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journalforcas@gmail.com

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Issue Introduction

Author: Amber E. George

Title: Instructor

Affiliation: Philosophy Department, Misericordia University

Location: Dallas, Pennsylvania, United States of America

E-mail: drambergeorge@gmail.com

Keywords: Art, Activism, Animal Ethics, Aesthetics

Art has been used to express sentiments regarding social issues and disrupt the status quo throughout history. Some of the most memorable pieces of politically charged artwork have arisen from an artist's deep-seated desire to appeal to the public's sense of justice. One such piece, Picasso's famed mural *Guernica* (1937), which is regarded as one of the most impactful anti-war paintings in history, illustrates the violence endured by people and nonhumans during the Spanish Civil War. Whether it is through allegory, satire, or caricature, modern artists continue to use art implicitly and explicitly to comment on many contemporary issues ranging from war, climate change, and the effects of globalization. For instance, photographer Edward Burtynsky (Khatchadourian, 2016) captures how industry and commerce negatively impact nature landscapes. However, some contemporary artists have gone to extremes to blur the boundary between being socially responsible and politically shocking. So-called "shock artists" aim to be

overly sensational to rattle the status quo; their art elicits controversy, stirs up public disapproval, and in the case of this issue's essay, can be characterized as morally repugnant.

This issue features Claudia Alonso Recarte's essay, "Guillermo Vargas's *Exposition #1* in the Context of Global Animal Ethics." The essay outlines various problems inherent in contemporary shock art that utilize nonhuman animals to relay disturbing imagery, sounds, and scents that create a scandalous experience for audiences. Those who favor shock art argue it is a viable means of providing social commentary and should continue under the guise of artistic freedom. Critics suggest shock art is a cheap means of gaining notoriety often at the expense of society's most vulnerable, such as nonhuman animals. One must question, just as Alonso Recarte does, are there limits to artistic freedom, and what are the ethical sensibilities related to humans using live nonhuman animals in creative projects?

When Vargas's exhibition went public in 2007, more and more people were beginning to question the ethics behind various forms of institutional nonhuman animal exploitation. The year 2007 also marked a shift in organization for *JCAS*. Specifically, our journal became a project of the Institute for Critical Animal Studies (ICAS) and secured its foothold as the premier clearinghouse for CAS scholarship and activism. As *JCAS* and CAS scholarship began spreading, so too did critical studies and activism. In particular, people began using social media and the Internet to draw communities together, often quite quickly, in ways that were previously unimaginable. For instance, in 2007 the Internet was instrumental in helping animal activists to expose and organize protests against the illegal dog fighting rings led by famed football player Michael Vick. Furthermore, around the same time in 2007, Alonso Recarte notes how efficiently millions of people were able to protest on a global scale Vargas' display of an emaciated dog in a Nicaraguan art gallery. Those who actively protested Vargas' project, including some CAS

scholar-activists, reacted not only to Vargas' misuse of art but also his misjudgment of what audiences will tolerate when it comes to animal exploitation. The backlash from the horrors of Vargas' dog on display opened avenues for further discussion about animal abuse within the art world. It is within this space that discussions regarding the fine line between aesthetics and ethics for nonhuman animals continue to this day.

Thus, we are excited to present this essay as the first installment in our new rolling submission and rolling publication format. As the new editor, I am in the process of peer reviewing a dozen or so articles from radical scholars who support CAS principles and total liberation for all. My goal as editor is to produce an intellectually rigorous, yet fully accessible journal that continues to expand the boundaries of CAS on a global scale. We are seeking scholarship from scholars and activists that is of the highest quality and comprehensible to all. If you have an article that supports CAS and would like to have reviewed for publication, please contact us.

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Guillermo Vargas's *Exposition #1* in the Context of Global Animal Ethics

Author: Claudia Alonso Recarte*

Title: Assistant Lecturer

Affiliation: Department of English and German Studies at the University of Valencia

Location: Spain

E-mail: Claudia.Alonso@uv.es

Keywords: Guillermo Vargas, *Exposition #1*, Animal Ethics, Online Activism, Artistic Community

Abstract

This paper reexamines Costa Rican artist Guillermo Vargas's *Exposition #1*, presented in Managua (Nicaragua) in 2007, from the perspective of twenty-first-century global animal ethics sensibilities. I argue that Vargas and the artistic community that defended his work simplified the implications and meaning behind the worldwide public reaction against the use of a suffering dog for his proposal, thus overlooking the shifting ethical attitudes towards nonhuman others that have been assimilated within popular culture, bridging a community between disparate nations. I begin by contextualizing *Exposition #1* alongside contemporary instances in which live (and suffering) animals have been commodified for aesthetic purposes within galleries and museums in order to illustrate the recurrent dilemmas that such exhibits have posed. I then turn to Vargas's piece to

* Claudia Alonso Recarte obtained her PhD in 2012 at the Complutense University of Madrid on the field of Jazz Studies, but has since then dedicated her research to Animal Studies and Ethics. In relation to such field, she has published in journals such as *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, *Atlantis* and *Investigaciones Feministas*, along with several book chapters. She is currently writing a monograph on dog narrators in classic works of world literature.

analyze how it has been ideologically safeguarded and verbally construed by his defenders, to which I respond with a comprehensive approach to the transnational cultural mindset that structured the online criticism and activism against the artist. I conclude that such collectivity reflected the ethical commitments and cultural tensions of its time, to which, because of its self-absorption and decontextualized arguments, the artistic community that advocated in Vargas's favor could not relate nor cared to understand.

On August 16, 2007, Costa Rican artist Guillermo Vargas – also known as *Habacuc* – wreaked havoc with his latest conceptual proposal. Within the walls of the Códice Gallery in the city of Managua, Nicaragua, Vargas sought to allegorize and reflect upon the fairly recent violent death of Natividad Canda Mairena through what he termed *Exposition #1*. The installation was replete with motifs that appealed to three fundamental senses: for soundscape, the Sandinist hymn was played backward; for smellscape, the scent of burning crack cocaine and marijuana impregnated the atmosphere. Finally, as a visual landscape, the proposal featured a sick and emaciated dog, allegedly picked up from the streets, tied to the wall with a scrawny rope around his neck. Further conceptual touches included the message “eres lo que lees” [“you are what you read”] written with kibble on the wall, and a sign instructing visitors not to feed nor unleash the dog. The three-day exhibition became a worldwide affair that attracted the anger and concern of a public that refused to accept animal cruelty as a feasible aesthetic methodology, igniting a less than serene discourse that doubly condemned artist and gallery for their lack of compassion under the guise of conceptual and artistic authenticity. Fact, myth and rumorology coalesced into virtual space as the Internet, the media, blogs and social networks globalized the reception of Vargas's piece beyond the Central American context.

The object of this paper is to revisit both Vargas's proposal and the arguments that were posed in his defense to reconsider them from within the global, twenty-first century shared sensibilities on nonhuman others as sentient beings. I argue that those who supported Vargas on the grounds of 'absolute freedom of artistic expression' failed to fathom the underlying ethical system structuring the online attack against Vargas's commodification of the dog, reductively profiling such collectivity as simplistic moralists and sentimentalists unversed in the fundamentals of art. Opposing the position undertaken by Sergio Villena Fiengo in his well-documented but argumentatively myopic *El perro está más vivo que nunca. Arte, infamia y contracultura en la aldea global* [*The dog is more alive than ever. Art, infamy and counterculture in the global village*] (first published in 2011), I reconsider the relevance of *Exposition #1* within the current social perceptions on the human/animal divide that have rapidly developed in the last decades, fleshing out a global, shared awareness of animal 'otherness.'

The first section focuses on contextualizing Vargas's piece within the worldwide aesthetics that overtly lead to animal suffering so as to better comprehend the culture that sparked the attack against the Costa Rican artist. In the second section, I question the logic, the assumptions and the discourse applied by the artistic and scholarly community that defended Vargas. In reexamining the motives underlying the animal ethics viewpoint, I aim to provide a different and hopefully more comprehensive approach to the complexities of the controversy than the ones that have been offered thus far.

The Aesthetics of Animal Suffering

Although Vargas's *Exposition #1* has probably garnered more infamy on a worldwide scale than any other aesthetic proposal to date, it does not stand alone in its exploitation of animal

suffering in the name of art. For the sake of both brevity and contextualization, I shall mention only twenty-first-century proposals with live animals that fall into the category of ‘art for galleries.’¹

Twenty-first-century western culture sensibilities, on the one hand, reflect the evolution of animal rights and liberation theory within the virtual space. Thanks to mass media information spread through the excess of interactive and social-network formats, consciousness-raising of animal exploitation has become commonplace. Viral videos displaying institutionalized forms of exploitation in zoos, factory and fur farms and in the entertainment industry (as well as footage of pets being abused by their owners) has helped to consolidate a collective response condemning such practices. This ‘call-out’ culture of the Internet era has globalized discussions about our treatment of nonhuman others, sparking thought-provoking debates that illustrate a range of opinions (from the more moderate, welfarist positions to the more radical, liberationist ones). If the animal liberation movement that began in the mid-1970s once proved to have overcome nineteenth-century protectionist and humane approaches, today’s sociopolitical scenario now presents the public assimilation of the theories set forth by intellectuals such as Peter Singer, Tom Regan, Carol Adams, Gary Francione, or Bernard Rollin, among scores of others. Even if not cultivated in the theoretical intricacies and differentiating ethical approaches themselves, a great part of the public opinion seems to share a perceptive sense that there is something disturbingly

¹ This classification thus leaves out other worldwide practices that have notoriously been defended on the grounds of cultural and aesthetic merit (such as bullfighting or rodeos) as well as the theater stage or film sets in which animal suffering is often called into question. Examples of the latter range from Rodrigo García and Martin McDonagh’s featuring of animals onstage (though the difference in their use and handling of such animals should be noted) to films such as Park Chan-wook’s *Oldboy* (2003), Michael Mayer’s *Flicka* (2006) and Pablo Berger’s *Blancanieves* (2012). Likewise, this classification also excludes proposals featuring dead animals or animal body parts. Examples here are numerous and are practiced by artists from diverse nationalities: from Colombian artist María Fernanda Cardoso, who made use of fish scales for *Pirarucú* (1992) and of dead reptiles and amphibians in *Frogs, Lizards and Snakes*, to the Mexican ensemble SEMEFO’s placing of the bodies of unborn foals on a carousel in *Lavatio Corporis* (2004) and Dutch artist Tinkerbell’s taxidermist pieces such as *My Dearest Pinkeltje* (2004).

unethical (or at least questionable) about instrumentalizing power over animals. In the words of Aaltola, “as pro-animal sentiments are becoming increasingly popular, it seems dubious to overlook them. Many people are affected by intuitions, according to which causing animals unnecessary harm is wrong, which emphasize animal sentience, and which may even suggest that animals are individuals with their own moral rights . . .” (2010, p. 34). No longer a liminal stance, such shared attitude often enough results in the creation of humane petitions, the emergence (and growth) of animal rights political parties,² active volunteering, membership in animal-rights organizations, conversion into vegetarianism and veganism, and even in the development of new academic fields such as critical animal studies. The term ‘speciesism’ itself, that which in the 1970s “made the contemporary comparison with racism and sexism and turned the focus of attention onto the prejudice of the exploiter” (Ryder, 2011, n.p.) may still spark debate, but is no longer, for the most part, met with surprise by those unfamiliar with it.

The gallery (or, in larger dimensions, the museum) as a space, functions in accordance with a series of normative conventions and tropes that guide visitors’ and spectators’ manner of ‘looking.’ The spectating subject surrenders to a semiotic system of communication between object and gazer whereupon he/she stands before the walls as an ‘Eye,’ an attenuated version of the self (O’Doherty, 1999) that restricts and cramps the viewer’s habitual behavior whilst it recodifies soundscapes through such viewer’s expected silence. As O’Doherty states,

² A recent, notable example of the soaring popularity of animal rights political parties is the upsurge of the ‘Partido Animalista Contra el Maltrato Animal’ (PACMA), founded in 2003 by Silvia Barquero Nogales in Spain. In the 2015 General Elections, PACMA doubled its 2011 results, and by the repetition of the General Elections in June 2016, it had increased its votes by 36%. In both rounds it was to emerge as the leading political force that did not make parliament, rising above more traditionally established parties such as UPyD, UDC, VOX and PCPE, among many others.

The ideal gallery subtracts from the artwork all cues that interfere with the fact that it is 'art.' The work is isolated from everything that would detract from its own evaluation of itself. This gives the space a presence possessed by other spaces where conventions are preserved through the repetition of a closed system of values. Some of the sanctity of the church, the formality of the courtroom, the mystique of the experimental laboratory joins with chic design to produce a unique chamber of esthetics. (1999, p. 14)

As we will see and as has been already suggested by Villena (2015), Vargas subverts gallery conventions by, on the one hand, accepting the space's status as part of the institution of art and, on the other, by allegedly provoking spectators into contemplating the possibility of recovering their position as subjects with a conscience, subjects willing to defy the inner 'Eye' that inhibits action.

Indeed, these time-space ingredients (twenty-first-century sensibilities and the gallery) implode the relation between ethics and art when a live animal body inoculates the meaning (and message) of the proposal with its presence. Let us begin to consider these matters through a selection of examples that brought the issue of artistic autonomy to headlines.

In 2000, Chilean artist Marco Evaristti presented at the Trapholt Museum in Kolding, Denmark, his *Helena y el Pescador* [*Helena and the Fisherman*], a piece that featured goldfish swimming in blenders. In this scenario, visitors were given the free choice to either press the button to mash and grind the fish, or to let them be. A prelude to Vargas's supposed 'call for action,' Evaristti converted the interaction between piece and spectator into a trial of sorts whereupon the public was forced to participate in an ethical dilemma. But the extent to which visitors might or might not have made use of the exposition as a motif for reflection instead of as an excuse to give

in to morbid curiosity and whim remains, to say the least, questionable. “Evaristti said depending on how visitors reacted to the piece revealed if they were voyeurs who liked to watch how others reacted, sadists who switched on a blender or moralists who troubled over the possibility of killing a fish” (Bomsdorf, 2013). As public outrage ensued and the police intervened, the director of the gallery, Peter Meyer (who was to be eventually acquitted of animal cruelty) continued to defend the piece, stating that “we have abortions and we have respirators where we choose whether to keep people alive or not . . . We have become rulers of the decision of life and death in a new way” (“A Bizarre Blending,” 2000, p. A3).

That same year Brazilian artist Eduardo Kac also stirred considerable controversy with his futile attempt to exhibit Alba, his *GFP Bunny*. A product of biotechnology, Alba’s combined rabbit and jellyfish DNA gave her the ability to glow in the dark. Because of the ethical implications and public outcry involved, however, the director of the National Institute of Agronomic Research in France (where Alba had been manufactured) decided against granting Kac ownership and permission for an exhibit. Here emerges an interesting point made by Stephens (2016), who suggests that Kac’s intention in creating the ‘chimerical’ animal may have been more attuned with making a statement about our collective social imaginary and fantasy world than about scientific advancements. Since there is no actual documentation available to prove the success of the transgenic experiment of Alba, there is still the chance that the pictures were the mere product of Photoshop. Yet, in the end, authenticity seems to be secondary: “Although it is most likely that Kac did produce – or rather commissioned others to produce on his behalf – an actual *GFP Bunny*, the striking visual qualities of the ‘bioluminescent bunny,’ and the images of this that circulated, are the real artwork” (Stephens, 2016, p. 60). What Alba, in the end, signifies, is “our own

willingness to believe in the capacity of biological engineering, in a way that dampens our ability to engage critically with it” (Stephens, p. 61).

The ethical engagement that Stephens is wary about is related to the limits of genetic engineering and the possible implications this may have for future generations. Nonetheless, for the most part, those who protested against Alba’s exhibition seemed more inclined to question the wellbeing of the animal subject itself. Concern for the treatment of laboratory animals, traditionally rooted in Victorian England, is enmeshed deep within the discourse of suffering, itself associated with the notion of sentience. Sentience is also one of those conceptual terms that was fundamental in the animal liberation and rights literature of the last quarter of the twentieth century and that now appears to have been assimilated within twenty-first-century sensibilities. This is relevant not so much because of the mainstream acceptance of the term, but because it shows the extent to which society has come to comprehend and naturalize (thanks in great part to advancements in science and ethology) nonhuman others’ condition as sentient beings. “Sentience is more than the capacity to respond to stimuli;” DeGrazia explains, “it is the capacity to have at least some *feelings*. Feelings include (conscious) sensations such as pain – where ‘pain’ refers to something *felt* and not merely the nervous system’s detection of noxious stimuli – and emotional states such as fear” (2002, p. 18). Although the scientific question regarding the sentient capacities of some types of animals remains to be solved (namely insects), empirical evidence sustains that more developed vertebrate species (mammals, birds, reptiles and even fish) are indeed sentient in different degrees.

Sentience as a cognitive capacity that is shared by humans and ‘superior’ animal species translates into different philosophical paradigms, of which Peter Singer’s utilitarianism and Tom Regan’s rights-based approach are generally regarded as the paradigmatic models within animal ethics. In the tradition of Jeremy Bentham’s dictum that consideration for animals should not be

based on whether they can reason or communicate through our language, but on whether they can suffer, Singer developed his theory on the grounds of species-specific interests. These may be simplified into the avoidance of pain and the pursuit of pleasure (from freedom of movement to the culmination of feeding, breeding, social and affective needs), something which, given our institutionalized systems of animal exploitation, is far from satisfied. Such ontological characteristics earn animals our ethical compromise to sustain the “equal consideration principle” (Singer, 1990). Regan, on the other hand, defends the notion that sentient beings are “subjects-of-a-life,” a feature that “involves more than merely being alive and more than merely being conscious” (2004, p. 243). For Regan, being a “subject-of-a-life” is associated, among other things, to the subject’s “psychophysical” self-perception within time and space, to its conscious sense of what its interests are, and to its capacity to pursue action to satisfy such interests. The subject’s own welfare bears a moral significance because of its “inherent value,” which is contrary to its instrumental worth.

If those concerned for the wellbeing of animals exhibited in galleries and museums display what some critics carelessly dismiss as pathological moralism, anthropomorphism and zoophilia, it is because they can empathize with the animal subject’s differing degrees of discomfort and, whether knowingly or intuitively, recognize and acknowledge its sentience. In the case of Evaristti’s goldfish, for instance, people did not just protest against the needless slaughtering of specimens, but also against their captivity within blenders in which they could hardly swim around. Huan Yong Ping’s *Theatre of the World*, exhibited at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 2007, presented similar reactions from visitors regarding the unnatural spatial disposition of where animals were placed. Intended as an allegory of the many world cultures coexisting or in conflict, the proposal placed several specimens of insects, spiders, reptiles and amphibians within a single enclosure.

The SPCA's investigations of the exhibit concluded that the animals were kept in an insalubrious state, with insufficient food, water, and resting spots. The handling of lighting and temperatures was just as negligent, and the removal of some species was ordered. To this, Ping angrily retorted by withdrawing all the animals altogether and accusing animal rightists of functioning as a censoring power (Gigliotti, 2010, p. 29).

The fact that visitors took the interests of 'less-evolved' species into consideration and that their comfort space within the installation was an issue goes to show the extent to which society has become sensitized to animal suffering, extending interest-rights to specimens that had been traditionally overlooked. A lesser-known example of an exhibit of sorts is Spanish artist Ismael Alabado's *Zorba* (2010), presented at the Asociación Habana Espacio Libre in Cáceres, Spain. Alabado used around a thousand crickets to create a soundscape within the rooms, pasting hundreds of them onto the walls. The spectacle was enough to make one visitor take matters into her own hands, spraying the immobilized insects with pesticide to put them out of their misery ("Los Grillos," 2010). Yet another more recent example of viewer's involvement in the wellbeing of 'lower species' as commodities in art exhibits is the heated protest against Chinese artist Cai Guo-Qiang's *Moving Ghost Town*, presented at the Aspen Art Museum in 2014. In this instance, iPads were glued onto the shells of live tortoises, and although noninvasive material was used as an adhesive, many visitors were disturbed by the possibility of the animals being in distress and argued that the artist's vision was an attack on their dignity.

However, it is still those proposals that feature 'more evolved' species, such as mammals and birds, which are likely to be perceived as the most scandalous. Evidently, this has to do with our cultural histories with these animals. Wild or domestic, they forge our sense of collective identity, as they recur in world literatures, narratives, mythologies, national symbologies and

aesthetic pieces. Mammals and birds more easily classify into what in the field of nature conservation has been termed ‘charismatic megafauna,’ a category that refers to species that generate a positive and constructive feedback from society because they present a series of appealing qualities to the public. Conservationists have successfully used the charismatic properties of high-profile species such as dolphins, tigers, eagles, elephants, wolves, and parrots, among others, to raise awareness about the threats to biodiversity, evincing how current environmental management has grown to incorporate the imagery shared by national and transnational popular cultures. “There is little correlation between the importance of an organism for the ecosystem it inhabits and human evaluations of its aesthetic value. But despite the mismatch, neither characteristic can be ignored in the conservation of biodiversity” (Maclaurin and Sterelny, 2008, p. 174).

Although dogs are decisively not an endangered species, they certainly qualify as charismatic megafauna on account of the social and affective sentiments that they stir. As we will see, Vargas had very precise creative reasons for using a dog in his proposal; but beyond the conceptual logic underlying his allegory, he also instrumentalized the dog to signify upon Costa Rican identity, something that would guarantee shock value to the proposal.

Much like Vargas, Argelian-French artist Adel Abdessemed also has a history of provoking viewers by using mammals (in his case in video montages). Among his pieces – which include *The Birth of Love* (2006), where a cat feasts on a rat – it is *Don’t Trust Me* (2008) and *Usine* (2009), both shot in Mexico, which most vividly portray and display animal cruelty. The former showed how animals were bludgeoned and slaughtered for meat, and the latter was a staging of a wide variety of animal species violently attacking one another. As Gigliotti (2010, pp. 31-32) notes, Abdessemed’s footage brought trouble to the facilities that hosted him, such as the San Francisco

Art Institute and the Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo in Turin, which found themselves having to deal with the controversy regarding the limits of art and the ethical implications of even just showcasing the suffering of live animals through recordings.

In this section, I have provided an overview of some representative twenty-first-century artistic proposals that, in their featuring of live animals in one way or another, have ultimately intensified and reinvented contemporary attitudes towards the welfare of nonhuman others. To contextualize how Vargas fails to negotiate acceptable animal ethics, we may conclude from the previous discussion the following: 1) the use of nonhuman others as commodities for artistic proposals is a strategy employed by artists from a wide range of nationalities, and through their pieces they excite national and international response; 2) the presence of live animals invites viewers to entertain the possibility of going beyond gallery/museum conventions and to move away from the 'Eye' into action – whether this be to satisfy sadistic urges or to act in the interest of the animal(s); 3) the latter response is a reflection of the extent to which animal sentience and suffering has been culturally assumed by society, and as such, it ultimately elicits an ethical response to art itself.

Revisiting Vargas's Proposal

As suggested earlier, Vargas's choice of using a dog is allegorical as much as it is an obvious instrument of shock tactics. According to the Costa Rican artist, the proposal was conceived as a critical response to the brutal death of twenty-five-year-old Leopoldo Natividad Canda Mairena. A Nicaraguan native of humble origins, Canda was a crack cocaine addict and petty thief. The victim of poverty in Nicaragua, he emigrated to Costa Rica to be able to provide for his family, only to be met with the harsh, discriminatory sociopolitical immigration policies

that were so much a reflection of the long-lasting tension and bitterness between the two nations. Hardships led to substance abuse and burglary, and ultimately, to a violent, agonizing death in the city of Cartago. On the night of November 10, 2005, he and a partner broke into an auto-part warehouse to allegedly steal some goods. Two trained Rottweilers were unleashed upon the intruders, and while the other thief made his escape, Canda was not as fortunate. The two dogs bit and ripped him apart, fatally severing tissue, skin, muscle, veins and arteries for an hour and before the owner of the warehouse, the security guard, police officers and the people in the vicinity that arrived at the sound of Canda's screams. Following the owner's orders, the police officers refrained from shooting the dogs (they later declared that they were afraid of accidentally wounding Canda himself) and, according to eyewitnesses, offered no help whatsoever and even enjoyed the gruesome attack. It was not until the dogs were hosed by firefighters that they finally let the dying Canda go. Video footage of the event shows how Canda was then quickly placed in the back of a car (see "Nica muere" entry in References), but to no avail: doctors at the hospital were powerless against the severe damage caused by the more than two hundred bite wounds that he suffered throughout his entire body.

The reconstruction of the events by media reports and academics have shown discrepancies regarding certain details.³ However, what appears to remain true and as a constant in eyewitness testimonies is that authorities and the owner failed to intervene to save Canda, even during the short moments when the dogs might have distanced themselves from him. Such lack of

³ There seems to be a lack of consistency regarding minor specificities such as the names of the dogs (some sources refer to them as "Oso" and "Hunter" while others call them "Abbott" and "Costello") or even the name of the warehouse itself. More sobering variations on the story revolve around how the events themselves unfolded: some local neighbors claimed that Canda was allowed to sleep in the warehouse and so he was not there to steal; others claimed that the security guard personally knew Canda (and that he might even have been a relative); some report that Canda had more than one partner that night; and still others claim that it was a policeman who finally picked up the mangled body, while evidence seems to indicate that it was actually a friend of Canda's who did so.

intervention, as Cornejo (2014, p. 55) argues and as we will see, has a great deal to do with how Vargas chose to design his *Exposition #1*.

Indeed, Vargas's poignant criticism of the death of Canda through *Exposition #1* is based on multiple parallels that reach beyond the conceptual outtake that his aesthetic undertakes. The proposal itself is evident in its symbolism: the burning of one hundred and seventy-five rocks of crack cocaine and an ounce of marijuana signified Canda's addiction. The stringent sound of the Sandinist hymn played backwards alluded to the twisted, injurious relations between Costa Rica and Nicaragua, and the dog food made an ironic statement on Canda's own calamitous fate as 'food' for the Rottweilers. Canda was a Nicaraguan who fell victim to the racism and discrimination of Costa Rica; Vargas, meanwhile, is a Costa Rican who debuted *Exposition #1* in Nicaragua, thus dodging Costa Rican animal protection laws that could perhaps have prevented his installation from taking place.

But let us consider the matter of the dog himself. As has already been pointed out by critics (particularly Villena, 2015; Cornejo, 2014), not only the use of a dog but of a particular kind of dog was strategic. Rumor had it that Vargas had paid some local children to capture a stray for his exhibit. To allegorize Canda, the dog was named Natividad, and so, in celebration of their meaningful shared name (nativity), Canda was to be reincarnated in that which he had already been (an immigrant/mutt leading 'a dog's life' in poverty and starvation) and in that which ultimately took the life out of him (a dog). Neither of the Natividads had any true roots – the abiding Costa Rican-Nicaraguan tensions on account of racism, xenophobia and the San Juan River border disputes had made it impossible for Canda to be welcomed as a foster child of the land, and the dog lacked a home just as much. And yet, both were slaves to a social and historical circumstance to which they were helplessly chained, as symbolized by the rope that tied Natividad

to the gallery wall. But Vargas sought to stretch the allegory even more: by posting a sign prohibiting anyone to neither free, feed, nor provide the dog with water, he attempted to reflect the indifference of a public who, like those who obeyed the warehouse owner and did nothing for Canda, blindly followed orders even at the sight of excruciating suffering. The dog, all skin and bones and with lesions and lacerations resulting from malnutrition and abuse, thus became the object of contemplation of the ‘Eyes’ that compliantly followed instructions and the shared expectations associated with the behavioral codes ‘activated’ within the gallery space. Unlike other proposals that were reviewed in the first section of this essay, none of the visitors subverted such gallery rules by taking action, and so Vargas succeeded insofar as allegorical authenticity to the inaction surrounding Canda’s death goes.

What Vargas most likely did not anticipate – but surely came to delight in, if only for the publicity it afforded him – was that far from passive, the reaction from worldwide readers of the news about *Exposition #1* was to materialize into a highly implicated, mobilizing force. This pun came in rather handy, as it brought the allegory to life beyond the gallery and into the virtual space: Canda’s torturous death had been trailed by a highly opinionated media and by thousands of Internet users whose reactions had stretched from furious indignation to sensationalism and sarcasm. Villena (2015) and Cornejo (2014) have documented the morbid, dark humor that the event aroused and how such rhetoric became the pretext through which to divulge racist and xenophobic stereotypes. Jokes about the efficiency of the heroic Rottweilers as immigration guards abounded, and even dog food was to be jocularly advertised as *nica* food (*nica* being a derogatory term to refer to Nicaraguans). This massive deformation of tragedy into the grotesque (an *esperpento* of sorts) was virally consumed within popular culture thanks to television and online activity. In the same way, the consternation caused by *Exposition #1* became contagious once the

news made the Internet, and although dark humor, in this case, was not the prevalent tone, the manner by which information became distorted and manipulated echoed how Canda's death had been processed by Costa Rican and Nicaraguan citizens. Much like Kac's *GFP Bunny*, the final artistic statement laid in what was concealed beneath the public's response.

It is not my intention to dwell on the unfathomable range of reactions elicited by Vargas's piece on the Internet. As mentioned, Villena has already compiled such feedback, analyzing how Vargas, until then relatively unknown and devoid of the "capital simbólico artístico" ["artistic symbolic capital"] (2015, p. 140) indispensable for 'membership' within mainstream conceptual art, practically became (in)famous overnight, sparking anything but indifference from the rapidly-growing worldwide public who read about *Exposition #1*. A great part of the critical feedback that condemned Vargas's commodification of the dog rapidly took the shape of activism, their prime objective being to castigate Vargas by having him 'expelled' from artistic activity. Such judgment passed from a global platform onto a Costa Rican artist functioned under the assumption that there had to be some transnational, agreed-upon 'decree' on what art should be, how it related to ethics, and how it negotiated contemporary sensibilities on human/animal relations. As a symbolic gesture of such assumptions, activists pressured the organizers of the 2008 Central American Biennial in Honduras to remove Vargas's participation. The petition, available in Spanish and English, was signed by around four million people from all over the world (Villena, 2015, p. 90) to no effect, as the committee behind the Biennial maintained that not only was Vargas presenting a different proposal in Honduras, but that artistic freedom was to always prevail over ethical acumen. Countering the artistic community's general backlash against the activists and antagonists of Vargas's proposal, I now turn to examine the animal ethics that cemented such immediate response. To do so, I recover the main accusations and discursive strategies employed by Vargas's

defenders so as to better elucidate the extent to which animal ethics were vilified, simplified and derided without regarding neither their actual principles nor their relevance within contemporary society and popular culture.

The Metaphor

A common observation made by critics has been that of asking how the online public could care so much for a dog and not so much for a person. According to Villena, Vargas himself was more inclined towards this ‘preferential interpretation’ of his piece: “más importante que la vida de un perro callejero es la vida de un ser humano, aun cuando fuera inmigrante, indigente y (supuestamente) delincuente” (2015, p. 100).⁴ This exegesis certainly went viral amongst those who defended Vargas and who prided themselves in having exposed the ‘hypocrisy’ of society. Columnist Jethro Masís describes the reaction of those who criticized Vargas as “mil veces más grande por un perro que por un ser humano muerto en esas circunstancias atroces” (as cited in Villena, 2015, p. 164).⁵ In his review of Villena’s work, Mora Rodríguez similarly states: “La campaña internacional a favor del perro termina mutilando y asesinando una y otra vez al hombre Natividad. Se le inculpa sin juicio, se le condena al olvido, al silencio y a la marginalidad” (2013, p. 481).⁶ Last but not least, is Villena’s own position: “Es poco probable que la ‘civilidad’ avance mucho en la sociedad globalizada e interconectada en tiempo real si nuestras manifestaciones de

⁴ “More important than the life of a stray dog is the life of a human being, even if he were an immigrant, a homeless person and (allegedly) a criminal.” (Translation by the author.)

⁵ “A thousand times bigger for a dog than for a human being who died in such atrocious circumstances.” (Translation by the author.)

⁶ “The international campaign to save the dog mutilates and murders Natividad the man again and again. He is incriminated without a trial, he is sentenced to oblivion, to silence and to marginality.” (Translation by the author.)

canofilia son poco más que una circunstancial coartada de la que hacemos uso alegórico para manifestar nuestra más visceral misantropía” (2015, p. 102).⁷

From an animal ethics perspective, one is left to question the logic behind this conjecture. Unless those concerned for the wellbeing of Natividad the dog are the same people as those who, through xenophobic rants, derided Canda’s suffering and death, the inference of such statement seems ridiculous and uninformed. Not only is the connection between the two groups of people impossible to demonstrate; these critics also choose to overtly ignore the twenty-first-century assimilation of speciesism as a continuum to racism and sexism as oppressive forms of power relations. Simply put, it is very unlikely that a defender of the wellbeing of the dog would have, on the other hand, celebrated (or even merely carelessly dismissed) the death of the man.

Moreover, the refusal to acknowledge the sentience of animals frequently leads to a bigoted logic of dragging the human/animal dichotomy to some hypothetical and unrealistic life-or-death situation. This rhetorical technique will, apparently, expose animal rightists’ supposed hostility against fellow human beings. In the words of Francione, “we treat virtually *every* human/animal interaction as involving a burning house that requires us to make a choice between humans and animals.” And yet, he goes on to add, “the overwhelming portions of our animal uses cannot be described as necessary in any meaningful sense of the word” (2000, p. 9). For all of Vargas’s efforts to allegorize the tragedy behind Canda’s death, the metaphors are faulty if only because in assuming an ethical stance towards the dog, one must question whether his suffering is necessary for the sake of art. In other words, why would the deliberate suffering of an animal be *necessary*

⁷ “It is very unlikely that ‘civility’ will develop much in a globalized society that is interconnected in real time if our manifestations of *canophilia* are little more than a circumstantial alibi that we employ allegorically to exhibit our own profound misanthropy.” (Translation by the author.)

to conceptually reconstruct Canda's anguish? Why, in the end, must the matter be posed as if one *has to choose* between the suffering of one or the other as if there were no other alternative? Villena, for example, seems overridden by revulsion when describing the sardonic, racist acclamations of Canda's death: "lejos de mostrar compasión y lamentar una muerte tan cruel," he writes, "lo celebraban de manera grosera y sin lugar a dudas xenófoba, como si se tratara de un acto de justicia o, peor aún, como un acto de defensa de la nación" (2015, p. 41).⁸ As if deepening into Natividad the dog's suffering were an insult to the memory of Canda, Villena of course refrains from being nearly as opinionated when it comes to the pain or misery that the sick, starving canine surely felt. Why is the condemnation of *both* forms of suffering unacceptable to such critics?

Furthermore, we may also continue to question the 'health' behind the metaphor of the two Natividades. Recall that much like Vargas, Evaristi, Alabado or Ping also commodified animals into allegorizing the human condition, whether from a more existential or a more sociopolitical framework. Baker traces the origins of such allegories to a few decades earlier, stating that

the last quarter of the century saw artists' traditional use of animals as little more than remote ciphers for human meanings begin to give way to instances of artist and animal coming closer together as living beings caught up in each other's affairs, willingly or otherwise. (2002, pp. 68-69)

We must keep in mind that animals are not empty signifiers – as part of our conceptual and social world, we invest in them a series of meanings, connotations and associations that appeal to

⁸ "Far from showing compassion and lamenting such a cruel death, they celebrated it in a coarse (and undoubtedly xenophobic) manner, as if it were an act of justice or, even worse, an act of defending the nation." (Translation by the author.)

our cultures, social habits and personal experiences. Whether the result of a species is that of becoming ‘charismatic megafauna,’ or of becoming part of some other categorical imagery (such as ‘pests’ or ‘food,’ for instance), what remains are still powerful connotations of which artists are well aware of, as their choice in animal species for proposals is not random.

As Villena notes, beyond the very particular meanings that dogs represent (domesticity, loyalty, unconditional love), Costa Rica has in recent decades encouraged a humane, public appreciation towards *zaguates* [mutts],⁹ upon whom citizens mirror themselves as *ticos*, a term used to absorb the multiethnic heritage of their culture. As Costa Rica has, in recent years, grown in its environmental and animal welfare policies, its cultural appreciation of the *zaguete* has increasingly become a motif of national identification. In 2009, Francisco Munguía’s aesthetic tribute to an estimate of one million homeless dogs in Costa Rica came in the form of the *Monumento al Zaguete*, made up of six steel sculptures modeled on real dogs with tragic stories and erected in one of the most eminent boulevards in San José. Just one year before, visionary Álvaro Saumet had founded ‘Territorio de Zaguates,’ a non-profit organization and shelter for more than six hundred dogs in Heredia. With its no-kill policy and with a vast wild terrain where different ‘packs’ are taken out for exercise on a regular basis, ‘Territorio de Zaguates’ has in little time become a worldwide exemplary referent for twenty-first century shelters. Gestures and breakthroughs such as these suggest not only a cultural assimilation of the dog as a sentient being with interests to which we must respond ethically, but also an empowering acculturation of the

⁹ Other designations referring to mixed-breed dogs abound in Central and South American slang. In Chile, for instance, dogs belonging to the ‘lower classes’ are called *quiltros* (Blanco Amor, 2003, 179) while in Colombia, strays are commonly known as *chandositos*.

zaguato as part of Costa Rican national identity. As such, the dog (or more precisely the mixed-breed stray) has gained the status of ‘charismatic megafauna’ within the country.

In such times of shifting attitudes towards stray dogs, Vargas’s personal choice to feature one makes a statement itself about his play with metaphoric intricacies. Natividad, hence, simultaneously emblemized Canda (and was therefore, Nicaraguan in a sense) and Costa Rican identity. His condition as a mixed breed within Vargas’s vision is the place where the *zaguato*, the *tico* and the *nica* fuse together, marking a stark contrast with the purebred Rottweilers that ended Canda’s life and were so sensationalized through anti-Nicaraguan jokes and racist stereotypes (Sandoval-García, 2011, p. 298). But what is at issue in our case is the limits upon the metaphor imposed by both Vargas himself and his supporters. If we do in fact entertain the conjuring powers of the polysemic Natividad (and here I do not just refer to his being a stray and to his deplorable, physical state, but also to his symbolic powers in being forcefully placed as he was, helplessly tied within the walls of a gallery), why must the metaphor be considered deviant the moment when sympathy and empathy become the viewer’s response? To put it another way, if the dog is good enough to symbolize Canda and the complexities of Costa Rican-Nicaraguan sociopolitical tensions, why is he not good enough to actually, truly and vividly *incarnate* a form of suffering to which we can relate and respond to in the interest of the sufferer? This brings us back to defenders of Vargas’s logic that, since the two Natividads’ forms of suffering are unparalleled, empathizing for the dog must imply carelessness for the man. For them, the metaphor must stop at some point if their ethical stance is to sustain itself, for if the metaphor continues into the depths of contemporary emotion and reason when it comes to nonhuman others, then it is regarded as immoral. This is quite the paradox for those who commend themselves for their self-proclaimed belief in the absolute freedom of expression in art.

The Discourse

Those that through the Internet raised their voice in dire disapproval of *Exposition #1* and signed the petition to keep Vargas off the Biennial tend to be pigeonholed and counterattacked through a series of repetitive arguments. Take for instance the position of another critic:

¿Por qué nos interesamos tanto en juzgar y criticar la acción de un artista dentro de una galería y no nos preocupamos por los mismos hechos que suceden a diario a nuestro alrededor? En la actualidad estamos más interesados en el ‘show’; es decir, en todo lo que se expone de tal manera que no forme parte de la realidad. (Cejas, 2011, p. 22).¹⁰

According to this view, caring for the dog not only implies an inherent negligence towards everyday suffering (be that of men or other stray dogs); it also discloses a hypothetical craving for sensationalist scenarios. And yet Vargas’s own position regarding the fate of the dog is not called into question. Vargas has always remained cryptic about what happened to Natividad, as he mysteriously disappeared from the exhibit on August 17. Speculations – and even confirmations – that the dog had indeed been starved to death circulated through the Internet, while the Códice Gallery proprietor, Juanita Bermúdez, released a statement saying that the dog had run away. Bermúdez went even further and asserted that there had been no actual animal abuse, and that the dog had been untied during the hours that the exhibit was closed and had been regularly fed by Vargas himself. Unwilling to neither confirm Bermúdez’s statement nor clarify the whereabouts

¹⁰ “Why are we so interested in judging and criticizing the actions of an artist within a gallery while at the same time we care so little about the same situation taking place on a daily basis around us? Nowadays we are more interested in the show; that is, in everything that is exhibited in such way that it is not part of reality.” (Translation by the author.)

of Natividad, Vargas continued to fuel the escalating rumors, much to the desperation of the public. One can, therefore, ask whether it is not Vargas himself, rather than the concerned public, who opportunistically exploited the free publicity that he was getting.

The ambiguity with which Vargas ‘performed’ had less to do with artistic originality and creativity and more to do with behaving like an ordinary, mundane online user. Villena (2015, p. 171) describes how Vargas actively participated in spreading the rumors that confirmed the dog’s death, publishing pictures of the proposal alongside a short note on other blogs. This invigoration of his own public image neither cleared up the hearsay with facts nor revealed any intention on the part of the artist to clear his own name. Such ‘sacrificial’ movement whereupon the relevance of the proposal was to overrule any chance for the artist to recover some semblance of a humane reputation, however, can be read as a well-played stunt. Releasing enigmatic statements to keep detractors intrigued has more in common with the leaking of one’s sex tape to reach celebrity status than it does with aesthetic artifice. Careers are boosted thanks to a public who collectivizes itself through consuming the image of the artist/sex-tape protagonist that is driven by the promise of stardom (Barron, 2015, p. 126). Vargas’s thirst for exposure and his aspiration to become a ‘brand’ within the space where the artistic community and popular culture meet, however, is inconsistent insofar as it simultaneously criticizes and capitalizes on western culture dynamics. In much the same way that western culture gallery codes of ‘inaction’ play in his allegory’s favor, so does he exploit the contemporary western pop culture chain reaction between performing an infamous act and resuscitating as a public icon of sorts, whatever the integrity of the final reputation may be. Staying true to the aphorism that there is no such thing as bad publicity, Vargas conveniently mimics the dynamics of western culture that he is otherwise so overtly critical of for its ethical stance on animal suffering.

In all fairness, Villena does indeed acknowledge Vargas's timeliness to make a name for himself by meticulously handling the rumors. Nonetheless (and despite his efforts to give his work the appearance of objective impartiality), Villena does appear to favor Vargas in many ways. For one thing, little is said about the fact that the 'shock' merit is arguably more attributable to Natividad than it is to Vargas himself. A quick glance at the literature on *Exposition #1* will instantly reveal that what made the proposal memorable was only one feature: Natividad. Little regard is given to the smell of the crack-cocaine, to the hymn or even to the baffling writing on the wall, which come off as merely complementary and anecdotal. It is the 'realness' of the dog that demands, by its very nature, both aesthetic and ethical attention.

An animal may be trained more or less cruelly to perform a certain trick, but the animal per se is not conscious of the space that requires of him to *act*. This is not to say that many animals, including the dog, are not self-conscious. As current scientific evidence substantiates, dogs are more than capable of self-consciousness. Horowitz (2009) has argued, for instance, that dogs' ability to 'instrumentalize' humans to get what they want or to adapt the intensity of their play to the size and capabilities of their partner in a game is reasonable proof of the species' capacity to empathize. Being able to place oneself in the position of the other subject necessitates a previous state of self-awareness. But our own traditional understanding of 'acting,' by which make-believe and the suspension of disbelief become encoded, and which we associate to particular kinds of cultural spaces, is not something dogs are, in all likelihood, aware of. Hence, as Orozco claims, "the place of representation that is the theatre cannot cope with what cannot be represented, and that is why live animals are rarely used as signs" (2013, p. 72). In a similar manner, the gallery space presents a difficulty in negotiating the meaning of the immediacy of the realness of the animal. Habituated to operating in accordance to the suggestive, the evocative and the symbolic,

gallery conventions are imploded because of the presence of the animal, who emerges as an outsider to the performance, and who is stuck in the legitimacy and credibility of its own nature. The shock value of *Exposition #1* is a given the moment in which the selfness of the dog subverts its spatial placement. Vargas may have been the one to place Natividad there, but if there is anything that excites an aesthetic response (even if this is of little importance within the wider, ethical issue at play), we would do well to consider the fact that it may indeed emanate more from Natividad himself than from Vargas.

There seems to be a shared sense amongst defenders of Vargas that to respond *ethically* rather than *aesthetically* to Natividad's suffering is to misunderstand the role of art as a phenomenon where freedom of expression must always supersede likeability or conformity with the medium through which it is materialized. However, it is ironic that while freedom of expression in the arts is championed, the freedom of expression of those who utterly condemned the proposal is so easily dismissed as uneducated and perverse. Firstly, Villena exposes his own outlook through a bigoted perception of the detractors. Despite his insistence on the diversity of the tones reflecting animosity, the excessive protagonism given to Spanish blogger Jaime Sancho and, although to a lesser extent, Rosa Montero – whose piece in *El País* he describes as “tendencioso” [“tendentious”] (2015, p. 91) – remains reductive and imbalanced, as surely the more than four million people signing the petition must have had different takes on the matter, regardless of their common objective. Villena delights in exposing the inaccuracies of the information published by Sancho, who imprudently regarded and disseminated certain rumors as true. By making Sancho the ‘ambassador’ of the public condemnation of Vargas and by directing the focus onto his more radical statements, Villena both dodges and silences the more articulate and reasonable criticisms against *Exposition #1*.

Secondly, while Vargas himself is portrayed as a provocative, multi-layered artist who vigorously combines aesthetic vision with a talent for the manipulation of the media, his critics tend to be categorized as rash individuals driven by an unfulfilled need for identification in social groups:

En la mayor parte de los casos, intervenir en la polémica habría permitido, además de construir una imagen propia como persona decente y socialmente ‘aceptable,’ que ‘hace algo’ para salvar el mundo, liberar tensiones psicológicas y crear la ilusión de pertenencia a una comunidad virtual . . . (Villena, 2015, p. 98)¹¹

Such psychoanalytic endeavors are absent from Villena’s discursive construction of Vargas as an individual and as a public persona. He seems insistent not only in labeling empathy for Natividad as a form of hypocritical “canophilia” (2015, p. 81), but also in suggesting that such empathy is the result of an emotional emptiness and frustration, conjectures which, according to Garber (1996, p. 122) are frequent amongst those who sneer at any hint of emotional bonding with dogs. Perceived as a symptom of deviance, concern for the interests of animals has traditionally been associated with sentimentality and femininity. Again, such position overlooks contemporary

¹¹ “In the majority of the cases, intervening in the controversy would have enabled not only the construction of a self-image as a decent and socially ‘acceptable’ person who ‘does something’ to save the world, but also the liberating of psychological tensions and the creation of the illusion of belonging to a virtual community.” (Translation by the author.) I’ve just reread this translation and perhaps my effort to make it literal in the end makes the sentence structure sound a bit strained... Here is a less literal (but perhaps more understandable) translation, but please feel free to choose whichever you think is best:

“In the majority of the cases, people feel that participating in the controversy makes them a more decent and socially ‘acceptable’ human being that ‘does something’ to save the world. Their intervention also relaxes their psychological tension and it creates the illusion that they belong to a virtual community.” (Translation by the author.)

assimilations of animal liberation and rights principles. Singer argued in *Animal Liberation* that an ethical system that included the interests of animals was the product of argumentative reasoning (not sentimentalism), and that those who assimilated such moral undertakings were no more “animal lovers” than the abolitionists were “nigger-lovers” (1975/1990, p. ii) (or, by extension, were suffragists ‘women lovers’). Villena indistinctly refers to all who were critical of Vargas’s commodification of Natividad as “animalistas” [animalists], disregarding the possibility that ethical commitment towards nonhuman others may just be part of a wider moral outlook that links all forms of suffering, be that human or animal. A more inclusive term to refer to the four million petitioners would have been more attuned with the positions of those that the author seems inclined to simplify and stereotype as a group. Even further evidence of this negligent portrayal is Villena’s tendency to refer to Natividad as “el perrito” [“the doggy”] time and again: although diminutives are common in the Central and South American Spanish variants, Villena’s unrelenting use of the signifier, in italics, comes off as dissonant when inserted within the sobriety of his arguments. More than paying tribute to the authenticity of the language, he appears to again ridicule Vargas’s critics by condescendingly infantilizing their object of concern.

When not infantilized or pictured as sentimental, an oft-quoted accusation against Vargas’s critics is that of resembling the Nazis’ radical censorship and destruction of modern, ‘degenerate’ art. Villena documents several instances in which the comparison is applied: from the committee of experts behind the Costa Rican Visual Arts Biennial (2007) to the declarations made by the artist and critic Joaquín Rodríguez del Paso and the Cuban curator Iván de la Nuez, the Nazi metaphor spreads along the discourse of those who regard the worldwide petition against Vargas as a form of censoring. This rhetorical strategy has often been the object of study of discourse analysts who identify the detrimental symbolism inoculated within anything associated with

Nazism. As Ravetto argues, Nazism as a sign functions in current western culture as a polarizing force between good and evil: “Nazism is stripped of all ideology, all humanity, culture and history in order to become a permanent prop in the historical clearinghouse of icons of repudiation and moral malfeasance” (2001, p. 36). The effect is, needless to say, very simple: those who stand against anything that may be comparable to the totalitarian logic of Nazism must represent ultimate moral goodness. To describe a plight against the use of a suffering animal as dictatorial censorship and activists’ petition to veto Vargas from the Biennial as a Nazi scheme makes a powerful statement about the extent to which such critics envision their moral outtake as the virtuous, righteous conduct.

The Holocaust metaphor is itself part of the common rhetoric of animal rightists and intellectuals such as Isaac Bashevis Singer, and has been for some time analyzed for its moral implications as much as for its actual efficacy in building a case for animals. A landmark work on the subject was Spiegel’s *The Dreaded Comparison* (1988), which concluded that human and animal rights are indeed an extension of the same philosophical imperative against the oppression and enslavement of the ‘other.’ While the comparison does incite profound discussion on the very nature of ethics, what I would like to point out is that while there seems to have been little backlash against art critics’ rather loose application of the Nazi metaphor, animal liberationists have been viciously criticized for the use of the metaphor towards their own end. Envisioning factory farms, slaughterhouses, fur farms and laboratories as concentration camps is not a far-fetched correlative: the methodology of abuse and exploitation remains the same in several aspects (systematic use of assembly lines, crowding in inhumane conditions, unconsented experimentation, massive extermination, etc.). Whatever resistance emerges against the allegory stems from our own shock at perhaps acknowledging our responsibility as the perpetrators of this carnage. In the same way

that pro-Vargas critics could only accept the dog/human metaphor to a certain extent, so do those who find the Holocaust analogy unacceptable remain within the suspicion that to have an ethical consideration for these animals somehow trivializes the suffering of the millions of victims of the Nazi regime. My point is to reflect on why art critics seem to get away with the metaphor easily while those who defend animal rights have a difficult history of negotiation with it. A fairly recent example of this is the harsh verbal incursion against artist Jo Fredricks's 2014 piece, *The Animal Holocaust*, where the controversy led to a dispute over the 'ownership' of the word 'Holocaust' (Kerr, 2014, p. 5). To be fair, art critics only take the Nazi metaphor insofar as crimes against *art* go, while in the second case it is the Jewish Holocaust that is conjured. Nonetheless, what would seem to be a discursive bias on the part of art critics is their refusal to mention or even entertain the idea that beyond the so-called collective censorship of Vargas, the Nazi symbol they are so partial to could also be applicable to how millions of people interpret the crime against Natividad the dog, to which they would appear as the passive accomplices this time.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to contribute to the open discussion surrounding Guillermo Vargas's *Exposition #1* by responding to those who belittled the millions of people that protested the proposal for its exploitation of a suffering dog. I have tried to show that Vargas's piece opportunistically came at a time when a considerable (and growing) part of global citizenship was beginning to reflect on the problematic ethics behind institutionalized forms of animal exploitation and abuse. Within this twenty-first-century context, perhaps a wiser interpretation of the gargantuan online reaction against Vargas would be to not digest the event as one merely concerning the limits of art, but rather, the limits of animal exploitation.

I end with a couple of final observations on what it is that the critics defending Vargas would, it seems, have wanted from the public. Because ethical shock appears, through their logic, unreasonable and unfitting within the gallery/museum codes, the acceptable response would have been for everyone (and not just the actual, physical visitors) to have assimilated Vargas's allegory solely through *aesthetic* shock. That is, in their view, what would have completed the artistic process would have been the absolute detachment from Natividad the moment before the metaphor crossed beyond the aesthetic and into the moral realm. The processing of the proposal would have then been self-contained and complete, as the online viewers would also have passively and fittingly reincarnated the men who mercilessly let Canda suffer and die before their eyes, thus recreating the role of the accomplices to the horrid crime. It seems, therefore, that the optimal citizenship for the artistic community is the one that, for the sake of gallery and museum conventions, vanquishes all ethical commitment and integrity in the name of an ahistorical appreciation of human creativity. If this is the type of art that is championed, then perhaps they would do well to remember that neither an anesthetized public nor apathy to suffering (regardless of what species, race, disability status, sex or gender it is) have ever led to philanthropy for the 'other,' a category which itself has proven so volatile over the course of history. Unable to keep up with neither the philosophical and moral dilemmas of the twenty-first century nor with the current ineffectiveness of shock art within popular culture, those who defended Vargas may more prudently reconsider what is really at stake in the celebration of this ideal, public inertia.

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JCAS SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Editorial Objectives

The journal for Critical Animal Studies is open to all scholars and activists. The journal was established for the purpose of fostering academic study of critical animal issues in contemporary society. While animal studies is increasingly becoming a field of importance in the academy, much work being done under this moniker takes a reformist or depoliticized approach that fails to mount a more serious critique of underlying issues of political economy and speciesist philosophy. JCAS is an interdisciplinary journal with an emphasis on animal liberation philosophy and policy issues. The journal was designed to build up the common activist's knowledge of animal liberation while at the same time appealing to academic specialists. We encourage and actively pursue a diversity of viewpoints of contributors from the frontlines of activism to academics. We have created the journal for the purpose of facilitating communication between the many diverse perspectives of the animal liberation movement. Thus, we especially encourage submissions that seek to create new syntheses between differing disputing parties and to explore paradigms not currently examined.

Suggested Topics

Papers are welcomed on any area of animal liberation philosophy from any discipline, and presenters are encouraged to share theses or dissertation chapters. Because a major goal of the Institute for Critical Animal Studies is to foster philosophical, critical, and analytical thinking about animal liberation, papers that contribute to this project will be given priority (especially papers that address critical theory, political philosophy, social movement analysis, tactical analysis, feminism, activism and academia, Continental philosophy, or post-colonial perspectives). We especially encourage contributions that engage animal liberation in disciplines and debates that have received little previous attention.

Review Process

Each paper submitted is initially reviewed for general suitability for publication; suitable submissions will be read by at least two members of the journal's editorial board.

Manuscript Requirements

The manuscript should be in MS Word format and follow APA guidelines. All submissions should be double-spaced and in 12 point Times New Roman. Good quality electronic copies of all figures and tables should also be provided. All manuscripts should conform to American spelling.

As a guide, we ask that regular essays and reviews be between 2000-8000 words and have limited endnotes. In exceptional circumstances, JCAS will consider publishing extended essays. Authors should supply a brief abstract of the paper (of no more than 250 words). A brief autobiographical note should be supplied which includes full names, affiliation, email address, and full contact details.

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