decision-making. In an eristic conception of knowledge production, debate, not consensus, matters. While I focus on long-term changes, the short-term institutional fallout is also worth mentioning: in my own experience, student evaluations were lower than average, with comments criticizing the liberal environmental politics undergirding the course as well as the instructor's alleged promotion of vegetarian and vegan lifestyles. After considering the benefits of zoopedagogy, in the concluding section of this article, I will reflect on the challenges of engaging in this and other critical/radical pedagogies and suggest some solutions. I will also suggest how zoopedagogy might help us expose the academy as a speciesist enterprise and initiate a discussion about disciplinary and institutional change.

Like Elizabeth Costello's son, in the epigraph to this article, I am hardly naive about the idea that "poetry classes are going to close down the slaughterhouses" (Coetzee 103). Indeed, I think that reading poetry and prose about animals is not enough for students to move out of their proverbial comfort zones and imaginatively inhabit the mindset of the other. It is not enough, moreover, to create change. But by incorporating theatrical techniques, an embodied performative experience can make animal existence a bit more real. In describing a specific in-class activity, I invite others to experiment with zoopedagogy not only to help familiarize students with difficult theoretical concepts of animal-standpoint theory, such as logocentrism, but also to explore alternative mode(l)s of communication. I begin with a theoretical section outlining my vision of zoopedagogy as ecoliteracy, rooted in Freirean ecopedagogy and animal studies discourses. Next, I describe and provide a script with directions for an activity that builds on theatrical techniques to make this theory accessible to students, along with my own notes from facilitating such an exercise. This information will be useful to teachers of animal studies, but can also be adapted to suit other pedagogical objectives to give voice to the voiceless, powerless, and dispossessed, whether human or not.

Zoopedagogy as Theory: Where Critical Pedagogy Meets Animal Studies

My vision of zoopedagogy stems from Paulo Freire's definitive *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), which has also inspired ecopedagogical writings, such as Moacir Gadotti's *Pedagogy of the Earth*, Francisco Gutierrez's *Ecopedagogy and Planetary Citizenship*, and Richard Kahn's more recent and so far the only book in English on ecopedagogy, *Critical Pedagogy, Ecoliteracy, and Planetary Crisis: The Ecopedagogy Movement*. As Kahn writes, "Just as there is now an ecological crisis of serious proportions, there is also a crisis in environmental education over what must be done about it" (5). Kahn notes that while federal and state legislatures require that environmental education be part of public education, "most Americans continue to have an almost shameful misunderstanding of the most basic environmental ideas" (5-6). This may be because environmental education, unlike the broader and more pervasive environmental movement, remains a marginal academic discipline, most often confined to natural sciences departments, with little, if any, interaction with scholars in the humanities or in education (Kahn 6). Kahn calls, therefore, for a more critical, interdisciplinary form of environmental literacy with a stronger "ethical focus that is presently demanded by our unfolding planetary crisis"; we should present students not with idealized experiences, of, say, life on a family farm, as does the Apple Valley Zoo's Wells Fargo Family Farm program, but with an ecoliteracy that exposes questionable practices, such as the naturalization of a corporate "family farm," and also teaches them how to take responsible parties to task (7).

Critical pedagogy is, of course, most closely associated with the work of Freire and Henry Giroux. It is an effort, within educational institutions, to study inequalities of power and "the way belief systems become internalized to the point where individuals and groups abandon the very aspiration to question or change their lot in life" (Burbules and Berk). The main focus is on transforming "inequitable, undemocratic, or oppressive institutions and social relations" (Burbules and Berk). For Freire, who worked on adult literacy in Latin American peasant communities, the task of critical pedagogy was to bring the members of an oppressed group to a critical consciousness (*conscientização*) of their situation as a beginning point of their liberatory *praxis*. Revolutionary leadership, Freire insisted, cannot "merely 'implant' in the oppressed a belief in freedom"; this is, rather, something that must come from dialogue and be "the result of their own *conscientização*" (Freire 67).

The reason why animal rights, unlike broader environmentalism, have been largely excluded from discussions of critical pedagogy as well as ecopedagogy lies in anthropocentric and speciesist biases. That human and animal oppression are interconnected can be seen in the case of meatpacking factories and the fast-food industry employing minimum-wage workers in unsanitary and dangerous labor conditions, as exposed by investigative journalist Eric Schlosser in *Fast Food Nation* (2001), to name but one example. Nevertheless, the latter receives little attention in critical pedagogy, as confirmed by a 2005 doctoral thesis which surveyed the Critical Pedagogy Program at the University of St. Thomas in Minnesota. The program has no formal mention of animal rights even though it prepares doctoral students "to address economic issues of social injustice

present in educational settings as well [as] the greater society” and focuses on “issues of inequality and oppression” (McGee v). When surveyed, more than half of the participants noticed some connection between animal rights and critical pedagogy, yet none requested that animal rights be included in their program of study (McGee 1, 174). A meagre 5% participated in any programs or classes which addressed animal rights and/or speciesism, and only 11% facilitated such discussions themselves (195).³

Added to this is the theoretical objection. Given Freire’s insistence on bringing the members of an oppressed group to critical consciousness through literacy, animals, with their other(ed), nonverbal “literacies,” do not seem capable of engaging in their own empowerment. Because animals, especially farm animals bred and reared for slaughter, are oppressed as much as, if not more than, their human counterparts, the choice to exclude their concerns is logocentric, that is, based on the notion coined by the German philosopher Ludwig Klages and central to Western epistemology, namely: that (human) words and language constitute the fundamental expression of an external reality. To counter logocentrism, compounded with the anthropocentric, or human-centered, bias also at work in the exclusion of animals from critical pedagogy and ecopedagogy, we can either speak on their behalf or redefine what we mean by language, so that they can speak for themselves. We can demonstrate that, since words are not an operative criterion given their species(ist) limitations, animals can, in fact, become conscious and voice their discontent by means other than narrowly conceived human language, and that, moreover, they can engage in the production of knowledge, with the latter broadly defined. Animals do, after all, have diverse ways of expressing themselves: they bite, kick, scratch when they disagree, oppose, or lack interest in something, but also nuzzle up, lick, or purr to show consent and affection. Then there is also the problem of domestication and animal consciousness: a farm animal may have internalized its captive status to such a degree that it cannot develop a consciousness (if, indeed, animals have consciousness⁴) critical enough to challenge the status quo. But this, too, can be at least in theory overcome through Freirean “dialogue.”

The best option is to let the animals speak for themselves by expanding the meanings of language, literacy, and knowledge. In her research on nonhuman primate culture and language at the Great Ape Trust in Des Moines, Iowa, Dr. Sue Savage-Rumbaugh has shown that “language and personhood are simply not coincident with the human form” (qtd. in Bradshaw 22), and that meaning can be “cultivated...across species lines”

3. The data reveal conflicting views regarding animals: the majority of the participants (56%) believe that it is not necessary for humans to eat animal products (dairy, meat) to maintain their health, but only 5% describe themselves as vegetarian/vegan (McGee 195-196).

4. That nonhuman animals have consciousness is a debatable issue only insofar as acknowledging it would make carnivores uncomfortable. Charles Darwin, writing 150 years ago, recognized that animals had emotions. Recent research confirms that a neocortex (absent in nonhumans) is not essential to experiencing affective states, which, in his provocative book on the inner lives of fish, Jonathan Balcombe takes to mean: “you don’t need a big, convoluted humanlike brain to feel excited about food or scared of predators” (83-84).

(Bradshaw 17). Great apes “[can] indeed learn to use and to respond to full sentences and understand the demands of grammar as well as of signs” (Weil 8). This challenges “humanity’s monopoly on epistemic authority” inviting us both to assert “animal agency and embrace new modes of communication and models of knowledge that bring other species into dialogue and authority as equal partners” (Bradshaw 15). The problem with this radical, though admittedly irresistible, proposal is that we have yet to acquire the practical means of understanding what animals are saying, despite having made some progress with species who most resemble us but comprise a tiny fraction of the animal kingdom; with the sixth mass extinction under way, then, we might need to step in and serve as their proxies.⁵

Through a zoopedagogical approach to the humanities classroom, that is, through the teaching of animals, we can become effective spokespersons for animal rights. This is not a limitation, as critics might charge based on similar accusations made against post-colonialism as a Eurocentric “first-world discourse” (Sethi 20). Opposing the charge that all research on animals is unavoidably biased, Rob Boddice urges us to acknowledge that scholars begin their work “*because* they are human, with unique skill sets and marks of distinction” (12). Another related objection to animal studies is anthropomorphism—that is, ascribing human traits, forms, or attributes to a being that is not human. Kari Weil suggests that we address charges of anthropomorphism by adopting a “critical anthropomorphism.” Building on Jill Bennett’s “critical empathy,” which is a “conjunction of affect and critical awareness” (10), Weil urges that “we open ourselves to touch and to be touched by others as fellow subjects and may imagine their pain, pleasure, and need in anthropomorphic terms, but stop short of believing that we can know their experience” (19-20). At the other end of the spectrum lies “anthropodenial,” the term coined by primatologist Frans de Waal, which refers to “the a priori rejection of human-like traits in other animals or animallike traits in us” (25). Ultimately, we can address such objections, as well as the paradox of a humanism not centered on humans, by recognizing, with Boddice, that we ask questions because we are human(ists), but that our answers must be qualified by the fact that we are *human animals*, both connected to and separate from our nonhuman animal planetary companions.⁶

One important aspect of critical pedagogy which zoopedagogy can emulate, so as to become a viable platform for the study and promotion of animal rights, is its contextual relevance: it is applied to “the specificity of particular contexts, students, communities, available resources, the histories that students bring with them to the classroom” (Giroux and Tristan). The animal turn seems particularly suited, then, to land grant institutions with historically strong agricultural programs, to which students likely come

5. This is analogous to Vladimir Lenin’s notion of a vanguard party which, though inconsistent with Marxist dogma, nonetheless helped the Bolsheviks launch a successful revolution.

6. “Even the term nonhuman grates on me,” de Waal admits, “since it lumps millions of species together by an absence, as if they were missing something.” In his comments on student papers he wants to write (sarcastically) “that for completeness’s sake, they should add that the animals they are talking about are also nonpenguin, nonhyena, and a whole lot more” (27-28).

from rural areas, having grown up on farms, to pursue veterinary and animal sciences degrees or seek careers in agribusiness. This situation carries “the specificity of particular contexts,” to use Giroux’s phrase, that, in effect, adds both relevance and potential resistance: especially in rural areas, students may see themselves as masters of the agricultural-industrial complex which places animals on the same plane as other utilitarian tools of agribusiness—as means to an end, not as sentient beings whose individual lives matter. They may have strong beliefs about animal welfare, rather than animal rights, very different from those of animal activists. While some may be able to conceptualize the various connections among animals, humans, and the environment, the knowledge and values these students bring to the classroom will likely make them see animals as commodities in economic more than ethical terms, welcoming provisions for animal protection so long as these do not interfere with material production. It is this attitude that should be brought into dialogue, though initially also into conflict, with a progressive zoopedagogy.

Nor is this impediment limited to rural areas or land grant institutions: students at urban universities may be removed from the natural environment and from the brutal realities of meat, poultry, and fish production, their engagement restricted to the digestion of processed, attractively packaged, faceless animal remains. Such intellectual distance may be as difficult to overcome as physical proximity: the latter requires reconceptualizing real violence to which one has become desensitized, while the former requires making symbolic violence real. We could think of this as the less obvious objective violence Slavoj Žižek describes as “systemic,” “the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems,” the violence that goes into sustaining “a comfortable life”: “not only direct physical violence, but also the more subtle forms of coercion that sustain relations of dominance and exploitation” (2, 9).

It is precisely such anthropocentric thinking that a zoopedagogical approach can expose and challenge. With co-production of knowledge and broadened, non-anthropocentric definitions of language remaining theoretically tempting but practically inaccessible, the route toward spokespersons seems the most prudent, albeit unorthodox, given Freire’s insistence on not simply “implant[ing]” in the oppressed a belief in freedom.” An embodied performative exercise, beyond an abstract channeling of the other’s mindset, is key to such engagement. In the following section, I describe a multi-phase in-class activity that can bring us closer to that end.

Zoopedagogy in Practice: Teaching Animals in Humanities Classrooms

The following in-class activity has been adapted specifically to the teaching of animal studies based on a professional development workshop I attended in Chicago in August 2016, during the annual meeting of the Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE), a conference that brings together teachers, theorists, and practitioners of drama and theatre. Entitled “Theatrical Jazz Workshop” and facilitated by Omi Osun Joni L. Jones, professor of performance studies in the African and African Diaspora Studies Department at the University of Texas at Austin, the workshop was designed to explore various theatrical jazz techniques, such as “ensemble-building, non-mimetic

movement, virtuosity, layering of elements, as well as writing that investigates the personal as political.” The goal was to develop “the practice of being present and collective witnessing” (ATHE).

In spring 2017, I developed and facilitated my own zoopedagogical version of theatrical jazz exercises I had learned in that workshop in my split undergraduate/graduate course at North Dakota State, a land-grant, research university in the Midwest, where I teach in the English Department. I designed this Topics in British Literature course to focus on texts about animals from the British Isles and the Commonwealth, such as Anna Sewell’s *Black Beauty*, the autobiography of a horse, which inspired Margaret Marshall Saunders’ *Beautiful Joe: A Dog’s Own Story*; Virginia Woolf’s *Flush*, a charming imaginative biography of Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s cocker spaniel; T.S. Eliot’s whimsical collection of poems in *Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats*; Peter Shaffer’s provocative psychoanalytical play *Equus*; the novel *Watership Down*, in which Richard Adams invents a special Lapine language spoken by rabbits; and Coetzee’s *The Lives of Animals*, among others. Through the close analysis and discussion of animal-centered fiction, poetry, and drama, I encouraged my students to explore how animals and animal experience are represented in narratives, and how the material conditions of their existence are handled in theoretical and activist texts, such as Singer’s *Animal Liberation*, Foer’s *Eating Animals*, and Haraway’s *The Companion Species Manifesto*. This was an interdisciplinary, reading- and writing-intensive course with an underlying philosophy that reading and writing about animals can help students become better critical readers as well as more empathetic, conscientious citizens capable of informed ethical decision-making with respect to animals and the environment at large. As I noted in my introductory lecture to my students, a recent study suggests that literary fiction helps readers become smarter and more empathetic individuals, as the latter is an integral component of socialization, thus supporting the view that literary fiction should be included in educational curricula. Of all the different genres assigned to the participants in the study, it was their reading of literary fiction that measured the highest in terms of ability to understand other people’s thoughts and emotions because of its focus on the psychology of the characters, their intentions and motivations (Chiaet). And if it is difficult enough to understand what other humans and characters are thinking or feeling, animals pose a greater challenge, and hence present a great exercise to flex our creative and analytical muscles.

The multi-phase zoopedagogical activity, based on the ATHE workshop in theatrical jazz, was conducted in the first week of class so as to invite the students to think about how nonhuman animals “speak” by asking them to communicate without using words or verbal cues. This was reinforced at the end of the semester, when the students were asked to write letters to their future selves with expectations for three, six, and twelve months in the future, to promote a greater awareness of empathy and environmentalism beyond the scope of the 17-week course. Their letters were mailed to them six months after the course’s completion, allowing them to evaluate their commitments halfway and adjust accordingly.

The purpose of the activity, more specifically, is to encourage those used to operate within and through human language to think outside its confines, relying on extra-linguistic communication, ocular, vocal, and gestural cues, and bodily movement to

express not just basic needs but potentially also higher-order cognitive ideas. Here the logocentric trap presents itself. As Weil asks in her book *Thinking Animals*, “how do we bring animal difference into theory? Can animals speak? And if so, can they be read or heard?” (5). Evoking the title of Gayatri Spivak’s essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” Weil presses animal studies scholars to reconsider how they give voice to voiceless nonhumans, lest they, like Western postcolonial scholars, end up not only providing the terms for but effectively speaking on behalf of the dispossessed peoples whom they claim to represent, Spivak’s warning against the critical establishment. Think about primatologists who, their best intentions notwithstanding, might “try to teach apes to sign in order to have them tell humans what they want” (Weil 5). By experimenting with non-human communication, however, we can challenge ourselves to think outside human language, an exercise that could get us closer to hearing, or at least learning to hear, what the animals are really saying.

Along with the theoretical hurdle posed by animal difference, some practical limitations include: the layout of the room, as space is needed to walk around; and accessibility for persons with disabilities, who might have difficulty moving freely about the room, or those with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) who might have trouble maintaining eye contact. For the latter, however, a critical discussion might replace Phase 1 of this activity, providing an opportunity to verbally interrogate the common association of eye contact with empathy, as well as the misconception that individuals with ASD who experience difficulty maintaining eye contact also struggle to identify with the thoughts and feelings of others. A recent study questions traditional theoretical accounts of ASD in which lack of eye contact and other social difficulties were seen as indicators of interpersonal indifference to others; firsthand reports from verbal people with ASD, on the other hand, suggest that “the underlying problem may be one of socio-affective oversensitivity”: that is, lack of eye contact, when constrained gaze is tested with a dynamic face, has more to do with increased anxiety, not antisocial behavior or lack of empathy (Hadjikhani et al.). Difficulty with eye contact also poses an opportunity to explore affinities between animals and humans with autism, particularly having to do with attention to detail and pain perception, as described by Temple Grandin, professor of animal studies at Colorado State University, specialist in livestock behavior, stress reduction, and humane slaughter, and prominent spokesperson for autism.⁷

7. In *Animals in Translation*, co-authored with Catherine Johnson, Grandin argues that animals, like autistic people, see in detail whereas “normal” people see the large picture and draw inferences about these raw data and small details; the latter, in fact, experience what Arien Mack and Irvin Rock call “inattentive blindness,” that is, inability to “consciously see any object unless they are paying direct, focused attention to that object” (qtd. in Grandin and Johnson 50). Noting that this difference between animals and humans has been corroborated by neurological research (by Nancy Minshew, among others), Grandin further insists: “When an animal or an autistic person is seeing the real world instead of his idea of the world that means he’s seeing *detail*. This is the single most important thing to know about the way animals perceive the world: animals see details people don’t see” (31).

One of Grandin's many insights involves putting human eyes on the same level as the animals', a notion that could provide further rationale for embodying the animal in a zoopedagogical exercise. When providing cattle plant owners with a checklist of items to handle cattle or hogs who refuse to walk through an alley or chute, Grandin describes "[getting] down on [her] hands and knees and [going] through the chute the same way the pigs did": "You have to get to the same level as the animals, and look for things from the same level angle of vision," she writes, because that is the only way to spot the "tiny, bright reflections glancing off the wet floor," which are causing the pigs anxiety (Grandin and Johnson 34). An even more radical experiment is Charles Foster's attempt, in his book *Being a Beast*, "to see the world from the height of naked Welsh badgers, London foxes, Exmoor otters, Oxford swifts, and Scottish and West Country red deer; to learn what it is like to shuffle or swoop through a landscape that is mainly olfactory or auditory rather than visual...a sort of literary shamanism" (1). Going beyond the theoretical assertion that "our capacity for vicariousness is infinite," and that we can "become one" with an animal by empathizing with it (216), Foster ventures out into the wilderness and, for example, instructs his children to spraint like otters and then try to reconstruct someone's life based on sniffing their fresh feces (83-85).

Short of tasking students with digging around in the dirt, we can bring embodied performative activities into the classroom and experiment with placing more emphasis on the body. "Within performative pedagogy bodies can be acknowledged, made visible, and moved to the center of pedagogical experiences," write Mia Perry and Carmen Medina in an essay investigating the role of embodiment in critical performative pedagogy. "Bodies are perceived as inscribed and inscribing people's relationships, engagement, and interpretation of multiple ways and histories of being, experiencing, and living, in the world" (63). By employing theatrical techniques and recognizing the ideological movement of bodies through space, "[s]tudents can be seen to be engaging their bodies in a negotiation of ideological and intellectual ideas, both of their own and of other participating and performing students," while also enabling both students and educators to reflect on how an awareness of our bodies can forge new modes of learning (Perry and Medina 70, 72). By redirecting attention from the mind to the body, in this zoopedagogical activity I aim not to re-assert Descartes' speciesist assumption that animals are soulless or mindless machines, but rather to *remind* the human animals in my classroom that they, too, are *embodied* subjectivities that can express themselves *sans* words.

Below is the script for the in-class activity, which can be provided orally or projected on an overhead screen.

Differences in vision, as explained by neurology and physiology, might also account for the differences in perspective between humans and animals. This has to do with the structure of the eye (humans have a fovea, or round spot, whereas domestic animals have a visual streak); and their respective perception of color and contrast, with humans' color perception being more developed and animals' contrast vision being sharper, as contrast is sharper in black and white, though along with better night vision comes "relatively poor color vision" (Grandin and Johnson 43).

Zoopedagogical Activity: Can the Animal Speak?

- **Phase 1:** Walk around the room, taking in your surroundings; pause when prompted and maintain eye contact with one person. No words.
- **Phase 2:** Walk around the room; pause when prompted and communicate to one person something about yourself. No words. Gestures ok.
- **Phase 3:** Walk around the room; pause when prompted and communicate to one person (someone new!) something about yourself. Words and gestures ok.

For Phase 1, I recommend allowing 15 seconds of eye contact the first time around, and then repeating the exercise several more times with 10-second intervals. The interstitial times allotted for walking around the room, getting to know one's body within that space and with respect to others, could range from 30 seconds to a minute or more. For Phase 2, I recommend a 30-second interval first, followed by several rounds of 20-second intervals, totaling, similar to Phase 1, about 3-5 minutes. The same for Phase 3 as for Phase 2. This should be followed by 10-15 minutes of debriefing, to be extended or shortened based on the enthusiasm of the responders. Free-writing and pair-sharing prior to sharing with the larger group will engage both oral and written skills in a collaborative context. A script for the debriefing session follows; this, like the steps above, could be projected on a screen.

Debriefing Questions

- **Eye contact:** describe your experience of maintaining eye contact with a person. What did you notice about the other person? What did you learn about yourself? Was it easy or difficult to maintain silence? Are all silences the same? What emotions did you experience, and which, if any, of these, did you express?
- **Saying without words:** describe how you felt telling a stranger something about yourself. Did saying this *without using any words* make it easy or difficult? What other kinds of extra-linguistic techniques or body language did you use to express yourself? Was this liberating? Frustrating? Both?
- **Describing yourself:** how does this linguistic experience compare to the previous one? Did you have any difficulty choosing how to define yourself or what "something" to express?
- **Conclusions:** Based on this activity, what can we infer about human *intraspecies* communication? What do we, in other words, rely on to define ourselves and tell our stories? What can we, in turn, infer about human-animal *interspecies* communication?

* * *

According to my notes from facilitating this activity in my animal studies class, during the eye contact exercise many students looked uneasy and somewhat anxious, and I heard several of them say, "this is so awkward" or "this is uncomfortable"; there was some audible laughter, and a bit of confusion in the room. During Phase 2, there was more confusion and uncertainty about how long to keep trying to communicate with-

out words. At least one student started using (what looked like) ASL, but then switched to less familiar, more erratic gesticulation. Phase 3 was by far the smoothest, and there were conversations as well as stories audible. Although it might seem redundant, I do not recommend omitting this phase as it provides fertile ground for comparison, enabling the students to see how much we rely on stories told through words and human language while also learning alternative mode(s) of communication for other(ed) storytelling.

In the debriefing following this activity, valuable insights were shared by the students themselves. When questioned about how long they thought they had to maintain eye contact, some of the students said 30 seconds, while others insisted it was 3 minutes (the actual intervals were 15 seconds first and 10 seconds thereafter); the intimacy and vulnerability that come with sharing someone's gaze made the experience seem longer, even unbearably long. One student commented on how uncomfortable it was to look at another person and not know what else to do or how to move; another admitted that she had trouble with eye contact when younger due to attention deficit disorder. One other student noted that eye contact was "aggressive," explaining that people of Scandinavian origin, so common in the Midwest, feel uneasy when forced to constrain their gaze. In contrast, someone else said about this phase, as about Phase 2, that not knowing how much longer to continue or what to do when finished provided the unease, rather than the eye contact or the gesturing.

When asked about Phase 2: "Saying without words," some students had trouble thinking of something to share. One person who immediately turned to ASL said she started to use "language," but thought it was cheating and stopped, and then added that this demonstrated the arbitrariness of language since even if she used ASL, she would have no idea whether the person at the receiving end was getting the message or (mis) taking ASL for "random gestures." The students came to a general consensus about how much they rely on words and how difficult it is *not* to say anything. Also, they shared their frustration at not knowing whether the message was conveyed and received accurately. This brings to mind Wittgenstein's notion of a language game, or *Sprachspiel*: with the rules of a specific game known to one but not to both players, it is unclear how to play or even what the game is, like an inside joke that only one of them is in on.

Such debriefing and post-activity discussions can, furthermore, stimulate discussions of linguistics, especially the contested identity between thought and language in the study of cognition, providing an opportunity to consider, for example, Jean Piaget's reluctance to deny thought to preverbal children and his subsequent declaration that cognition must be independent of language. "With animals," as de Waal insists, "the situation is similar. As the chief architect of the modern concept of mind, the American philosopher Jerry Fodor, put it: 'The obvious (and I should have thought sufficient) refutation of the claim that natural languages are the medium of thought is that there are non-verbal organisms that think'" (de Waal 102). The Dutch primatologist himself sees humans as "the only linguistic species," capable of rich and multifunctional symbolic communication; he calls it "our own magic well." However, de Waal also recognizes that other species not only have complex emotions, intentions, and other inner processes, but are able to communicate them through nonverbal signals, though "their communication is neither symbolized nor endlessly flexible like language" but "almost entirely restricted to the here and now" (de Waal 106). Even so, animals have developed ways to signify

objects at a distance: honeybees signal distant nectar locations to the hive, monkeys utter calls in predictable sequences (akin to human syntax), and Kenyan velvet monkeys even have distinct alarm calls for a leopard, eagle, and snake (107).

The connection between language and intelligence is fraught, exposed through testing that has been shown to carry racial, ethnic, cultural, and class biases.⁸ To these we can add speciesism. Rather than “testing animals on abilities that *we* are particularly good at—our own species’ magic wells, such as language—why not test them on *their* specialized skills?” de Waal proposes (22). A zoopedagogical exercise in which the students find themselves unable to partake in a simple language game, which is not formally presented, but might still be perceived as a test of their intelligence, is likely to help them develop both humility and empathy toward others who are regularly not in on the inside joke, in areas outside the classroom’s safe and contained environment, where this carries serious material and spiritual repercussions.

Conclusions: Teaching Animals in the Speciesist Academy

The purpose of the described zoopedagogical activity is, ultimately, ethical and political: to combat anthropocentrism and speciesism. By seeing ourselves as the masters of our planet, we tend to ignore and downplay the rights of other species. Whereas animals must rely on their natural skills for survival (fangs, claws, acute sensory organs), we have developed various technologies of domination and can enhance these with the use and abuse of our planetary companions. The ways in which we have justified our dominance over the animal world and the many arguments we continue to make (that animals lack consciousness, cannot feel pain, do not experience emotions etc., and hence deserve to be enslaved, owned, domesticated) echo those made throughout history about various others (non-European, non-white, non-male, non-cisgender)—hence, the connection between animal studies and women’s and gender, queer, postcolonial, and critical race studies. The latter opens up this activity to teachers and practitioners in other humanities disciplines, including foreign-language and multicultural studies classes that would benefit from initial bewilderment as a stepping stone to confronting and embracing difference. We cannot read animals *in the original*, the way we can read the untranslated stories of other humans whose languages we can learn, but are left to read animal narratives ventriloquized by, however sympathetic, writers, poets, dramatists, and artists; yet, an embodied performative experience like the one described above, in which we have to rely on more than words, is still an animal leap in the right direction.

Added to our logocentric limitations and the epistemological difficulties of knowing the animal qua animal is institutional resistance to doing such liberatory work in the academy. I will conclude by reflecting on such hurdles, starting with one I have

8. For biases in standardized testing in particular see, for example, *The Skin That We Speak: Thoughts on Language and Culture in the Classroom*, edited by Lisa Delpit and Joanne Kilgour Dowdy, especially Asa G. Hilliard III’s chapter on “Language, Culture, and the Assessment of African American Children” and Victoria Purcell-Gates’ “... As Soon As She Opened Her Mouth!': Issues of Language, Literacy, and Power.” For a speciesist approach to language and intelligence, see Daniel C. Dennett’s “The Role of Language in Intelligence.”

experienced myself, that of lower student evaluation scores, which nonorthodox pedagogical practices and course designs might realistically incur. The following are institutional data from the Topics in British Literature course which I designed and taught as “Animals of the British Isles & Beyond.” “The quality of this course,” one of the criteria included in faculty evaluations, was rated by my undergraduates at 3.8 and by the graduates at 2.8, as compared to my two-year average of 4.0, which matches the departmental average. Anonymous student comments included: “This course was extremely political...you are wrong if you are a conservative, and you are wrong if you are not a vegetarian/vegan”; “We read...mainly about vegetarianism”; “This course is wrongly marketed, still trying to figure out why this has anything to do with British lit. Instructor promotes her democratic political agenda. Not cool”; “This class was very interesting, but I feel as if [the instructor] was concerned with pushing her beliefs on the topic onto her students.” On the positive side, one student said, “I enjoyed this class as it taught me about a new topic in English studies. [The instructor] knows how to challenge her students which I think is very important.” Student evaluations/ratings of instructors are, of course, notoriously unreliable and reflect gender bias, among others, as a growing body of educational research has repeatedly confirmed, with women and people of color rated lower than their white male counterparts by male and female students alike. The American Association of University Professors’ (AAUP) Committee on Teaching, Research, and Publication studied this issue in 2014 and provides useful recommendations as well as other less biased ways to measure teaching effectiveness (Vasey and Carroll).

Still, the position of a liberatory practitioner is inevitably precarious and those most vulnerable (untenured, non-tenure track), who make up the majority of teaching faculty and whose retention and promotion are typically contingent upon such scores, might feel reluctant to engage in nonorthodox pedagogies. (In my case, the chair was supportive of innovation and aware of its perils, and I continue to contextualize the scores and comments as such.) I would suggest mitigating risks by incrementally implementing shorter, low-stakes activities and including individual animal-centered texts in surveys rather than revamping entire courses or curricula. Another suggestion would be to bring literary scholars together with scientists to team-teach cross-listed courses on animals in order to play up interdisciplinarity and innovation, which often figure in universities’ strategic plans and would appeal to their various stakeholders, while simultaneously reinforcing Haraway’s insistence on the inseparability of human and nonhuman worlds (“naturecultures”). Concerns over student enrollments, however, which would be divided between departments and colleges, and other institutional logistics might preclude such collaboration.

The moderate approach to zoopedagogy, moreover, falls short of an oppositional critical pedagogy’s potential to expose the academy as a speciesist enterprise, one where the contributions of nonhuman animals are everywhere hiding in plain sight: from animal testing by animal sciences departments without the subjects’ consent,⁹ and the

9. The American Association for Laboratory Animal Science (AALAS) is “dedicated to the humane care and treatment of laboratory animals,” but a search of its website produces references to human consent only, such as the consent I would need to obtain to “reprint, copy, electronically reproduce, or utilize any document on this web site.”

speciesist handling and disposing of animal tissue by teaching and research facilities alongside cadaveric material,¹⁰ to the operation of university meats laboratories carefully equipped for the theater of death: the slaughter, cutting, and chilling rooms and freezers that likely go unnoticed by most visitors to campuses. Although courses in animal studies or anthrozoology (focusing on science, ethics, policy, and animals in the arts and humanities) are currently taught at at least 25 U.S. institutions, there is still an underrepresentation of animals given their pervasiveness (The Animals and Society Institute).

A more far-reaching response to speciesism, informed by Haraway's critique and truer to the spirit of the Chthulucene, would mean reconceptualizing education to account for the labor power of all animals and effecting change through political demonstration (with other animals) against the institutionalization of speciesism in all its variants.¹¹ The zoopedagogical activity was part of a course designed to expose the exploitation and dehumanizing treatment of animals, to raise awareness of endangered species and mass extinctions, and to assist in forging an environmental ethics that recognizes and aims to combat such injustices. That the activity "spoken" of here means to challenge logocentrism may seem paradoxical, as is conducting such anti-speciesist Chthulucenesque work from within the speciesist academy. Similar charges have been raised against the discipline of postcolonial studies being embedded in elitist neo-colonialist institutions. Although, at the moment, our contribution as practitioners of radical pedagogies may be limited to pointing out this contradiction, our responsibility remains to outline a vision for a future academy that is more reflective of Haraway's "multispecies muddle."

As another small step in that direction, following Haraway's invitation to "[i]magine a conference not on the Future of the Humanities in the Capitalist Restructuring University, but instead on the Power of the Humanities for a Habitable Multispecies Muddle!" (32), in January 2018 I organized and chaired a special Modern Language Association session to discuss how, as scholars, teachers, citizens, and eco-ethno-feminino-vege-zoo activists, we can rewrite the doomsday ending to the anthropo-capitalo-progressive narrative. Building on Haraway's work and "thinking tentacularly" about multiple elastic, muddling, messy networks, the panelists proposed a critique of the academy as a neoliberal consumerist enterprise as well as a seemingly detached humanistic enclave with staunchly enforced disciplinary divisions, suggesting paths towards new diverse ontologies and emergent ecologies, and offering pedagogical applications for Haraway's conceptual reconfiguring of Humanities/humunities by proposing interdisciplinary theoretical models and curricula for experiential and sensual learning and knowledge production in and with nature. My hope for this work is to initiate similar conversations in humanities classrooms and beyond.

Acknowledgments

10. The differences in the treatment of animal tissues and human cadavers fall along species lines due to "differences in our perceptions of their respective intrinsic and instrumental values [with] [a]nimals [being] considered to have lesser intrinsic value and greater instrumental value than humans" (Kaw, Jones, and Zhang, abstract).

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