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Issue Introduction: The Effectiveness of Fiction and Activism within Critical Animal Studies

Nathan Poirier

This issue presents three articles that span a range of issues important to critical animal studies. The first two articles use fiction to draw out important implications of humans' relations with nonhumans. While perhaps seeming more theory driven, both articles have activist implications. Using fiction to discuss oppression helps convey a message of cruelty in a way that may be deemed more acceptable by readers who may then be more likely to heed the lessons in the articles and their respective fictional works (De Vries, 2016). Readers understand that the actual animals in the story do not exist and were not abused. However, similar animals do exist and are abused in similar ways. Different parts of a story may resonate more or less strongly with individual readers, whereas with a philosophical argument, if one premise is considered inadequate, the whole of the conclusion may be deemed invalid. Taking cues from fictional literature can effectively impart humane lessons onto individuals who are then equipped to translate those lessons into changes in attitudes and behaviors.

The first article, by Margaret Villari, "The Proximity Paradox: Understanding Reality through Animals and Fiction," explores what she terms the "proximity paradox" concerning animal experimentation. This paradox relies on two contradictory notions: that humans are similar enough to nonhuman animals to justify experimentation while remaining different enough to justify why we do not experiment on humans in the same ways. Villari approaches this tension through Thalia Field's novel *Experimental Animals*. Villari finds a similar paradox in the use of documents, which would include such things as this journal issue and Villari's own study, to obtain knowledge. Villari's use of fiction to investigate a topic as serious and material as animal experimentation may have a wider appeal to connect personally with audiences, helping to facilitate change.

Next is Anastassiya Andrianova's essay, "Why Did Gerasim Drown His Mumu? Animal Subjectivity in Turgenev's 'Mumu'" again engages with a work of (this time Russian) fictional literature. Andrianova uses the lenses of

disability and animality to highlight the life of the fictional dog from the novella's title whose role has been subsumed to that of the main human character, Gerasim. Andrianova argues that there is an important relationship between embodiment and subjectivity for the character of Mumu. Using this as a basis for a CAS reading opens new avenues for practical application. Subtly present in the background of this essay is a discussion of the ethics of murdering faithful Mumu versus the humane means of putting down companion animals in our modern world.

The last of this issue's three essays complements the first two by being heavily activist-oriented. Activism should not be undertaken simply for the sake of doing something, but it must also aim to be effective for those it is meant to help liberate (Terhaar, 2012). CAS supports radical strategies for liberation but also recognizes that some tactics may be more convincing to certain groups than others. Thus, diversity in strategy is a guiding principle of effective activism. Which strategy to choose, and when, can be dictated by prevailing theory and previous experience. As a radical total liberation activist, it is advisable to have a general understanding of various approaches to activism, their pros and cons, and who is more likely to be persuaded by their use.

To this end, the last article, entitled, "The Emotional Politics of Images: Moral Shock, Explicit Violence and Strategic Visual Communication in the Animal Liberation Movement," is about communication strategies for animal activists, particularly concerning the use of graphic images. Laura Fernández reviews existing literature on the efficacy of graphic images and discovers mixed results. As Fernández covers, visceral imagery can both shock people into a type of paralysis and shock people into action. While Fernández's ultimate conclusion is that the effectiveness of graphic imagery needs more research, a further result that is apparent is that its use should neither be avoided entirely nor relied upon as the sole means of communication with the public. Because the situations of so many nonhumans are so precarious, with the animals themselves being so vulnerable, Fernández's discussion of strategy is important because it contributes towards effective action.

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The Proximity Paradox: Understanding Reality through Animals and Fiction

Margaret Villari

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Abstract

The contradictions present in the documentary form and the epistemological content of Thalia Field's book, *Experimental Animals* (2016), attempts to model a more accurate understanding of modern reality. By choosing to use the vivisection debate as content and "reality fiction" as a form, Field invites readers to consider the problematic way in which we make and chose our truths. The dichotomous relationships in *Experimental Animals* mimic the necessary contradiction in the justification for vivisection and create what I term the "proximity paradox": One must recognize and accept a human likeness to an animal to use it for the advancement of the understanding of human physiology, but at the same time one must distance themselves from the animal, marking them as Other, to lawfully perform the brutal task. In a similar vein, one must recognize the document as something that is close enough to reality to justify its production, but at the same time must distance oneself from the document to receive a more accurate representation of reality. Distance functions paradoxically, then, when considering the epistemological relationship between vivisection and the uses of documents to create knowledge.

Keywords: experimental animals; reality fiction; proximity paradox; animal studies; Thalia Field; epistemology.

Without our animal companions it is obvious that we would not have certain foods, clothing, or comforts. It might not be as obvious, though, that without animals smallpox would still be crippling our immune systems, we would be unaware of insulin's power in controlling diabetes, and the Medical Nobel Peace prize would be virtually nonexistent ("Animal Research and Testing," 2016). According to the U.S. based Foundation for Biomedical Research's (FBR) website:

Animal research has played a vital role in virtually every major medical advance of the last century - for both human and veterinary health. From antibiotics to blood transfusions, from dialysis to organ transplantation, from vaccinations to chemotherapy, bypass surgery and joint replacement, practically every present-day protocol for the prevention, treatment, cure and control of disease, pain and suffering is based on knowledge attained through research with lab animals. (Animal Research and Testing, 2016)

FBR has recently started a campaign titled "Love Animals? Support Animal Research" which acknowledges the "really complicated issue" that plagues the medical field because of animal activism. The campaign singles out pet-owners as individuals who should support animal research because, "health problems—surprise!—affect our four-legged friends just as they do people" (Animal Research and Testing, 2016) Embedded in this logic is a hierarchy of vitality and suffering: who should suffer so others may not? Who should die so others may live? Who gets to make these decisions? For example, questions of why we eat some animals and worship others spread across culture, race, religion, gender, class, etc. Wrapped inside these ontological debates are variances of epistemology that result in a framed dominant narrative, designed to swiftly silence the possibility of alternative narratives.

Thalia Field's "reality fiction" *Experimental Animals* (2016) navigates the overwhelming intersection between the use of animals in creating knowledge and mediums which envelope and deliver this knowledge as a singular dominant narrative. Field is a professor of literary arts at Brown University, has authored five books prior to *Experimental Animals*, and has significant experience working in theaters in the U.S. and in Europe. Her book *Experimental Animals* is partly the story of Claude Bernard, a 19th century French physiologist, "Father of Experimental Medicine," and unapologetic vivisectionist who is celebrated for discovering

the pancreatic function, his work with the poison curare, and many other scientific discoveries, as a result of his brutal experiments on animals. Laced throughout, documentary materials including photos, scientific diagrams, news articles of the day, excerpts from Claude's notebooks, personal letters, and records from famous public intellectuals in the 19th century is the invented voice of Claude's wife and accidental animal activist, Fanny Bernard. Fanny's voice acts as both the connective tissue amongst the archival material collected by Field for over a decade and an influential representative for historically silenced voices (Slate, 2017).

While there have been a number of popular nonfiction works that discuss the ontological, moral, and ethical debates embedded in the dialectical relationship between animals and humans, such as Jonathan Safran Foer's *Eating Animals* (2009), few have explored the epistemological value of animals by incorporating works of fiction in order to bring attention to the growing movement. Though Field's work is unique amongst them in its form of reality fiction, two novels that explore historical issues involving the liberation of animals from their subjugated history are J. M. Coetzee's foundational novella, *The Lives of Animals* (1999) and Jesmyn Ward's more recent work *Salvage the Bones* (2011). As the field of critical animal studies began to take form about thirty years ago, Coetzee offers a fictional story exploring the stigmas attached to being an "animal activist" in academia in the 90s. Ward's work helps carry the field by exploring the shortcomings of US law in protecting nonhuman lives in times of crisis. *Salvage the Bones* follows the lives of a working-class African American family, including their dog China, through Hurricane Katrina. Coetzee, Ward, and Field use fiction to provide a foundation for navigating the difficult complexity of a very real, powerful, and growing movement.

Experimental Animals starts with the forced marriage of Fanny and Claude Bernard. Because Fanny was the daughter of a wealthy physician, her hand in marriage came with a considerable dowry that allowed Claude to finish his education and continue to carry out his experiments. Unfortunately for him, Fanny grew to question then despise the work Claude was doing, having to consistently encounter mutilated animals. The ethical price of Claude's experiments poisons their marriage and pit wife against husband as Fanny responds by stealing the dogs, cats, and other animals from Claude's "collectors," people, usually young boys, employed by Claude to lure animals into the streets, sometimes even out of pet owners' homes, and

capture them for his experiments. Though their unhappy marriage sets the stage for the contradictory predicaments presented throughout the rest of the book, the characters of Claude and Fanny eventually fragment and begin to proliferate into other characters, including Anna Kingsford, Emilie Zola, Charles Darwin, George Elliot, Francis Cobbe, and Victor Hugo. These scholars, along with the book's content and form, tackle a number of philosophical, ontological, emotional, and ethical questions that occupied 19th century minds, and continue to confound us to this day.

While considering the complicated connection between animal experimentation and epistemology, I argue that the contradictions present in the documentary form and the epistemological content of Field's novel attempts to model a more accurate sense of reality. By choosing to use the vivisection debate as content and reality fiction as form, Field invites readers to consider how we make and choose our truths. The dichotomous relationships in *Experimental Animals* mimic the necessary contradiction in the justification for vivisection: one must recognize and accept a human likeness to an animal in order to use them for the advancement of the understanding of human physiology; but at the same time one must distance themselves from the animal, marking them as Other, to lawfully perform the brutal task. In a similar vein, one must recognize the document as something that is close enough to reality to justify its production, but at the same time must distance oneself from the document in order to receive a more accurate representation of reality. Distance functions paradoxically, then, when considering the epistemological relationship between vivisection and the uses of documents to create knowledge. Distancing oneself from an animal allows for the violence done to an unfamiliar body "in the name of scientific fact" to be ignored more easily, silencing and therefore distorting parts of reality, while distancing reality from the document allows us to dismantle its authority as a singular, dominant narrative, recognize the contradictions that exist within our creation of knowledge, and therefore more accurately represent reality. In short, it seems Field is drawing attention to the spectrum of truth and attempting to carve out a space in the world of "fact" where silenced voices can be heard, and where reaching or claiming a definitive conclusion is recognized as useless. The turn away from a kind of thinking that relies on certainty levels the authoritative power of the absolute fact of science (vivisection) and document (dominant narrative) with the ambiguity and contradiction present in most aspects of reality.

In this paper, I provide readers with a potential model, what I term “the proximity paradox,” for understanding the complicated relationships between animals, reality, fiction, and epistemology. Most generally put, the proximity paradox emerges when one cannot accept a truth without simultaneously acknowledging a likeness, or closeness, and difference, or distance. For example, one must acknowledge that humans are similar to animals in order to justify the research value of animal experimentation for the benefit of humanity, but at the same time must acknowledge their difference from animals to make it acceptable for them be killed and/or tortured in the name of science. The proximity paradox can be used as a way of navigating the ambiguity and balancing oneself in a modern world that destabilizes the authority of certainty and truth (see figure 1 on page 24 for a visualization of the proximity paradox).

I begin with a brief history of 19th century vivisection followed by a short evaluation of the genre of documentary poetics, the fast-emerging critical field of animal studies, and Thalia Field’s categorization of her book as a reality fiction. I attempt to connect the three schools of thought by positing reality fiction as a subgenre of documentary poetics, and animal studies as an area of inquiry related to documentary poetics in that its purpose is to change the fundamental structures on which we think and act in modern times. I then use the significant theme of silencing, the incorporation of Fanny Bernard’s fictional voice, and the proximity paradox to support my claim that the content and form of Field’s book react and respond to one another in a way that destabilizes how we build knowledge by challenging the authority of the document in a human-centric world. By the end of the paper, I hope to have contributed to Field’s admirable purpose of fostering a public sense of wisdom in what we consider life’s worth, no matter who it belongs to.

A Brief History of 19th Century Vivisection and Animal Welfare

The significant yet troubling conflict between medical experiments and animal welfare breached the walls of the legislature in England in 1876 with the world’s first move to regulate vivisection. The complicated intersection between scientists’ approach to vivisection as an indispensable experimental method generating fundamental knowledge toward the advancement of physiology and the public’s retaliation against the quietly violent, barbarous treatment of animals, inspired Frances Power Cobbe to

request a bill that might reduce any unnecessary suffering. Defined in one of the earliest drafts of the Vivisection Act vivisection is (for further discussion on the Vivisection Act see Hamilton, 2013):

the cutting or wounding or treating with galvanism or other appliances, any living vertebrate animal for purposes of physiological research or demonstration, also the artificial production in any living vertebrate animal of painful disease for purposes of physiological research or demonstration. (1876)

Several provisions outlined in the early drafts of the Act were passed into law, such as the periodical inspection of vivisection facilities and requiring a license to conduct experiments without anesthesia. However, penalties imposed for violations of this act were somewhat minor: a small fee for a first offense and two small fees or three months in prison for any further violations. Coupled with the less-than threatening punishments, the overwhelming complexity of the Act led to its inability to be understood and carried out by the police resulting in the ultimate failure of the attempt to mediate the vivisection war which would rage on for centuries to come (Hamilton, 2013).

Recognizing the shortcomings of the Vivisection Act, students at the London School of Medicine for Women took action. Experiencing the suffering of vivisected animals firsthand led medical students Lind-af Hageby and Liese Schartau to publish an essay, *The Shambles of Science*, that gave the animal welfare movement significant momentum (for further discussion see Lansbury, 1985). The essay caused several significant reactions, the most prominent of which is the donation of a memorial to a terrier, and all victims of vivisection, in 1906: a water fountain strategically placed for public exposure in a recreational park. The inscription on the fountain read:

In Memory of the Brown Terrier Dog Done to Death in the Laboratories of University College in February, 1903, after having endured Vivisection extending over more than Two Months and having been handed from one Vivisector to Another Till Death came to his Release. Also in Memory of the 232 dogs Vivisected at the same place during the year 1902. Men and Women of England, how long shall these Things be? (Lansbury, 1985)

The statue angered unsupportive medical students and inspired the Old Brown Dog Riots of 1907 which led to its eventual removal three years later. While this might seem to be a defeat, the incredible hard work and perseverance of the antivivisectionist groups, namely the National Anti-Vivisection Society and the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection, paid off after seventy-five years when the Brown Dog Statue was re-erected in 1985, never to be removed. The statue bears the original inscription along with an important reminder of the appalling rise in the number of animals treated with cruelty, violence, and indifference:

Animal experimentation is one of the greatest moral issues of our time and should have no place in a civilized society. In 1903, 19,084 animals suffered and died in British laboratories. During 1984, 3,497,355 animals were burned, blinded, irradiated, poisoned and subjected to countless other horrifyingly cruel experiments in Great Britain. (Lansbury, 1985)

The following year the UK passed the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act of 1986 which, while tightening up some loose ends, remains almost as ambiguous as the Vivisection Act of 1876. Equally as obscure is the United States Animal Welfare Act (AWA), a blanket bill intended to provide the foundation for all animal welfare and protection, passed in 1966. However, birds, rats, and mice—species that comprise over 90% of animals in US laboratories—were specifically excluded by the Secretary of Agriculture in 1972 and are still not protected under the AWA. In 2020 vivisection remains legal worldwide under the condition that animals be anesthetized prior to the experiment, and, according to the Humane Society of the United States, it is estimated, “that more than 25 million vertebrate animals (animals with a skeleton made of bone) are used annually in research, testing, and education” (“Animals Used in...”, 2020). There are exceptions, of course, in almost all animal welfare legislature regarding vivisection, that allows vivisection sans sedation if the experiment is deemed “scientifically necessary.” Many of the laws passed, including the AWA, do not make clear the definition of “scientific necessity” forcing us to question what has changed since 1876 and to revisit, yet again, the provocative question on the Brown Dog statue: How long shall these things be?

Documentary Poetics, Animal Studies, and Reality Fiction

Before diving into *Experimental Animals*, this analysis must define the term “documentary poetics,” and explain the relationship among documentary poetics, reality fiction, and animal studies. It is the *purpose* of documentary poetics that connects it to animal studies: to expose suffering by shedding light on things we do not understand or are conditioned not to see. In his essay “From Reznikoff to Public Enemy,” American poet, scholar, and activist Philip Metres explains that the use of documentary materials in poetry “give voice to stories of people and movements that the mass media tend to ignore or misrepresent” (2007). Similarly, professor Derek Ryan writes in his introduction to animal theory that in animal studies “we find the often marginalized voices that open up the possibility of a thinking which is not centered on humanity” (2015, p. 5). It is important to note that while these genres speak of giving voice, they do not do so in a way that subscribes to an ableist narrative that inherently sees the privileged human as savior to the disempowered, but rather attempt to disrupt such thinking by exposing the deleterious effects of historical and modern forms of silencing (for more on ableist narratives see Nocella et al., 2017). This exposition exposes the dialectical connection between the genres of documentary poetics and animal studies in their relationships with content and form.

On its surface, documentary poetics deals primarily with form by recontextualizing documents, changing their form and presenting the information as poetry (or in Field’s case, a reality fiction). On the other hand, animal studies seems to deal primarily with content, challenging the human-centric thought processes upon which we build our knowledge by resisting thought fortified by a belief that the human is the center. However, it is the moment of connection between form and content within these genres that binds them to one another. In a video lecture titled “Assemblage Theory, Society, and Deleuze,” professor Manuel DeLanda explains that Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze “decided deliberately not to have to reach consensus about everything” in their two volume post-structuralism collaboration, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (European Graduate School Video Lectures, 2012). Within this heterogeneous analysis Guattari and Deleuze present the philosophical concept of rhizomes, a model of organization inspired by botanical roots used to describe connectivity. These relationships work on challenging thought patterns that reinforce hierarchies and binaries by rejecting the idea that existence is organized linearly. Instead, the interconnectivity of assemblages is organized in an endless horizontal

plane in which everything is connected. These connections are ubiquitous in that alliances have no specific direction. One can find within Guattari's and Deleuze's analysis a relationship between form and content, an assemblage used to describe assemblages, a place to learn from difference without marginalizing.

Both documentary poetics and animal studies contain seemingly contradictory principals that, like Guattari and Deleuze, come together to create a space to progressively explore difference. *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (2012) explains that documentary poetics has, "two potentially conflicting senses: it consists of, concerns, or is based on purportedly objective records of facts or events but uses those records to support, elaborate, or advance an often passionately held partisan position." Ryan (2015) points out that in animal studies the "simultaneous emphasis on de-centering the human by using our distinctly human form of humility and imaginative thinking marks the paradoxical challenge facing those working in the field of animal studies, including those engaged in theoretical debates" (p. 14). The fields are paradoxical in that you must use the tools you are trying to destabilize in order to destabilize them. By categorizing *Experimental Animals* as a reality fiction, Field takes two seemingly paradoxical genres and creates an assemblage she calls "reality fiction," in order to create a horizontal plane of understanding that resists hierarchal certainty and attempts to open up a critical thinking environment similar to that of Guattari and Deleuze: a place to think about different parts of life sideways, without one existing "above" or "below" one another.

Field uses hierarchal binaries as content in trying to challenge and destabilize this kind of thinking. *Experimental Animals* essentially resists categorization and has been described as a novel, a poetic essay, and a textured collage, among other things. While there is difficulty in pinning down exactly what form the book takes, it is this confusion that Field is trying to expose throughout her work. The term "reality fiction" in itself is a contradiction that points not only to the possibility of existence between competing narratives (between reality and between fiction), but to that space in the middle of the spectrum as necessary in order to create a legible reality. It is not her intent to establish one side of an argument as "right" and the other as "wrong," but rather to undo both "sides" to draw attention to how we create and accept knowledge, and to what exactly we are leaving out, or what has been left out for us. Field creates a narrative that lets characters, and

readers move between what would conventionally be referred to as reality and what would conventionally be referred to as fiction.

Because of its paradoxical nature, its intent to amplify silenced voices, and its attempt to direct readers to question dominant narratives presented in documents, I consider reality fiction a subgenre of documentary poetics. Because the dominant genre for employing poetics is poetry, some scholars might reject this categorization. When examining Peter Dale Scott's poem *Coming to Jakarta: A Poem about Terror* in his aforementioned essay "From Reznikoff to Public Enemy," Metres (2007) explains that poetry can "fly under the radar of the censoring apparatus still in place in prose." While *Experimental Animals* certainly challenges the definition of prose, the majority of the book is none-the-less composed of fragmented pieces of prose, the like of which bears a close correspondence to everyday speech and thus, according to Merriam-Webster, distinguishes the medium from poetry. It is for this reason that reality fiction is distinguished from documentary poetics, but because each genre uses documents for similar purposes they are closely connected. The careful curatorial organization of the documents and Fanny's prose allows for a fragmentation of prose that resists the censorship Metres refers to.

The act of censorship, and its consequences, turns out to be a significant theme in Field's work. Many of Field's decisions in constructing her book, such as the inclusion of Fanny's fictional voice and the particularly grueling descriptions of vivisection, are responses to sounds and voices that exist outside of the frame of history's documented dominant narrative. Readers react to this newly audible silence in ways that acknowledge the significance of its absence in modern public awareness. Lauren Choplin from the Nonhuman Rights Project who interviewed Field shortly after the release of *Experimental Animals*, describes the sensation of reading the book as something that made her feel dazed, "as if [she] had just been delivered a blow without having seen it coming, rendered immobile the same way one of Bernard's countless animal subjects would have been" (2017). Field calls upon her readers to acknowledge the document as one that functions to silence violence, then hear, more often than not for the first time, the unsettling cries of those muted voices.

Silencing/Undoing

One of the most prominent ways in which a document can persuade readers of its singularity in creating knowledge is to silence any alternative narratives. While documentary poetics employs several devices to draw attention to (and destabilize) this silencing including erasure, line breaks, and white space, Field's reality fiction uses the act of vivisection to draw attention to the silencing and the documentary form to destabilize its function in order to make readers question the validity of a singular dominant narrative.

Claude Bernard's immediate silencing of an animal when conducting vivisection responds to the infringement sounds of animals in pain inflicted in his experiments. Field's book is set at a time when the public was not shielded from, as they are now, the unimaginably violent price of knowledge. Members of communities surrounding vivisection labs would consistently hear the loud and disturbing noises coming out of animals being dissected alive (often, and especially in Claude's experiments, without any anesthesia). Field uses Fanny to present a documented court case from a woman whose business was suffering because of these alarming sounds: "The girls and I take great interest in a court case between the city of Paris and Madame Gelyot, owner of a lodging house on Rue de la Sorbonne—who sues the city for damages caused to her business by Claude's student guests. An officer carefully enumerates cries, whimpers, and howls to support her case. The neighbors testify. She wins the case on appeal" (2016, p. 183). Here sound and mimicry from an individual with authority, function as vital tools in persuading others to sympathize with the human suffering business by acknowledging the unsettling sound that vivisection creates. Instead of responding to this situation as Fanny might, by "compiling the actual by way of association, juxtaposition, and willful inclusion," Claude simply carries out his pain-inflicting experiments and silences the animal by cutting their vocal cords (Slate, 2017).

After Claude reassures Fanny, who is growing increasingly uncomfortable with the ethical price of her husband's experiments, of the validity of his work as a physiologist as one might reassure "an unclever child," Fanny explains:

...but I know that when the animals make anguished noises, the experimenters hold them harder, and that Magendie outright laughs in order to reassure the audience that pain is normal. Later in bed I am afraid to move as the last bells ring and the horrific agonies of a dog just outside the door—Claude'd brought home an animal in

worse shape than usual—I fear what I’ll find if I go. I can’t bear it a moment more, but nor can I move. I just want the animal to die and be gone—but the howls reverberate until some neighbors call, Police!—Police! (p. 18)

Immediately following this section Field places a documented excerpt from Claude’s red notebook:

CLAUDE’S RED NOTEBOOK:

To decide the question of whether the pneumogastric produces movements in the larynx, it is absolutely necessary to have exposure. It is necessary to remove the cerebellum, avoiding the sinus, then the larynx being exposed by the ordinary procedure, it is necessary to cut the vagi, and respiration will be seen to stop immediately. On cutting the spinal accessories the voice will be seen to stop while breathing nevertheless continues. (p. 18)

The repeated all-capitals that introduce Claude’s notebook throughout the book serve to bolster the document as authoritative and dominant. The color, red, is also one of importance. Despite its association with blood, anger, and violence, the color red also establishes Claude’s notes as a singular, dominant narrative. According to Margaret Visser in her article “Seeing Red,” “...red used to be really the only colour. Before the discovery of the spectrum in the seventeenth century, all other colours tended to be considered variations of either black... or white” (1997, p. 42). Color and capitals aside, the words of Claude Bernard were still widely accepted as those of a true “genius incarnate of experimental medicine,” “dedicated to the truth” as he is often lauded in some of the documentary material in the book (*Medical Tribune* qtd. in Field p. 1, Earnest Renan qtd. in Field p. 192). To provide an alternative narrative and put the animal back into these authoritative documents, like the ones in the *Medical Tribune* where the animal is hardly recognizable having been silenced both physically and theoretically, Fanny immediately follows Claude’s words: “Claude proudly reports he’s discovered the trick of cutting dogs’ vocal cords at the beginning, saving himself a lot of trouble” (p. 19).

Despite its presented authority, Fanny’s voice provides readers with a point of view outside of the dominant narrative created by Claude’s notes to unveil the problematic nature with silencing. When Claude immediately cuts their vocal cords, the sensations that would have caused the animal to

cry out still exist and are still very much intact (as he asserts a few times throughout the presented documents). However, to make the information gathered from the experiment accessible (to be physically heard) and easier to accept (audiences are shielded from the severity and urgency of the animal's pain sounds) the violence must be silenced. The act of vivisection and truth making intersect on a personal level, just as the vocal cords of the animal are severed to make for a more digestible, acceptable dominant narrative, a document is curated to allow for an easier, more comfortable dominant truth by leaving out the gruesome details. One would often forget that animals were even used in the book when looking at Claude's notes. As Field notes in an interview, the scientific aesthetic "...at least for the public, became to change the language and hide the violence: three dogs would be turned into three vagus nerves'" (A Conversation..., 2017).

Silencing the troubling noises of animals that deliver "easy access knowledge" is similar to how certain documents are given hierarchical authority. Undocumented information, and sometimes even less popular documents that might undermine or complicate a truth that is more easily digested as dominant, are silenced. While the act of vivisection physically silences, Field also uses the incorporation and organization of documents that contradict each other in order to expose the multiplicity of truths available. While the incorporation of these documents does not exactly mimic the silencing function of vivisection, the contradictions "undo" dominant truths in a way that invites readers to question the validity of documents that push for a singular narrative.

When Claude is publicly faulted for his work in discovering the liver's role in producing sugar by Mr. Figuier, he journaled an entry about the imbecile that questioned his work into his notebook. A group of people Fanny refers to as "the commission" astutely explains Claude's authority in truth making:

Mr.Figuier hasn't put all the force of battling such adversaries into his work. He should recall that since Magendie, Claude Bernard is the premier living physiologist, and he deserves to be always discussed seriously. *Even when he is wrong*, and we don't believe that to be the case in this instance, we can say that his talent, his wisdom, his marvelous facility with experimentation and induction, leads him to almost always be right. (p. 28, my emphasis)

As with many documentary sources in the book, Claude's words, due to his prestige and resulting authority, are taken for truth even when they are false. But, the commission seems reluctant to speak in absolutes, and while Claude is "almost always" right, there is still some doubt.

That doubt is justified as Claude's fascination with pain is traced throughout the book. One of the most fundamental aspects of a justification for Claude's experiments is that pain is necessary in order to survive. Without pain, Claude argues, humans would not know who they were: "What is pain for... if not to show who we are? An elevated heart-rate to speed blood to the muscles? Learning not to visit a painful thing twice?" (p. 10). Shortly after this assertion Claude explains to Fanny, who is having significant issues trying to mentally digest the half-mutilated animals that surround her constantly, "that physiologists travel through live bodies because pain is physiology's helpful guide" (p. 18). The documented material reflecting Claude's evaluation of the incredible value of pain in understanding all living things couldn't be clearer, and as we can see from "the commission," the public loyalty to Claude's intellectual authority is unwavering. Claude's obsession with consistently and euphemistically reminding the public of the positive value of pain is a large part of the justification for vivisection in the first place. This is Claude's attempt at reassuring the public that the pain the animal is experiencing, the pain he silences by slicing the vocal cords of the animal in order to "save himself a lot of trouble," is a helpful, positive thing that should not be shied away from, but embraced. (Field, p. 19)

Claude's understanding of pain is, to an extent, correct. Natural pain teaches and guides with a firm hand. Sometimes experiencing inflicted pain in a moment, such as an injection, is necessary in order to prevent more pain in the future. But what happens to the value of pain when the unnecessary infliction of violence on one body acts as a "helpful guide" to a body that does not experience it? Claude was not vivisectioning dogs for the sake of improving the lives of dogs, but for humans. He does not differentiate between actively enduring necessary pain in order to prevent further pain and inflicting unjustified and uninvited violence to a marginalized other for the benefit of someone else. This becomes clear in Claude's personal evaluation of the process of dying.

Claude is unsurprisingly thinking about pain during the last moments of the life he worked so hard to understand. However, his expected praise of pain is replaced by lament. Jacques-Arsène d'Arsonval, assistant to Claude

and present during his final hours, recalls some words Claude said to him amidst his suffering: “Nature is sometimes very stupid: what purpose does all this pain serve? Nothing. Not for me, not for you. I don’t regret the pain, only that the pain helped no one” (p. 192). Claude sees the pain he is feeling in death as worthless because no one is learning from it. What was once so helpful to him, important enough to violently invade living bodies, betrays him in his final hours. Though his assertion seems to reiterate his justification for vivisection, these new moments of natural pain reiterate Claude’s blindness to the difference between enduring the natural pain of death and being forced to endure unimaginable pain for the benefit of another. On his death bed, Claude is forced to confront the uncertainty produced by the proximity paradox: before experiencing death, he expects his natural pain to be the same “helpful guide” as the pain of a vivisected animal, acknowledging a fundamental likeness to the animal, yet is disappointed to find out, in dying, that it is not—thus reluctantly acknowledging a difference.

This kind of frustration leads one to ask where the impassioned support for taking Claude seriously is now? This documented utterance of one of the world’s most renowned physiologists has the potential to undo, or at least destabilize, the justification of the value of pain in experimentation, yet this material is buried in the archives, unable to be searched for or attained without years of tumultuous research. The lack of recognition for Claude’s odd valediction reinforces the idea that certain documents are given authority to perform a charade of reality while others, which complicate, question, or make the dominant reality difficult to digest, are silenced.

In following the easily available traces of Claude Bernard which laud his exceptional contributions to discoveries in human physiology one might find his well-known work with the poison curare. Amongst scientific jargon Claude is quoted saying,

With curare, no agony, life seems extinguished, but...this is not to be!...This death, which seems so free of pain, is actually accompanied by sufferings more atrocious than the imagination can invent. The victim is not deprived of sensation or intelligence, but only the means of expressing these through movement. (p. 21)

The description seems fitting for the latest horror film: the animal can make no objecting sound, can make no protesting movements, yet the “sufferings more atrocious than the imagination can invent,” remain. Taking away their

voice has no effect on the reality of the animal's existence. The authority of the document does something similar: it does not take away sensation or intelligence, just the means of expressing this information through selective framing and distribution.

It was the silencing power of documentary narratives that inspired Field to breathe life into an otherwise unpopular part of Claude Bernard's narrative while she intended to provide readers a glimpse into a world where the public was unprotected from the sights and sounds of vivisection, in turn decentering the dominant narrative from a human-focused purpose to a wider scope that included all animals, Field found herself in a position to revitalize the voice of Fanny Bernard (*The Rumpus...*, 2016).

Fanny's Voice

In a 2016 conversation with Laurie Sheck, facilitated by Emma Komlos-Hrobsky, Field admits to her original intent to keep the entire book a collage of archival, documentary material, and the moral dilemma she found herself in as a result of her findings:

I had wanted to do the book entirely as a collage, but the archives weren't giving me enough on Fanny. Her role in the narrative, and her role as the original anti-vivisection activist (on whose work other better-archived activists could build) made her too important to leave just to the few letters and lists that exist. I searched for years for more information on her and found only small mentions of her daughters. Finally, I made the decision to fictionalize her voice, and use her as a counter-weight to Claude's well-known archive. It was a tremendously difficult decision, and one I still feel with ambivalence. (*The Fact and the Shadow*, 2016)

The invented voice of Fanny Bernard, one Field later describes as an element she did not know she needed to develop the true purpose of *Experimental Animals*, functions as a guide for readers through the documentary material of the book (*Between the Covers...*, 2017). Fanny also allows Field the opportunity to, as she puts it in one interview, "free [Fanny] from the archives," because the documentary material that exists present Fanny as a nagging, ungrateful, horror of a wife, and Claude as a blameless "martyr of married life" (*The Rumpus...*, 2016, Zola qtd. in Field, 2016, p. 116).

Field opens *Experimental Animals* by quoting Anatole de Monzie from “The Abusive Widows: The Case of Claude Bernard.” In this document, Fanny is described as an “enemy-spouse, bigot fighting the freedoms of modern science,” who “trained her two daughters against the scientist who was forced to hide his labors in a humid cave” (2016, p. 3). In line with the authority given to documents in delivering credible information, Monzie feels compelled to assert that he “repeat[s] these details in the certainty that documents to support them will come to light” (p. 3). He ends his published attempt at humiliating Fanny by explaining, “This executioner-woman eventually had widow’s rights, and she used them pretending to defend the legacy of the man she tortured” (p. 3). In a world that silenced Fanny’s response by attempting to package her in an envelope of history addressed to hell, Field allows Fanny to speak. Fanny comments, “Tortured? That’s a mighty big word, given all the deeds and done-tos around here. Just goes to show how rumors do become true” (p. 3). For most the book Fanny’s words function as an apparatus that breaks down the walls of a dominant narrative by providing commentary on the ironic or contradictory aspects of presented documentary material. By responding to an assumedly exaggerated documented and preserved accusation against herself, Field is using Fanny to point to the way in which documents, even ones that are yet to come, circulate information that is often distorted or incorrect. In addition to pointing out the problematic authority of the document, Field also reminds readers that canonical literature is predominantly male by resurrecting female voices that have not been preserved in archives and libraries.

By imagining a strong female presence in defining historical conversations, Field’s work makes Fanny a universal figure not only representing, but *liberating* historically silenced beings like herself. Field responds to the silencing of less favorable, more violent, and therefore more difficult narratives by reluctantly adding Fanny’s fictional voice to her book. After undergoing the physical representation of being erased or silenced, Fanny is brought back to life in *Experimental Animals*. As her story unfolds, Field uses individuals with a heavier archival presence, such as Anna Kingsford, to act as “doubles” for Fanny, blurring the lines between reality and fiction, and allowing Fanny’s situation to expand and gain steady footing in the face of a history determined to distort her reality. The relationships developed between Fanny and her “doubles” mimic the ability of an

alternative narrative to spread just as fast as a dominant narrative, such as Claude's science, can (The Rumpus..., 2016).

Claude and Fanny function as an intimate dichotomous pair throughout the book. When Fanny realizes that her discomfort with Claude's experiments is not only strong enough, but important enough to act upon, she begins the anti-vivisectionist movement by doing everything she can to save animals from Claude's curious hands:

My dog-stealing of his dog-stealing drives him into rages, and even though out network of safety might seem to a stray as just another form of prison, I persist in the slipping of ropes and the binding of jaws, the calming and holding and transporting across bridges... the loading into carriages bound for secret places. (p. 40)

While there is a certain similarity between Claude's work and Fanny's, self-described as an "intimate act that has started to connect [Fanny's] husband and [herself,]" there is also a vital distance between their work that the lives of the animals literally depend on.

The Proximity Paradox

The major difference between Fanny's and Claude's understanding of animals is that Fanny often thinks of how animals can feel and experience pain, fear, and other emotions in a manner similar to humans. On the other hand, Claude sees the animal as an opportunity for domination and exploitation as a result of their non-human nature. When Claude is describing his fascinating experiments with curare, the poison that virtually renders the will of a living body useless, Claude confidently asserts, "...what morality says we can't do to those like us, science authorizes us to do to the animals," and Fanny comments, "of course the animal still feels every poke and jolt without a way to cry" (p. 21). As with many binaries acknowledged throughout the book, such as the epistemological value of science versus art, or looking for knowledge inside a body versus outside, Field uses the polar attitudes of Fanny and Claude to highlight the spectral nature of reality.

Experimental Animals inhabits a space between many dichotomies, some of which can be understood using what I have termed "the proximity paradox" by exploring how their contradictions function in the "undoing" of certain truths. The proximity paradox idea deals directly with the relationship between the pro and anti-vivisectionist debate and how the form

of a reality fiction recontextualizes a document, rendering its function as an accurate representation of reality useless.

The first step in understanding the proximity paradox is recognizing the contradiction in the justification for vivisection. When the *English Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals* complained about vivisection, Claude Bernard published his response to the complaint:

Experiments on living animals.... has given life science a new certainty that it never had...Physiologists have been criticized for haphazardly applying results obtained on living animals that don't resemble man. This critique, on first glance, might seem just. It would be right, if we only operated on invertebrates, even though these too can provide immense help in a number of cases. But even more help is true when studying animals with cerebrospinal nerves, equipped with five senses and four limbs, possessing a four-chambered heart, two kidneys, two lungs, a diaphragm... (p. 72)

Claude is acknowledging a closeness of humans to animals, the likeness of which creates, he claims, “new certainty never seen before.”

One must also necessarily distance humans from animals in order to remain “high-minded and big-hearted men, tender-souled like Claude Bernard” (p. 213). While many may consider vivisection as brutal as murder, I imagine there is a wider range of people, and might even hazard to say that almost all people, would aggressively rail against the live dissection of human beings for exploration, with or without anesthesia, and would refer to those performing the experiments as something far from “big-hearted” or “tender-souled.” While simultaneously accepting animals as similar enough to humans to provide accurate knowledge based in their dissection, one must also distance themselves from the animal to keep themselves from confronting the true violence that occurs. It is not until Claude begins witnessing violence toward humans that he recognizes the moral dilemma. He writes to his lover, “Never in all my life have I been in a moral situation this disturbing; then again, I’ve never seen my country invaded” (p. 123). The sentence is almost laughable due to his daily purporting of morally disturbing behavior via unwelcomed invasion, but the acknowledgment is nonetheless important because it frames the moral distance Claude has between himself, as human, and his victims, as animals. What is it, then, that makes this distancing possible?

While it might not be the only factor, the acceptance of document as an accurate representation of reality largely contributes to the problematic distancing of animals and humans. At the start of the book Fanny is explaining to readers Claude’s published notes. She writes: “For writing up the result of their ‘medical experiments,’ Magendie (Claude’s mentor) invents a three-paragraph form: hypothesis, action, conclusion. These paragraphs never mention failures or repetitions, and Claude borrows this shorthand too, for in his scrawled notes one often forgets there’s any animal involved” (p. 12). The distance Claude feels toward animals is transmitted to his documents, which, if taken as fact, presents a distorted reality that further perpetuates a blindness to violence. This silence, the void of animal presence in Claude’s notes, provides the connection between the contradictory content and form of the book (see Figure 1 for a visualization of the proximity paradox).

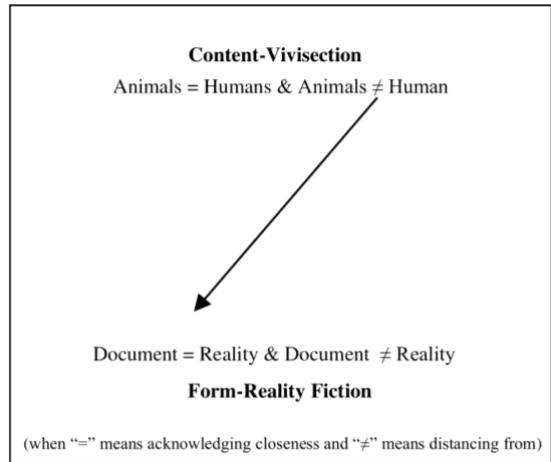


Figure 1 The Proximity Paradox- A simplified visualization for understanding the connections between the problematic way humans understand animals and reality.

In an interview with Jenny Bouilly from The Rumpus poetry blog Thalia Field explains that “by using people’s own language in the novel, she hopes to put characters back into their own words, to return to them some of their proper texture and tone and point of view” (The Rumpus Mini-Interview Project #61, 2016) She uses the documents in the book to maintain a sense of reality for each real-life character, establishing the document as that which accurately represents reality. But, she does not stop there. In addition to providing individual documents to represent reality more closely, she also arranges these documents on a fictitious stage, in specific order, with Fanny’s fictitious voice acting as a connective tissue. This forces readers to zoom out, to distance themselves both from the singular document and the supposed accuracy of the document in providing experiences that closely mimic the true reality. The contradiction lies in Field’s use of documents to delegitimize the document as an accurate source of reality.

For example, preceded by documents that ask the question, “what is truth?” and followed by documents from Claude that compare animals to stone, is the account of Anna Kingsford in a museum, encountering the sounds of vivisection for the first time. She writes, “As much as I had heard and said and even written before that date about vivisection, I found myself for the first time in its actual presence, and there swept over me a wave of such extreme mental anguish that my heart stood still under it...” (p. 91) Field uses the published writings of Kingsford, a document, to undermine the authority of a document to represent reality, which in itself is a paradox. The sound of a screaming dog distanced Kingsford from the reality her reading and research about vivisection created for her. It allowed her to dismantle its authority as a singular, dominant narrative, recognize the contradictions in her creation of knowledge via the document, and dedicate the rest of her life to putting an end to vivisection.

Conclusion: A Call to Action

Like Anna Kingsford, Thalia Field felt compelled to action when she, after over a decade of research, heard the silenced voices of the past and recognized their muted place in the present. Field explains, “*Experimental Animals* was necessary for me to research and write because I wanted to explore how we’ve ended up so disastrously disconnected from the suffering we are imposing on the living world” (A Conversation..., 2017). While the U.K. has arguably been working to establish strong, clear legislation that decreases animal suffering, lawmaking in the U.S. does not seem to reflect the same intent. The practice of vivisection has changed very little since the 19th century, with the exception of the Animal Welfare Act (AWA), passed in 1966. Despite the growing animal welfare movement, the ambiguously worded AWA is still the only federal law in the U.S. that provides rules and regulations for the care and treatment of some animals in research. Unfortunately, since the public has been “protected” from the extreme violence and forced sacrifice of many lab animals, the law specifically excludes mice, rats, and birds—the most commonly used animals in experimentation, testing, and education. Field deliberately chose to situate her book when “whole neighborhoods could HEAR the animals [being vivisected], day in and out. [She] wanted to bring that into clarity for the reader. We are protected, too much, from the sounds and the smells and the horrors being done in our name” (A Conversation..., 2017). While each

country is oscillating in their response to the confounding legislature on nonhumans, the Humane Society of the United States reminds us that the historical silencing of the reality behind animal testing is not a thing of the past as “no accurate or comprehensive figures are available on how many animals are used—or for what purposes—in the United States and worldwide” (Animals Used in..., 2020).

It is my hope in exploring the contradictions present in the human justification for disturbing animal experiments in conjunction with similar contradictions present in assigning epistemological authority to documents that I can contribute to Field’s mission in lifting the veil of comfort we have been accustomed to when it comes to our treatment of animals. The rendering of the public blind and deaf in the face of animal exploitation does not stop with animals in laboratories. Zoos and circuses have silenced realities in order to provide the public with guilt-free entertainment. Perhaps one of the most important industries in existence, the food industry, also provides the public with comfortable blinders, working with advertising companies, grocery stores, and fast-food chains to separate the living breathing animal from the meat we consume.

Though it can be particularly difficult to read, it is this discomfort that, I think, makes *Experimental Animals* a book everyone *should* read. The various documents intertwined with Fanny’s fictitious voice perform on Field’s fictional stage to acknowledge the messy nature of how we consciously or unconsciously choose our truths while giving voice to the muted cries of the past. The use of documentary poetics invites readers to find “a way to move within ambiguity, multiplicity, [and] contradiction, rather than reaching for certainty or closure” (The Fact..., 2016). By engaging in the critical discourse of animal studies, Field is invoking one of the most prominent and epistemologically destabilizing subjects that challenges us to completely reevaluate the way we think and have thought for centuries.

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Why Did Gerasim Drown His Mumu? Animal Subjectivity in Turgenev’s “Mumu”

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Abstract

This essay offers a critical animal studies analysis of Turgenev’s novella “Mumu” (1854), the famous tragic story about Gerasim, a serf who was deaf and mute, and was ordered by his owner to kill his beloved dog. While Turgenev’s story has been traditionally read as an allegory on Russia’s serfdom, the essay offers a new interpretation that focuses on the realities of the titular dog Mumu’s existence and the representation of her subjectivity; moreover, it exposes the narrator’s selective anthropocentrism in recognizing this subjectivity only then to use it to augment the pathos of her death, so as to comment on the inhumanity of serfdom. Combining animal studies with disability studies, the essay also critiques the speciesist and ableist assumptions in the depictions of Mumu’s animality and Gerasim’s disability, which are used in the narrative for aesthetic effect, proposing a more ethical reading centered on intersubjectivity, mutual understanding, and empathy. To answer “why Gerasim drowned his Mumu,” the essay considers his motivations, but is more invested in using animal-standpoint criticism to recuperate the life of a dog otherwise lost to allegory and to raise awareness about the literary representation and societal treatment of companion animals.

Keywords: animal studies; disability; dogs; intersubjectivity; Turgenev.

The proverbial man’s best friend, dogs figure widely in literature and culture, from Snoopy, Lassie, and Disney’s 101 Dalmatians to Pavlov’s dogs and the Soviet space-dog Laika. Whether working dogs or companion animals, canines encourage us to reflect on both the proximity and the “significant otherness” of their species, whose evolution is so closely intertwined with humans that Haraway (2003) refers to it as a “co-history” and “co-evolution in natureculture” (p. 12). In *The Companion Species Manifesto*, inspired by her own canine friend Cayenne Pepper, Haraway (2003) argues that, as our “companion species,” dogs remind us that our species are interrelated, that this connection is “in the syntax; it is in the flesh” (p. 12). But is it a truly symbiotic connection, a friendship fostered in reciprocity and mutual respect, or does it inevitably privilege one side—the human—over the other? Does positing humans as “a dog’s best friend” sound at all idiomatic, or does it reveal a long history of co-dependence in which humans, despite their reliance on guard dogs, herding dogs, sporting/hunting dogs, guide dogs, and companion and therapy animals, remain the only species conceived of as having full subjectivity and historical (political, legal, economic) agency? (Of course, these attributes are not now nor have in the past been equitably shared by all humans either.)

Human ambivalence about canine “significant otherness” is especially evident in the discourse around and societal treatment of companion animal death. For example, we typically use euphemisms, like “put down” or “put to sleep,” to talk about veterinary-assisted deaths. Although there are about 700 pet cemeteries in the United States, “dead pets are still often disposed of informally” (Borrelli, 2017). The sentiment that “[a] dog should die like a dog, not cruelly, but with a respectful matter-of-factness, unaccompanied by the rituals of human mourning,” could still be expressed in a major U.S. newspaper 25 years ago (Klein, 1995). These days, however, funerals for companion animals have become a booming industry (Miller, 2019; Schopen, 2015), though the consumerization of personal loss can be understood as further objectifying companion animals, still legally considered property in most U.S. states (Babcock, 2019), by making their deaths part of a market economy which already profits off of the mass slaughter of farmed animals. Similarly, in the cultural imagination, the repeated deaths of the reincarnating Bailey in Hallström’s film *A Dog’s Purpose* suggest that dogs’ deaths, along with their lives, remain subservient to human ends.

Those who were moved by Travis' killing of the titular dog in Fred Gipson's *Old Yeller* will appreciate another narrative about a dog who, despite performing physical and emotional labor for her guardian, found death at his hands. This text is Ivan Turgenev's "Mumu," the tragic story of Gerasim who drowned his dog Mumu. Gerasim was a serf in pre-emancipation Russia, who was deaf and mute, and "mu-mu" was the only phoneme he could articulate. Mumu, first a small helpless puppy, matured into a shrewd and loyal companion. Although cherished by almost everyone at his mistress' estate, the smart dog was rightly suspicious of the cruel *barynia* in charge, who sought Mumu's affection and upon being spurned, ordered Gerasim to dispose of her. The story is known to Turgenev readers in and outside of Russia, where it is commonly assigned in elementary schools. The question why Gerasim agreed to follow the heinous order only then to flee the Moscow estate for his native countryside, has inspired two films, Bobrovskii and Teterin's *Mumu* and Grymov's *Mu-mu*, and more recently, various Internet memes, including one image in which two self-satisfied cats give Turgenev's book an enthusiastic thumbs-up. Most responses to the text, whether serious or trivial, focus on Gerasim's motivation and the symbolism of his act while ignoring the actual dog—thereby committing a second symbolic killing.

Much needed is a new interpretation of Turgenev's novella that focuses on the realities of Mumu's existence and the representation of her subjectivity, treating the titular dog as a subject who has a compelling story of her own, as well as desires and needs, many of which she shares with humans. Also needed is an interrogation of the largely accepted, yet demonstrably anthropocentric commentary on the purpose of Mumu's barking: to guard and protect her guardian (at the literal level) and to foreshadow the emancipation of the Russian serfs seven years after the story's publication (at the figurative level: see Frost, 1987, pp. 177-78). This essay argues, therefore, that Mumu's voice is one of the characteristics that reveal her subjectivity; along with her eyes and her body, it provides opportunities for intersubjective communication and the sharing of vulnerability with Gerasim. Further, to argue that her voice is one, but not the sole characteristic of subjectivity is, on the one hand, to challenge the human monopoly on anthropocentric, abled-speech communication and, on the other, to think about non-logocentric forms of subjectivity outside human language and voice, which are more inclusive of nonhuman animals and

differently-abled persons with linguistic conditions. An analysis of intersubjectivity in Gerasim and Mumu’s interspecies relationship thus invites a combination of disability studies, which aims to “change the normative way we conceive of the world, of literature, of cultural production, of voice, of sight, of language” and “to challenge the received in its most simple form—the body—and in its most complex form—the construction of the body” (Davis, 2006, xviii); and “animal-standpoint criticism,” which “starts [...] from the premise that animals are seats of consciousness—subjects, not objects; that they are individuals with stories/biographies of their own, not undifferentiated masses; that they dislike pain, enjoy pleasure; that they want to live and thrive” (Donovan, 2011, p. 204).

My reading demonstrates Turgenev’s sensitivity toward nonhuman animal subjectivity, but also puts it in perspective: first, this subjectivity is qualified by a selective anthropocentrism (dogs are “smart,” thinking beings, but are primarily valued in their capacity to serve humans); second, it encourages the story’s readers to empathize with Mumu, thereby using her tragic ending to amplify the sociohistorical allegory. When “Mumu” is read as an allegory on serfdom, as it almost always is, the reality of Mumu herself is ignored and the pathos of her unjustified drowning is used to highlight human injustice—in Donovan’s (2011) words, “the moral reality of the animals’ suffering is overridden [*sic*] in the interest of creating an aesthetic effect” (p. 206). I join many generations of Turgenev readers and critics in asking, “Why did Gerasim drown his Mumu?” Yet, while I discuss Gerasim’s motivation (which, due to his being a person with linguistic disabilities, poses narratological difficulties: see Somoff, 2010), I am more invested in highlighting the potential of animal-standpoint criticism to recuperate the life of a dog otherwise lost to allegory and to help us think about the literary representation and societal treatment of our “significant others.”

A summary and brief overview of the story’s critical reception may be useful. Turgenev’s “Mumu” opens with Gerasim’s characterization: he was a tall and muscular peasant who was “deaf and mute from birth” and, due to his strength, was taken from his rural home to serve as a porter at a widow’s estate on a distant street in Moscow (Turgenev, 1986, IV, p. 246 [all translations from the Russian are mine—A. A.]). If not for his disability, the narrator alleges, any woman would have happily married him; however, his “misfortune,” compounded with an imposing physique, alienated Gerasim

from others (p. 246). Since he was a serf working for the cruel *barynia*, all of his troubles came from her whims. First, the *barynia* decided to play matchmaker to Tat'iana, her washerwoman, with whom Gerasim was in love. It is on the day of Tat'iana's departure from the estate, a year after her arranged marriage to the resident drunkard, that Gerasim stumbled upon the small puppy. Gerasim named her Mumu—according to the narrator, who repeatedly editorializes about disability in problematic broad strokes—because “mutes know that their mooing attracts the attention of others” (p. 258). More misfortune befell Gerasim when his mistress did not receive the loyalty she expected from Mumu. She saw the dog gnawing on a bone in a flower bed and ordered that she be brought into her rooms and given milk; when Mumu refused to let herself be petted and instead showed her teeth, the *barynia* overreacted and threw the dog out of her house. She later ordered her chief porter Gavriila to catch and take the dog far away, but Mumu managed to find her way back to her distraught guardian, who eventually learned of his mistress' hand in the affair. Although he attempted to conceal her in his room, the dog's yelping exposed her unbeknownst to the “poor deaf fellow” (p. 264). At night, while Gerasim was secretly walking her, Mumu barked at a drunk trespasser who had fallen asleep in the yard, and the noise woke up the *barynia*; the following morning, it was made known that “Mumu would no longer be among the living and that the *barynia* might oblige, not be angry, and calm down” (p. 266). Gerasim fed Mumu her last meal, took her to the river, and in an ironic reversal of their initial encounter, he tied her body to several bricks and drowned her. He then returned to the estate to gather his belongings and left for his small village, where he continues to live as a bachelor and has no contact with women or dogs.

Scholarly approaches to “Mumu” have largely focused on the allegorical depiction of Russian serfdom, grounded in Turgenev's biography and Russia's history prior to the 1861 emancipation. Frost (1987), for example, sees Mumu's “purpose in life” as “brought out in her barking” (p. 178). He asks rhetorically, “What better symbol of the situation of the serfs?” (p. 177), and contrasts Mumu, with her voice and freedom-loving spirit, with another dog in Turgenev's story named Volchok, who was never released from his chain, “did not demand freedom at all,” and “stopped barking almost immediately, as though himself sensing its futility,” preferring to remain both literally and metaphorically enchained (Turgenev, 1986, IV, p. 259). Frost (1987) insists that, like Volchok, “the Russian people lie silently and

submissively in their hovels, living out their days, making no effort to attain freedom” (p. 178). Frost thus treats the old dog and Mumu as “surrogates for theory,” in Haraway’s (2003) words (p. 5), in a typical sociohistorical reading: the *barynia* emblemizes the injustices of Russia’s serfdom; Mumu’s rebellious spirit is perceived as contrasting Gerasim’s powerlessness to transcend his enslavement, and her voice—his failure to speak (out), also shared by Volchok.

Turgenev was highly critical of the inhuman right of serf-holding even though he was born into the landowning class that relied on this institution for its subsistence. The character of the *barynia* is based on his mother, V. P. Turgeneva, while that of Gerasim, on her serf Andrei who, unlike his fictional counterpart, served her till her death (Turgenev, 1986, IV, p. 605). Like Frost’s (1987), McDowell’s (2016) reading stresses “the impotence and suffering of a mute peasant and his dog, both unable to express themselves and therefore unable to influence their own destinies” (p. 201). In a similar vein, Gerasimov (2018) describes “Mumu” as “a horror story,” “which has psychologically traumatized generations of Russian children,” noting that its “most disturbing aspect [...] is the anonymous and unspeaking nature of the source of violence—social relations, rather than an exotic psychopath”; the psychological effect of this is “amplified by the mirroring levels of aphasiac submission to completely arbitrary violence” (p. 180).

These and other readings of “Mumu” confirm Mondry’s (2015) claims that “[t]he dog is modern Russian culture’s most representative and most political animal” and that canine representation fits Derrida’s definition of this animal as “the fraternal allegory of social poverty, of the excluded, the marginal, the ‘homeless’” (pp. 1, 4). Furthermore, the symbolic uses of Mumu fall in line with those of other canines: “Loyalty and treachery, obedience and cruelty, demarcation and the crossing of boundaries—all these features are part of the symbolism of the dog” (p. 6). The Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin saw a “new sensibility” about human-animal relations evident in Turgenev’s novella (as cited in Mondry, 2015, p. 25). In his essay “About Flaubert,” Bakhtin described the emergence, in 19th-century European discourse, of a new attitude toward animals, which he attributed largely to the rise of the consumerist middle class whose “humanity became shameless” with respect to animals, and combined with the loss of fear and respect toward animals as sacred beings, promoted their exploitation and

consumption (as cited in Mondry, 2015, p. 23). Whether as “the symbol for the coming emancipation of the serfs in Russia” (Frost, 1987, p. 179), as a Christ figure “sentenced to death on trumped-up charges,” mimicking the story of the crucifixion (Lupion, 2018), or as a literary reflection of the period’s consumerist de-subjectification of animals, Mumu appears in such readings figuratively and discursively, her actual dogness and individuality erased for the sake of abstract arguments.

To think about Gerasim’s role as the executioner (albeit by proxy) of an actual dog, the realities of whose existence matter, rather than a pawn in the grand scheme of human injustice, is both to confirm serfdom’s inhumanity and to put the real Mumu back into the critical reading of “Mumu.” Like Mumu, moreover, Volchok should not be reduced to a symbol of voicelessness and futility; he is a real animal and also what Taylor (2017) calls an “animal cripp” (p. 115): the old dog whose “decrepitude” obstructs movement and whose name (meaning “little wolf”) ironically clashes with his domesticated life in captivity. It is worth noting that fictional dogs in a work of literature are no less real, as Baker (2001) convincingly argues, because “[c]ulture does not allow unmediated access to the animals themselves”; the “real” and the “symbolic” are interconnected (pp. 10, 25).

The problem with predominantly allegorical criticism is that it is uninterested in the dog’s actual dogness. Such reluctance to address the animal *qua* animal confirms what Baker (2001) has called “denying the animal” (p. 136). Baker draws on Ursula LeGuin’s notion of the “critical terror of Kiddilit,” which is based on the belief that to identify with the animal is wrong, that it is child-like or even childish, and is, in turn, a prejudice that “constructs the animal as absolutely *other*, and by association those who identify with the animal themselves come to be seen as other” (p. 124). Baker (2001) points out that narrative animals, according to LeGuin, make the “adult male critic” uncomfortable, as he can only appreciate a story where irony and metaphor make the animal not really there (p. 125). Notably, the “naïve” readings of “Mumu” by Russian elementary-school children challenge the post-Soviet psychoanalytical interpretations of Gerasim as a rebel against serfdom by responding to the ending (very astutely!) with much resentment, pointing out that Gerasim could have left Moscow with Mumu rather than drowning her beforehand (Somoff, 2010, p. 504). Out of the mouths of babes, then, who are the most biophilic, drawn instinctively to animals and nature (Urquiza-Haas & Kotrschal, 2015, p. 167), and who

identify more readily with animals than adults do, comes the dire revelation that not only readers and critics, but Turgenev himself had conspired against Mumu: by presenting her as a relatable character with an inner life only to subject her to a death that is best explained through (Gerasim's internalization of) a cruel social structure of which she is thereby rendered an allegorical martyr.

Once one interprets the text from an animal standpoint, a real dog's portrait begins to emerge. The yet unnamed puppy enters the narrative through details drawn from external observation, in a helpless state, struggling to keep her small body afloat: "[Gerasim] kneeled down and saw a small puppy, white with black spots, who, despite all his efforts, could not crawl out of the water, fought, slid, and trembled with his entire wet, thin body" (Turgenev, 1986, IV, p. 257). (The Russian noun *shchenok*, or "puppy," is grammatically gendered masculine but applies to both sexes.) The diminutive form of the adjectives meaning "wet" ("mokren'kim") and "thin" ("khuden'kim"), which is used to describe the young Mumu, adds a sympathetic touch mostly lost in translation; this, along with other references to Mumu's "fine little voice [golosok]," "smart little eyes [glazkami]," and "little face [mordochkoi]" (pp. 259, 269), evokes, the "cute response," which was first identified by Konrad Lorenz when describing features that elicit instinctive parental responses to infants and which also applies to baby animals with neotenic, or infantile, traits (Fraustino, 2016, p. 153).

The next detail concerns Mumu's eyes, one of which "seemed a bit bigger than the other," suggesting that they have only recently opened, which, along with her inability to drink from a cup on her own, leads the narrator to deduce her age as "no more than three weeks" (Turgenev, 1986, IV, p. 258). A description of her greedy drinking follows. It is at this point that the narrator reveals, presumably as her guardian learns this, the animal's sex, and contends, "No mother takes care of her child quite like Gerasim took care of his pet" (p. 258). "Pitomitsa," the noun used to refer to the yet-unnamed Mumu, can be translated as "pet," "nursling," or "nurse-child," thus reinforcing maternal imagery. Gerasim's care for Mumu over the next eight months results in her becoming "a very good dog of Spanish breed, with long ears, a puffy tail shaped like a pipe and big expressive eyes," thus emphasizing the same external details with a focus on her body and eyes in particular (p. 258). The narrator also states that she "was extraordinarily smart, kind to everyone, but loved Gerasim alone" and was "passionately

loyal to [him]” (p. 258). These qualities—intelligence, kindness, and loyalty—are implicit in her daily activities: Mumu wakes Gerasim up in the morning, leads the water-drawing horse to him on a leash, accompanies him to the river to fetch water for the house, guards his tools, and never lets anyone near him. She “live[s] in great friendship with the water-drawing horse” and is “complete mistress of Gerasim’s room” (p. 258), which defines her in terms of feminine domesticity and collaborative interspecies labor.

It is worth noting that Mumu’s depiction challenges the distinction Haraway (2003) draws between companion animals and working dogs, perhaps tapping into the sort of ambivalence that surrounds animals’ lives on small farms (for example, treating a calf or a piglet like a member of the human family only to slaughter them for food later on). Haraway (2003) writes that the value of “pet dogs” depends on “an economy of affection” and “a problematic fantasy” rather than, in the case of working dogs, on their skill and a rural economy that is less likely to collapse (pp. 37-38). Mumu is characterized as “a furry child,” to borrow Haraway’s term (2003, p. 37), in a description that renders Gerasim her male mother. She then becomes Gerasim’s loving companion and household mistress, thus effectively replacing the woman who did not reciprocate his love. The scene in which Gerasim, in his festive “kaftan” (coat), leads the newly brushed Mumu to her death has been compared to a wedding (Frost, 1987, p. 183). Mumu is also, however, a working dog who accompanies him on daily errands besides guarding his room. It is when she refuses the *barynia*’s attention that Mumu is first ordered to be abducted and, upon her return, to be killed. Haraway (2003) finds the expectation of dogs’ love problematic and even “abusive—to dogs and to humans,” as it makes the dogs’ existence dependent on human affection and convenience, and whether they “deliver on the fantasy of unconditional love” (p. 33). Mumu’s position as a working dog proves precarious when her identity is blurred in the *barynia*’s expectation of “unconditional love”; failure to deliver on this “fantasy,” as Mumu becomes an inconvenience after the *barynia*’s momentary infatuation, seals the animal’s fate.

Other descriptions of Mumu, including the “unforeseen circumstance” (Turgenev, 1986, IV, p. 259) of her attracting the *barynia*’s attention, are limited to body movement: when one of the *barynia*’s servants tried to catch Mumu, “the agile doggy...leapt, twisted, and kept dodging” (p. 260). When the *barynia* reached out to pet her, Mumu “convulsively turned

her head and bared her teeth” (p. 261). These are all quite suggestive while being limited to the exterior; we can infer that Mumu’s actions, particularly her rejection of milk which she gladly drank at Gerasim’s, express her rejection of the unkind mistress. While the narrator stops short of anthropomorphizing Mumu’s emotions, preferring to narrate her bodily responses instead, such details nevertheless convey the presence of not merely a conscious but a strong will. Similarly, when Gerasim brings her to the tavern for her last meal, it is her body and eyes that receive narrative attention: Mumu is described as “glancing at [Gerasim] with her smart little eyes,” with her “glossy fur indicating that she was recently brushed”; she eats “with her usual politeness, hardly touching her little face to the meal” (p. 269). In the final moments of her life, it is her eyes and body movement that the narrator highlights: “She glanced at him trustingly and without fear, slightly wagging her tail” (p. 270).

The characterization of Mumu’s eyes as “expressive” is one of several details that point to a canine subjectivity. Equally important is Mumu’s voice. In the following passage, the narrator describes it as purposive and discriminating, attributing this quality to Mumu’s pedigree:

At night she did not sleep at all, but she did not bark without purpose, like some foolish mutt, who, sitting on her hind legs with her head up and her eyes shut, barks merely out of boredom, at the stars, and regularly time and again—no! Mumu’s fine little voice was never sounded in vain: either a trespasser came too close to the fence, or there was a suspicious noise somewhere or a rustle... In a word, she was an excellent guard. (pp. 258-59)

The narrator’s anthropocentrism is especially bold here, associating barking without a human-serving purpose with cognitive and typological inferiority (“some foolish mutt”) while also denying the animal the pleasure of simple vocalizations (barking “out of boredom” or “at the stars”). With Mumu’s barking considered part of her duties as a guard dog, it is ironic that her outburst at the trespasser, which wakes up the *barynia* and leads to Mumu’s abduction by Gavriila, is part of these very same duties. Mumu’s less discriminating yelps, while hidden in Gerasim’s room upon her return, further condemn her by making her presence at the estate known to the *barynia*’s servants. To suggest that her “fine little voice” symbolizes the rebellious clamor denied to the oppressed “Russian people [who] lie silently

and submissively in their hovels” (Frost, 1987, p. 178) is to ignore the various iterations which do not support a neat allegorical reading. More accurately, Mumu may be perceived as giving “voice” to Gerasim by sounding the protestations against his mistress that he cannot due to his social status and/or disability; such a view, however, is not only ableist, but undermined by the text itself: Gerasim has the means to rebel. By leaving the estate “without his owner’s permission, Gerasim commits an act of disobedience—and one of the most seriously punishable in Russian serfdom” (Somoff, 2010, p. 501). Rather than examining Mumu’s barking with respect to humans, thereby either condoning the narrator’s selective anthropocentrism (“selective” because the narrator recognizes Mumu’s voice as purposive, but its purpose is to serve humans) or yielding to the allegorical erasure of its materiality, I read it as one, but not the sole expression of Mumu’s subjectivity.

The term “subjectivity” has multiple meanings and a long discursive history. The subject is “a subject to itself, an ‘I,’” with its own experience difficult to understand or inaccessible to others; it is also “a subject to, and of, others” and “often an ‘Other’ to others”; and “a body that is separate [...] from other human bodies,” “closely dependent upon its physical environment” (Gagnier 1991, as cited in Hall, 2004, pp. 2-3). Hall (2004) distinguishes between identity and subjectivity, terms often used interchangeably, by defining identity as “that particular set of traits, beliefs, and allegiances that [...] gives one a consistent personality and mode of social being,” whereas subjectivity “implies always a degree of thought and self-consciousness about identity,” even if such comprehension remains incomplete (p. 3). Haraway (2003) alleges that “[t]here are no pre-constituted subjects and objects, and no single sources, unitary actors, or final ends”; rather, there are “contingent foundations,” in Judith Butler’s terms, and “bodies that matter are the result” (p. 6).

Many forms of subjectivity are linked to language use and hence exclusionary of most nonhuman animals and certain differently-abled humans, making Haraway’s (2003) relational reorientation, which emphasizes contingency and materiality, more relevant to the current analysis. To speak of nonhuman animal subjectivity is to challenge “the human monopoly on notions of personhood, thought, and subjectivity” (Weil, 2012, p. 58). Weil (2012) notes that apes’ “proven ability to learn and teach sign language to other apes” has already undermined the logocentric human-animal divide by demonstrating that they possess “the basic

capabilities deemed necessary for subjectivity: self-consciousness, rational agency, the capacity to learn and transmit language,” while further confirming Darwin’s conviction that humans differ from other animals in degree only (p. 4).

While some animal studies projects continue the work of exploring animals’ language capabilities, others, following the so-called counter-linguistic turn, search for forms of subjectivity outside logocentric, rational processes of thinking and speaking that have historically privileged humans over nonhumans, and continue to privilege nonhuman primates over other animal species. These concerns are shared by disability studies that focuses on persons with linguistic conditions, like autism or Asperger’s Syndrome, which challenge assumptions about rational thought. Rather than language or historical agency, Weil (2012) suggests that we think of subjectivity as “simply through being a body in time” because “questions of time and consciousness cannot be considered independently of the bodies that allow them to be materialized, [...] give them sensation, meaning, as well as duration” (pp. 37-38). The latter conception of subjectivity is, further, more in line with disability studies’ challenge to the normative emphasis on voice, sight, and language (Davis, 2006).

The narrator’s descriptions of Mumu focus on her external behavior: her body, eyes, and barking, through which a canine subjectivity emerges: her “agile” body fights, trembles, and twists, and she licks Gerasim but “bare[s] her teeth” at the *barynia*; her “smart” and “expressive” eyes impart an attitude of trust and fearlessness; her purposive barking sets her apart from other, less “extraordinarily smart” dogs. That the narrator of “Mumu” privileges voice and sight may be attributed to prevailing and unquestioned ableism typical of 19th-century literature (Holmes, 2018), evident as well in his ableist generalizations about the facial features and vocalizations of people with disabilities (Turgenev, 1986, IV, pp. 250, 264). That he calls attention to Mumu’s body may, in turn, be attributed to the speciesist identification between animal and body, historically considered to be forces of nature in contradistinction to the rational element of human and, particularly, privileged masculine culture (Weil, 2012, pp. 139-40). The depiction of Mumu’s expressive body suggests an alternate form of subjectivity, whereas the privileging of her voice and eyes, though ableist according to late 20th- and 21st-century revisionist work, also validates a

subjectivity that might otherwise be denied due to older speciesist notions about the lack of canine consciousness/interiority.

More broadly, Turgenev's views on animality and dogness may be gleaned from the numerous references to dogs throughout his earlier short story collection, *A Huntsman's Sketches*, where hunters are repeatedly identified as having "a rifle and a dog" (Turgenev, 1986, III, pp. 22, 140, 354). While many hunting dogs are mentioned in passing, those that have names (often speaking ones) enjoy privileged status. In "Bezhin Meadow," the narrator's dog Dianka (whose name is the diminutive form of Diana, the Roman goddess of the hunt) is "definitively the smartest of all four-legged creatures" (p. 88). In "Farmer Ovsianikov," another dog, Milovidka ("pleasant-looking" or "coquette"), is depicted as a valued being whose owner refuses to sell her and holds a funeral upon her death (p. 63). In yet another story, "Ermolai and the Miller's Wife," Valetka (from "valet," a name typically given to mutts) is described as "a smart animal"; his owner does not feed him trusting the dog to be smart enough to find his own nourishment (a backhanded compliment verging on animal abuse). Valetka seems so indifferent to the world, the narrator states, that, were he not a dog, he could be described as suffering from "disenchantment [razocharovannost']" (p. 20). Thus, the narrator recognizes the animal's anthropomorphic capacity for experiencing the world which the Russian language reserves exclusively for humans. Because it reflects human values, interests, and scale, language is by definition anthropocentric, which problematizes any representation of animal "nature" as over against "what human nature itself is" (Clark, 2011, pp. 192-94). In depicting Valetka, the narrator of the *Sketches* singles out his sense of smell, which, along with endurance, makes him a prized hunting dog, but this human-serving detail is balanced with a description of Valetka's body that reveals his individuality while anthropomorphizing dogs more generally: "He usually sat, tucking his cropped tail under himself, frowned, twitched, startled at times and never smiled. (It is known that dogs have the ability to smile, and to do so quite nicely)" (Turgenev, 1986, III, p. 20). Although the value of animal anthropomorphism is debatable (Fraustino, 2016, p. 146), in the *Sketches*, the attribution of humanlike traits to nonhumans recognizes the presence of another living being with an interiority, however limited.

Sensitivity to canine consciousness shared by Turgenev's narrators is put in perspective by the human chauvinism prevalent in Russian

sociolinguistics. The Russian idiom “sobake sobach’ia smert’” (“one who lives a dog’s life deserves a dog’s death”), for instance, means that a death without confession suits a person of ill temper. The association between youthful gullibility and puppyhood is also idiomatic: the 19th-century Russian ethnographer Dal’ (1882), a useful source on contemporary linguistics, offers several idiomatic examples, including “old, like a dog, yet foolish (young), like a puppy” (“star, chto sobaka, a glup [mal], chto shchenok”) and “he is still frozen in puppyhood (stupid from his youth)” (“on eshche v shchenkakh zamoren [smolodu glup]”); in contemporary Russian slang, “shchenok” (puppy) means “snot” or “son of a bitch.” Idioms are essential components of any language’s general vocabulary which reflect a particular culture’s ideas and conceptions of reality and experience, though cross-linguistic stereotypes are also found across cultures (Casas & Campoy, 1995). The speciesism of other Turgenev stories, however, is more in line with Bakhtin’s critique. The derogatory use of “dog” to designate an immoral person appears in “Burgmeister,” one of the *Sketches* about a government official who abused his peasants and is described as “a dog, not a person”: “It is said: a dog, a cur is a cur”; “Yet he is such a cur, a dog [...] a swindler, shameless, a dog” (Turgenev, 1986, III, p. 136). The Aesopian use of nonhuman animals to designate unattractive human traits, which reduces animals to simple, negative stereotypes rather than promoting their complex and unique subjectivities, is not limited to dogs in the Russian language nor to the 19th century. Animal rights activists advocate for a broader conscientious “liberation” of human language from anthropocentrism by abandoning, among others, the use of animal epithets, like “hare-brain,” “snake,” or “chicken,” as insults (Mola and the Blacker Family, as cited in Adams, 2010, p. 95).

The detailed descriptions of Mumu’s purposeful barking, loyal companionship, and role as “an excellent guard” all point to a subjectivity and add up to a sympathetic portrait. However, this subjectivity also functions to maximize the aesthetic impact of the two critical scenes—one of her abduction and the other of her killing—to make a bigger point about human cruelty. In the first of these scenes, after Mumu was stolen, a distraught Gerasim is said to have called out to her, “mooring” in his own way: “‘Mumu!’—but Mumu did not answer” (Turgenev, 1986, IV, p. 263). Gerasim’s face, “already lifeless, as the faces of all deafmutes [*sic*] [...] turned to stone” (p. 264). The other peasants, who typically mock him and

talk behind his back while expressing apprehensions about his physical prowess, on this occasion neither smile nor say a word. The “scream of joy from his wordless breast” upon Mumu’s arrival is, then, reinforced through the tactile imagery of her “lick[ing] his nose, eyes, mustache, and beard” (p. 264). Both subjectivities, human and nonhuman, are described indirectly without explicit narratorial commentary: we are shown, rather than told, how they felt, with their subjectivities recognized but not ventriloquized by the narrator; in fact, this moment of mutual understanding culminating in reciprocated joy points to Gerasim and Mumu’s intersubjectivity. As understood by Husserl, the term refers to “the interchange of thoughts and feelings, both conscious and unconscious, between two persons or ‘subjects,’ as facilitated by empathy” (as cited in Cooper-White, 2014).

But this scene draws its pathos from the needless loss and return of an animal, further compounded by her being the only companion of a socially estranged man with disabilities, which are also put to work for aesthetic effect (“lifeless [...] fac[e]”; “wordless breast”). Frost (1987) finds the scene of Mumu’s loss “especially pathos-filled” because it reminds the reader of Gerasim’s “inarticulateness” and his connection to animals (he is compared to a young bull earlier in the narrative) (Frost, 1987, p. 179). Unless we key in on such moments as exemplary of intersubjectivity and recognize the meaningful “interchange [...] between two [...] ‘subjects,’” Mumu risks becoming one of many “conventional fictional devices” and “vehicles of use to comment on human situations” (Donovan, 2011, p. 214), while Gerasim risks serving as what critical disability scholars Mitchell and Snyder (2001) call a “narrative prosthesis,” “a crutch upon which literary narratives lean for their representational power, disruptive potentiality, and analytical insight” (p. 49).

Similarly, the famous scene of Mumu’s drowning at the end of Turgenev’s novella employs her embodied subjectivity and her guardian’s pathos-inducing disability to evoke the most poignant emotional response. In the final moments of their friendship, the narrative focus falls yet again on the eyes, which ironically mark Mumu’s and Gerasim’s contrasting knowledge of what is to come: while the unsuspecting Mumu is depicted as “glancing at [Gerasim] trustingly and without fear, slightly wagging her tail,” Gerasim “avert[s] his eyes and shut[s] them” (Turgenev, 1986, IV, p. 270). Gerasim’s failure to meet Mumu’s gaze—to “see[k] to inhabit an intersubjective world that is about meeting the other in all the fleshly detail of a

mortal relationship” (Haraway, 2003, p. 34)—and Mumu’s ostensible ignorance of her impending fate suggest the collapse of intersubjectivity. It is also possible, however, that Mumu knows and so submits to her guardian’s judgment in a remarkable show of “unconditional love” (or internalized servility). Frost (1987) suggests this, but only to allegorically describe Mumu as “[a] willing sacrifice offered up by her master’s hands, [who] becomes the symbol for the coming emancipation of the serfs in Russia” (p. 179). The narrator’s limited perspective on her largely inaccessible interiority leaves open the possibility of an intersubjective communion.

What follows is no less heart-rending: “Gerasim heard nothing, neither the brief yelp of the falling Mumu, nor the heavy splashing of water; for him even the noisiest day was wordless and soundless, in the way that even the quietest night is never soundless for us” (Turgenev, 1986, IV, p. 270). Though less so with respect to the animal whose emotions are inferred by the narrator (“trustingly and without fear”), this may be interpreted as an innovative use of disability standpoint—of attempting to experience the world from the perspective of a person who is deaf; yet that the implied “we” is nondisabled and can imagine the sound inaccessible to Gerasim, reveals an ableist bias that otherizes this experience. And, again, pathos stems from the violence committed against an animal whose “yelp” the audience is invited to imagine.

It is not just the two climactic scenes. The yoking of animality and disability for the purpose of aesthetic enjoyment by (presumably) nondisabled audiences is already present in the story’s title. In the same paragraph as the “expressive eyes” and “passionate loyalty” to her guardian, the narrator reveals that Mumu is given her name by Gerasim, “mu-mu” being the only phoneme he can articulate (Turgenev, 1986: IV, p. 258). Gerasim’s vocalizations are defined “first as the lowing or mooing of cattle (or the bellowing of a bull) and second as speaking indistinctly or inarticulately” (Ozhegov, cited in Frost, 1987, p. 179). This naming reflects the speciesist tradition in Russian culture of not giving dogs Christian names from the Russian Orthodox name canon (Mondry, 2015, p. 14). According to Dal’s ethnographic dictionary, “‘*Greshno sobaku klikat’ chelovecheskim imenem*’—‘It is sinful to give a dog a human name’” (p. 14). Turgenev critics have offered various readings of this verbal choice. Frost (1987) notes that the bovine sound summons an earlier comparison of Gerasim to a bewildered young bull, who is captured while grazing in a meadow and put on a train

(pp. 178-79). Somoff (2010) sees in the naming of Mumu, “the only name he was capable of giving,” Gerasim’s acquisition of speech and, symbolically, his entry into the human community (p. 513). Recent scholarship has begun to question able-spoken conceptions of communication impairments as unintelligible speech, instead proposing an intersubjective approach that challenges such failure to recognize alternatively-abled utterances (Inahara, 2013). Ironically, it is by connecting with an animal that Gerasim joins the language-based human community, from which he once again dissociates upon Mumu’s death. Indeed, language functions here both to connect and to separate him from other humans in a way that animals are also at once connected (through spatial contiguity, material adjacency, friendship, zoophilia) and separate (denied full subjectivity because they operate outside human thought and language). Both Gerasim and Mumu are otherized in “animacy hierarchies,” that is, “a particular political grammar...which conceptually arranges human life, disabled life, animal life, plant life, and forms of nonliving material in orders of value and priority” (Chen, 2012, p. 13).

Gerasim and Mumu’s interspecies friendship combines animality and disability in other ways, as well. By taking Mumu into his small quarters, even allowing her to sleep in his bed, Gerasim defies the cultural tradition that, in addition to the prohibition on naming, deems dogs both literally and figuratively “unclean,” with associated prohibitions against touching and allowing them into Christian houses (Mondry, 2015, p. 14). Mumu, in turn, provides the love that Gerasim, as a person with disabilities, lacks in a community where he is treated as an Other. The narrator compares him to animals (bull, lion); the other characters compare him to animals (bear) and animal-like supernatural figures from Eastern Slavic folklore (leshii, kikimora), and also question his capacity for human and nonhuman companionship: “what kind of a husband could he be?”; “what does he need a dog for?” (Turgenev, 1986, IV, pp. 251, 272). Indeed, as Cary Wolfe reminds us, the discourse of speciesism is “always [...] available for use by some humans against other humans [...] to countenance violence against the social other of *whatever* species—or gender, or race, or class” (as cited in Taylor, 2017, p. 108). The discourse of ableism can be found even in liberatory texts: one of the questions Haraway (2003) asks in her *Manifesto*

is: “how might stories about dog-human worlds finally convince brain-damaged US Americans [...] that history matters in naturecultures?” (p. 3).

More so than the sociohistorical interpretations of “Mumu” as a comment on serfdom, Taburin’s drawing of Gerasim and Mumu in the row boat privileges the tragedy of the human-dog relationship. Baker (2001) argues that the animal image serves as a Derridian supplement to the animal narrative “*bringing to light* the disruptive potential of the story’s animal content” (p. 139). In the image, Gerasim stands with his right arm around Mumu’s torso and his left gripping the bricks tied with rope. His tall stature makes Mumu’s small body appear even slighter, with her pointy snout reaching toward his face. Both man and dog look despondently into each other’s eyes. In the background, two peasant figures on the riverbank observe and gesticulate, perhaps in a desperate attempt to stop what is about to transpire. To see this as short of a tragic interspecies lament seems heartless. Even if Gerasim’s hair, *kaftan*, and muscular hands mark him as a serf, the familiar allegory on serfdom does not immediately emerge from this image of intimacy and shared grief.

Yet, why was this tragedy necessary? Was Mumu’s purpose first to



An engraving, from a drawing by V. Taburin

Source:

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=11264960>

work for Gerasim at the estate and then to do the emotional labor required for his transformation, which ultimately empowered him to leave his owner and the estate behind? In her discussion of the problematic “good death” in Coetzee’s novel *Disgrace*, Weil (2006) asks, But what of the death of animals? Is that death “as such” and do they have access to it, or perhaps we through them? What exactly

might an animal death do for us, not in terms of what it might supply us as food or clothing, but rather might there be any “knowledge” gained from seeing an animal die, if not from killing it ourselves? (p. 90).

The story whose readers have been asking, for almost two centuries, “Why did Gerasim drown his Mumu?,” is a good place to think about such questions.

Weil (2006) argues that, in *Disgrace*, “the look of the animal we kill provokes, however disturbingly, a transforming moment in the life of the main protagonist, David Lurie” (p. 90). One can also argue, however, that Lurie does not change, since the book ends ambiguously with little promise of redemption. It is only after Gerasim drowns Mumu, upon the *barynia*’s petulant orders, that he resolves to leave her estate in an act of grave disobedience (Somoff, 2010, pp. 505, 501). The narrator says that he “followed all orders accurately,” but adds that “he also knew his rights, and no one dared take his place at the table” (Turgenev, 1986, IV, p. 247). The inhumane system of serfdom does not crush his individual will completely, since he asserts it continually and is finally able to escape of his own volition. Thus, Gerasim gains physical freedom, yet does drowning Mumu also “transform” him spiritually and morally?

The narrator concludes “Mumu” by expressing the village men’s view of the “*bogatyř*’-like strength of the mute man” who is lucky to be free of women and who does not require a dog because no thief would dare step foot in his yard (Turgenev, 1986, IV, p. 272). The view of the peasants is reductive for women and dogs, implying that the former are a cause of misery and the latter only good for guarding one’s abode. The female Mumu was a companion and a work partner; because he previously seemed to enjoy companionship and communication, Gerasim’s self-imposed celibacy and isolation put into question how transformative Mumu’s death really was, or what “knowledge” Gerasim (or we) “gained from seeing an animal die,” in Weil’s (2006, p. 90) words. Shunning the world seems an unlikely conclusion to a story meant to incite social change.

Ultimately, we cannot know why Gerasim drowned his Mumu, not because Gerasim’s linguistic disability challenges conventional modes of narrating others’ consciousness, but because this unnarrated act is also unnarratable. A theory of trauma, as Berger (1997) reminds us, “will intersect with other critical vocabularies which problematize representation and

attempt to define its limits—discourses of the sublime, the sacred, the apocalyptic, and the Other in all its guises” (p. 573). Such aporia in “Mumu” points to an even greater one: less than how Gerasim experienced it (we learn the consequences), we know nothing of how Mumu experienced her death. Somoff (2010) finds Gerasim to be a limit case for contemporary prose narratives that featured narrators with little to no access to the characters’ interiority which, in turn, precluded the “reliable representation of the character’s inner life” (p. 508); however, she fails to even mention the representation of canine consciousness that presents an even more extreme case. That Mumu’s death keeps fueling narratives intent on discovering everything but her subjectivity seems, therefore, doubly inhumane. In my attempt to recover her life, I have not uncovered her experience of death, yet I have tried to reveal the complexity of emotions and intersubjective relationality beyond language that Turgenev’s novella conveys, even as it makes the death of an animal the climax of its narrative mechanism for generating pathos.

Furthermore, I have attempted to read the dog’s death with as much respect, and deserving of as much critical attention, as a human’s. This is not to insist that a dog’s life is superior to any human’s, as Byron did in an inscription to his dog Boatswain’s monument (Perkins, 2003, p.4), but to assert near equivalency. Part of my motivation is personal: when I taught “Mumu” in an undergraduate literature course on literary animals, one student’s reaction to Mumu’s death left a lasting impression. “You gotta do what you gotta do,” this otherwise empathetic young woman, who also reflected fondly on her companion dog, wrote in her reaction to Turgenev’s story. How does an instructor respond to such a statement, a defeatist reading that confirms the inhumaneness of serfdom and Gerasim’s futility and precludes any potentially transformative interpretation? Is feigned nonchalance the best possible response to the monstrous abyss that Gerasim opens up by acting as God in first saving and then taking the life of another living being, a particularly ironic misuse of power given that it follows the orders of a woman whose own power rests on a landed conspiracy to maintain an inhumane system of ownership and absolute control of human beings? Can such matter-of-factness be read against the grain as a repressed scream against the injustice of the human-animal relationship? And, equally as important, how do we make sure that no one is faced with similar decisions?

Granted, this is not a typical reaction to “Mumu”; readers’ responses range from resentment (Somoff, 2010) to psychological trauma (Gerasimov, 2018), which may be equally difficult to address in a classroom setting. But starting with the affective and working through such resistance, by asking students to write informally and then think critically about, defend, revise, or even reject their beliefs in light of historical, sociocultural, and environmental contexts, is an urgent, albeit challenging, way to engage in ecopedagogy. By foregrounding the relationship between an individual with disabilities and a nonhuman animal, a critical animal studies interpretation of “Mumu” demands a holistic understanding of two commonly oppressed groups, adding to this, moreover, the historical oppression of Russian peasants under serfdom, and the interrogation of ableism, speciesism, and classism. Such an understanding is the first step to total liberation.

Donovan (2011) cites “crush” videos as the “extreme example” of animal abuse for human aesthetic enjoyment, where small live animals are crushed to death by stiletto-clad women for the sexual titillation of the male human viewer (p. 209). The production of these videos was criminalized by the *Preventing Animal Cruelty and Torture Act* in November 2019, making selected acts of animal cruelty a federal felony in the U.S. (though state laws remain largely iniquitous). I am proposing the monstrous comparison between the pathos-inducing death of the fictional Mumu, or the repeated deaths of the continually reincarnating Bailey in *A Dog’s Purpose*, and those of the many real animals “crushed” on video—to make a larger ethical point about the various purposes (imagined or real) that dogs are expected by humans to serve, and which require that we continue thinking-through what dogs are, who humans are in relation to them, and how the human-dog relationship can be made mutually meaningful and reciprocal without being reduced to “unconditional love,” which puts an unnecessary burden on the animals to transform their human companions. Rather than attempting to answer the ultimately unanswerable question of Turgenev’s “Mumu” and reading it as always already having drowned the titular dog, we might, instead, focus on what precedes the climactic river scene: less on how Mumu’s depiction is constrained by anthropocentrically constructed purpose, and more on the depiction of an emotive, intelligent animal whose subjectivity is inseparable from her own environment, as a serf’s working dog in 19th-century Russia, but which may also have something to say about ours.

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The Emotional Politics of Images: Moral Shock, Explicit Violence and Strategic Visual Communication in the Animal Liberation Movement

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Abstract

Animal liberation activists regularly use visual communication to get their message across to the public. Explicit violent images are considered a potential tool to bridge the moral gap between activists and audiences. However, there is a strong debate regarding the effectiveness of different visuals. This paper aims to contribute to the discussion by examining to what extent these images may be effective means of raising awareness of speciesist beliefs and attitudes, as well as promoting changes in them. To this end, this paper reviews the most outstanding research on anti-speciesist visual communication strategies from an interdisciplinary approach, focusing on the concept of moral shock. According to the review, it seems reasonable to conclude that animal liberation activists can benefit from the strategic use of moral shock, but given the difficulty of drawing clear conclusions on the topic, more research on the issue is needed to obtain more accurate results.

Keywords: advocacy; animal liberation; emotions; moral shock; speciesism; strategic visual communication.

Introduction

The streets of the city are full of people walking all over the place, meeting their friends, going to the theatre, cinema, or simply buying stuff. In a corner of the square, a group of animal liberation activists hold signs and computers showing several pictures and videos of nonhuman animals living within animal exploitation industries: an encaged sow is lying on the floor, unable to move. She is squashing her own baby, couched inside her body while trying to nurse. The sow's gaze, while she tries to spin around, is heartbreaking. A conveyor belt walks to the abyss a group of tiny newborn yellow chicks, who will be ground up alive because they are not profitable to the egg industry. A group of fishes are taken out of the water in fishing nets and are put in a plastic box full of ice, where they will agonize until their last minute of life before completely freezing. These are just some possible images that disclose the reality behind the walls of farms, aquaculture facilities, and slaughterhouses around the globe. This group of animal advocates may be in any city, using the power of visuals to break up the silence, raise awareness, and promote social engagement with the animal liberation struggle.

Nonhuman animals are one of the most oppressed collectives in contemporary societies of the Global North. The domination that suppresses their bodies and lives, however, is generally normalized. The ideology promoting this domination is called speciesism, which can be defined in a moral sense as “the unjustified disadvantageous consideration or treatment of those who are not classified as belonging to a certain species” (Horta, 2010, p. 1). It can also be described in a structural sense because it organizes all levels of the social structure: political, economic, ideological, and symbolic, cultural (Nibert, 2002). Anthropocentrism is the moral paradigm that places human beings at the center of importance, validity and consideration above other animals. Anthropocentric speciesism justifies human supremacy based on species membership alone. This oppressive idea has great similarities to other historical centrisms that reflect the configuration of power relations in a binary, speciesist-anthropocentric, colonial-Eurocentric, and heteropatriarchal-androcentric world (Ávila Gaitán & González, 2015). The social devaluation of certain subjects who have been left to the margins, gives rise to systems of oppression such as racism, speciesism, ableism, classicism, sexism and environmental injustice, among other power structures. All these systems of power, far from being

independent or isolated, are strongly interconnected (Adams, 1990/2010; Nibert, 2002; Hribal, 2010; Ko & Ko, 2017).

In this context, media and communication play a primary role in both reproducing and challenging systemic ideologies. For Fuchs (2011), “communication refers to a symbolic interaction process between human subjects, whereas a medium is an artefact/object/technology that enables communications” (p. 75). Throughout this process, considered by Freeman (2014) as not neutral, conventional media plays a central role in the perpetuation of the speciesist ideology, which is based on human supremacy, the instrumentalization of other animals, the reproduction of the human/animal binary and the distorted representation of nonhuman animals and their relations with humans (Nibert, 2002; Khazaal & Almiron, 2016). Animality is frequently represented in hegemonic and institutional art and visual culture as a means to reinforce human supremacy by underlining the differences between human and nonhuman animals or as a means to create interest and empathy towards a human being, as shown by Kean in her research on animal representation in urban commemorative sculptures (Kean, 2011, p. 61).

Media and hegemonic discourses generally represent nonhuman animals as mere resources for human means; the relevance of their lives and bodies is measured by their capability to satisfy human necessities and pleasures, instead of considering the inherent value of their lives in themselves (Freeman, 2009b). Even when nonhuman animals’ capacities of feeling and having particular and complex emotional lives are thoroughly documented (Bekoff, 2007), the media offers a distorted and caricatured image of nonhuman animals, suppressing their suffering, their individuality and specificity as unique beings by representing them as properties or goods. Through speciesist language (Dunayer, 2001), false advertising (Adams, 1990/2010), negative anthropomorphism (Parkinson, 2019) or commodification of their bodies, as well as the omission of the debate about the use and exploitation of other animals, media representations of nonhuman animals promote and reproduce this speciesist ideology (Freeman, 2009b; Almiron et al., 2016). Scholars J. Keri Cronin and Lisa A. Kramer (2018) defined this speciesist media imaginary as the “iconography of oppression” (p. 84). Through these distorted and violence-sanitized images of nonhuman animals, the dominant systems of visual culture normalize animal use and exploitation.

As a consequence, the animal liberation movement faces the challenge of “[enabling] target audiences to perceive problems [related to nonhuman animals] as severe and unresolved by authorities, creating a sense of urgency that motivates social intervention” (Freeman, 2014, p. 69). Aaltola underlines the power of images for nonhuman animal advocacy: images are an alternative to words, “as they communicate the physical form and emotive gestures of the animal, and leave the door open for emotions and forms of understanding which usually escape analytical reasoning and propositional language” (Aaltola, 2014, p. 20). Philosopher Kathie Jenni (2005) also considered this emotional dimension when she held: “Images are catalysts for ‘the unfolding of compassion.’ They do not by themselves produce either feelings of empathy or the disposition to help that compassion involves, but they promote a necessary condition for both: vivid awareness of individual suffering” (p. 6). Cronin and Kramer argue that artistic interventions and photographic images can interrupt the systemic iconography of oppression and challenge the speciesist status quo (Cronin & Kramer, 2018, pp. 84, 86). When advocating for animal liberation and trying to influence people’s behaviors, activists find in visual communication a potential source of opportunities to subvert socially normalized speciesism. The visual representations of nonhuman animal realities from an antispeciesist gaze are diverse and varied and there is a strong open debate regarding the effectiveness of different types of visuals within the animal liberation movement. This paper contributes to the discussion by examining the extent to which images of explicit violence towards nonhuman animals may be effective means of promoting change in speciesist beliefs and attitudes and aligning society with the animal liberation movement’s goals. To this end, this paper conducts a literature review compiling the most outstanding theoretical studies and the empirical research on animal advocacy communication strategies available to date. Currently, there are more theoretical discussions of violent images and moral shock, but not a lot of empirical research in general and focused on animal advocacy and visual communication in particular, as well as research on complementary visual communication strategies used to persuade in activism which are also applicable to the animal advocacy movement. This review focuses on the concept of “moral shock” (Jasper & Poulsen, 1995) because studies have shown that visuals including explicit violence trigger an emotional impact in audiences and have the potential to create changes in moral perception and

modify speciesist beliefs and attitudes.

While this paper explores the explicit violent imagery and moral shock tactic possibilities towards individual attitude and behavioral change, the moral shock strategy is not limited to creating change at an individual level and can also positively promote structural change. For example, undercover investigations in nonhuman animal exploitation centers which show explicitly how these nonhuman animals are subjected to exploitation and direct harm within the animal industrial complex have received large media coverage and have helped to prompt social discussions and raise public awareness on animal exploitation issues. This fact has facilitated shutting down animal exploitation centers or motivating some banning or regulations within certain industries in some cases.

During this paper the term “animal liberation movement” and “animal advocacy movement” will be generally prioritized and used to refer specifically to the anti-speciesist and abolitionist branch, the aim of which is the end of any animal use. In the case of the referenced studies, the concept coined by the authors—generally, “animal rights”—will be kept. For the literature review, all the empirical research found was included, done from diverse ideological perspectives of the animal advocacy movement. I use movement in singular as an umbrella concept, but not with universalizing intentions of the broad cultural, ideological and organizational diversity within international animal advocacy.

The article is structured as follows: first, the paper explores the distinctive traits of animal liberation activists and some of the most relevant approaches to communication strategies in these communities. Second, the concept of moral shock, its theoretical background and some of the main empirical studies are examined while approaching other visual communication strategies and considering the important relations between communication, emotions and social change in the case of the animal liberation movement. Third, the primary empirical studies on anti-speciesist visuals are presented. Finally, the last section discusses the main conclusions drawn from this review, explores the contributions of philosophers and social scientists on the risks and opportunities of using moral shock, outlines some ethical concerns for communicators, and highlights the need for more empirical research on the topic.

Activist Communities and Communication Strategies

Before addressing the extent to which visuals portraying explicit violence are effective, it is useful to explore the general strategies and profiles of the activist communities provided by the literature. These studies, briefly discussed below, shed valuable light on the composition of the collectives and associations and certain common characteristics of animal liberation activists' profiles, and some of their main communication strategies.

Regarding values, studies show that the animal liberation movement is mostly feminized (Gaarder, 2011) and not generally affiliated to a religion (Jasper & Poulsen, 1995, p. 502). Animal liberation activists generally share values and identities, such as their more holistic approach to other power structures (Taylor, 2005) or their common visceral disgust and developed moral aversion to nonhuman animal use and exploitation (Herzog & Golden, 2009). They use strategies such as networking (Cherry, 2006) to reinforce their shared beliefs and moral shock (Jasper & Poulsen, 1995) to bring their message of respect toward nonhuman animals to their audiences. They also increase their perceived efficacy and make their activism sustainable by fortifying strategies such as seeing the positive, thinking cumulatively, celebrating victories, and claiming credit (Einwohner, 2002).

With regard to recruitment and communication strategies used by the animal advocacy movement, Jasper and Poulsen state that “the success depends primarily on affecting nonstate actors (including the public)” (1993, p. 656). Jasper and Poulsen also conclude that “previous contact with someone in the movement is the most important factor explaining an individual’s recruitment” (1995, p. 495). However, as will be pointed out later, moral shock is also an important strategy for recruiting strangers.

In their effort to broaden the animal liberation movement, activists must face some strategic choices related to the “Extension Dilemma” and the “Reaching Out or Reaching In’ Dilemma” (Jasper, 2004). The former refers to the tension between the expansion of those considered allies in a social struggle with the risk of losing focus in the movement, and the latter to the choice of which audience a social movement intends to reach: those who are already sympathetic to the movement or the uninitiated (Jasper, 2004). Other possible dilemmas are related to authenticity—if it is better to present the message in the most ideologically-authentic way or if it is more effective, for pragmatic reasons, to adapt activists’ appeals to “better fit the audience’s interests and values, even if they are discriminatory or self-interested rather than aligned with the SMO [Social Movement Organization]’s anti-

discriminatory or altruistic guiding values” (Freeman, 2009a, pp. 19-20). If the aim is to achieve effective communication, animal liberation activists need to guide their moral outrage while trying not to increase the “moral chasm” (Jasper & Nelkin, 2007, p. 230) that distances them from their potential audiences.

However, effectiveness may not be directly connected to a less radical discourse or strategy. Karagianni and Cornelissen (2006) show an enormous diversity of political tendencies and aims inside anti-corporate social movements that already share values and goals. The animal liberation movement has also been considered an anti-corporate movement because of its targets and strategies (Jasper & Nelkin, 2007). Following Jahn, Hong and Park’s research, the public attitude toward radical and moderate activists does not vary significantly, because the “public perceives them as activists together” (2013, p. 120). However, “the public support toward activists could differ by the communication strategies the activists decide to utilize” (Jahn et al., 2013). This confirms that efforts must be put into adapting the messages to different audiences rather than looking for a universal strategy.

As shown by Jasper (1998), social movements—and all forms of social life—are pervaded by emotions. It has been shown that emotions relate more to activism than cognitive agreement alone, for the latter does not result in action (Jasper, 1998, p. 413). As upheld by Wisneski and Skitka (2017), there is agreement in the moral psychology field on the strong association between morality and emotion. It follows then, that the animal liberation movement needs to consider emotions as a central issue in its communications strategies. In this effort, it is relevant to keep in mind the context where the communication takes place and to consider that emotions are culturally constructed, as cultural norms shape what will be labeled as normal or deviant and sustain different cultural backgrounds of shared assumptions (Jasper & Poulsen, 1995; Jasper, 1998). The same authors revealed that personal and moral proximity to the audience also conditions the persuasive communication approach. Einwohner (1999) included activists’ identity and audience’s perceptions on activists’ gender, class, and race as factors that shape social movement outcomes and increase or reduce the effectiveness of a campaign. These identity markers, interactive between activists and their audiences, influence the perception of a campaign and whether it is framed as an important and necessary social issue or as an illegitimate one. The researcher examined an anti-hunting campaign and an

anti-circus campaign carried out by the animal rights association Progressive Animal Welfare Society (PAWS) composed by predominantly middle-class female activists. As Einwohner concludes:

Interactions between PAWS activists and their targets are shaped by ideas about class and gender, but in different ways. In the hunting campaign, activists are evaluated in terms of class and gender, which become a source of illegitimacy and a basis for hunters' dismissal of the activists' claims. Circus patrons do not use class and gender to the same extent when evaluating the activists' claims; however, when it does arise, patrons actually use gendered assessments as a justification for, rather than a dispute of, their anti-circus stance (p. 70).

More recently, Faunalytics' Animal Tracker survey (2019) gives room to important information about animal advocates and social attitudes towards animal advocacy (demographic analysis of allies, neutrals and adversaries) in the U.S. This research can be helpful to target audiences while taking into account Einwohner's concerns about the relational character of activists and audiences identity markers.

Effectiveness, Emotions and Moral Shock

In this article, effectiveness is understood in relation to the ability to generate changes in speciesist attitudes—including the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral levels—of the recipient of a visual message. In research on communication strategies and social movements, framing has been the main tool used to analyze how activists define the problem, offer a solution, and suggest the desirable strategy or action to reach their goals of social, environmental, and interspecies justice (Benford, 1993; Jasper, 1998; Freeman, 2014).

Following Snow and Benford (1992), frame is understood here as “an interpretive schemata that simplifies and condenses the ‘world out there’ by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of actions within one’s present or past environment” (p. 137). With regard to framing, Jasper (1998) focused on the concept of “frame alignment,” referring to the necessity of adjusting activists’ and potential participants’ frames—considering their beliefs, life experiences and self-narratives. Jasper, following Benford (1993), distinguished between three

types of framing: (a) diagnostic, the conviction that a problem needs to be addressed; (b) prognostic, the conviction related to the appropriate tactics, strategies, and targets, and (c) motivational, the conviction to get involved in activist activities.

In her research, Mika (2006) underlined four frame alignment techniques (Snow et al., 1986, pp. 467–72, as cited in Mika, 2006) that make the connection of animal liberation ideas with the ones followed by other social justice movements and facilitate the linkage between oppressions and liberation struggles: frame bridging, frame amplification, and frame extension. The author also emphasized the concept of frame transformation as the last goal of animal liberation activism. According to Mika (2006), frame transformation is based on the process by which new values are planted, old ones jettisoned, and contrary beliefs reframed, resulting in a transformation of frame. A phenomenon is reconceptualized so that what was once tolerable is now immoral and unacceptable (...). Animal rights groups, in particular, have often successfully used moral shock tactics to transform frames. (p. 920)

In Mika's study, the frame transformation is mainly represented by three PETA shocking advertisements:

One simply states, in bold letters, "Meat is Murder." Another, which also has religious overtones, shows a sheep suspended by a single back leg, showering blood on a nearby wall, with the accompanying text: "Lamb of God. Choose Life! Go Vegetarian." Over the course of the focus group discussions what emerged as the most shocking ad is an image of emaciated concentration camp victims juxtaposed with chickens in factory farm cages with the caption, "To Animals, All People are Nazis" (Mika, 2006, p. 923).

Moral shock has been described by the coiners of the term as a stimulus or event that causes a sense of outrage which in turn leads individuals to react in response to it (Jasper & Poulsen, 1995).

At first, evidence on the effectiveness of moral shock seemed contradictory and of dubious accuracy. In their study of anti-nuclear and animal rights protests, Jasper and Poulsen (1995) noted a contrast: in the case of the animal rights movement, the "recruitment of friends" was mainly based on existing networks, while the "recruitment of strangers" was

produced primarily through direct moral shocks (p. 499). Generally, the shock was the result of new information “about something existing which has already done unseen damage” (Jasper, 1998, p. 409).

In 2007, Jasper and Nelkin also suggested that moral shocks had been used as a recruiting tool for protest movements because of their persuasive nature, even for people with no prior political interest; they can not only inform the recipient about realities in which others do something to animals but also cause viewers to question their own actions related to animal exploitation. More recently, however, Jasper noted that shocks “do not change people’s underlying values; they only clarify or activate them” (2011, p. 293).

Wrenn (2013) researched the potentialities of using moral shocks as a means for the animal abolitionist strategy. Wrenn states that moral shocks have historically been used by the welfarist branch in the animal advocacy movement to motivate reform, while the abolitionists have focused more on narratives and logical-rational arguments. Wrenn holds that abolitionist anti-speciesism should introduce moral shocks to promote veganism because of its link with emotions and attitude-change (2013, p. 380). Even if explicit violence images allude mostly to the treatment and exploitation conditions of those animals, such visual contents can be framed in a broader abolitionist argument.

More recently, Wisneski and Skitka (2017) studied moral shock in the case of anti-abortion communication under the hypothesis that “exposure to graphic and emotionally charged images can increase the degree to which people see an issue in moral terms” (p. 147). They defended the unique effects of moral shock to morality, holding that moral shocks appear to moralize attitudes. Jasper had already pointed out, in 1998, that responses to moral shocks vary greatly in terms of the emotions that ensue (p. 409) and Nabi (1998) and Herzog & Golden (2009) have pointed to disgust as a key emotion for persuasion and attitude-change in animal advocacy messages.

Other essential communication tools the animal liberation movement uses to change speciesist worldviews are those related with boundaries of species and the moral community, which are frequently expressed through the use of moral shocks. Cherry approached Durkheim’s concept of “symbolic boundary” and the idea of influencing the culture to generate social change, especially through the creation of collective identities and the dissoluteness or overstepping of symbolic boundaries that perpetuate

difference and oppression between human and nonhuman animals. She argued that the change in the cultural codes and the shift of symbolic boundaries should be considered as an aim—and not a simple consequence—for the animal liberation movement (2010, p. 472).

Cherry (2010) suggested two different strategies to fight against symbolic boundaries and to influence the cultural meanings of audiences: “boundary-blurring” and “boundary-crossing.” Cherry holds that “boundary-crossing” describes typically individual-level processes in which a person moves from one group to another without changing the symbolic boundary within itself to displace symbolic boundaries instead of reinforcing them (2010, p. 468). The boundary crossing strategy is used by activists: (a) physically, when they use their human bodies (usually nudes) as nonhuman animal bodies, as in Animal Equality street performance for the World Meatless day (Animal Equality, 2012); (b) Iconographically, as pointed by Cherry, in the PMAF (Protection Mondiale des Animaux de Ferme) in their anti-foie-gras poster (2010, p.469); (c) Discursively: as in a Compassion Over Killing (COK) t-shirt with an image of a dog on a plate and the question, “Why not? You eat other animals, don’t you?” (Cherry, 2010, p.470). “Boundary-blurring’s strategies” are divided into two categories, as summarized by Bertolaso:

In the first category there are the focusing strategies; these strategies stress the biological evidence that humans are animals as well and that there is no difference between animals that are culturally loved and respected and animals that are culturally seen as mere resources; the second category is composed of the universalizing strategies, which place nonhuman animals beside humans as victims of violence and compare the animal rights movement to the movement for human rights (2015, p. 15).

A boundary-blurring strategy of focusing would consist of dismantling the companion/farmed animal divide, as done for instance by vegan artist Roma Velarde in one of her paintings titled “Tu perro no quiere ser tu comida. Los demás animales tampoco” (“Your dog doesn’t want to be your food. Other animals neither”). She painted a puppy in a plate and a piglet in a bed on the floor, changing the normalized places where each animal would be to question the species boundary and cultural assignation that has been normalized for each species (Velarde, 2018). In the case of the

universalizing strategy, some visual examples are the superposition of images of human animal exploitation and nonhuman animal exploitation, as the human victims of the holocaust and chickens encaged in factory farms. This kind of imagery has also been used making verbal or visual references to the comparison between human slavery and animal exploitation, as for example in a campaign against the circus that show an elephant chained paw with the text “slavery continue in the circus”. These strategies have been criticized from decolonial and anti-racist vegan activists and thinkers, for both ethical and strategical reasons (see, for example McJetters, 2014; Ko & Ko, 2017).

Some authors have argued that the use of moral shocks can generate paralysis or activate psychological defense mechanisms that promote inaction within the anti-speciesist discourse and political activity by alienating a part of the audience whose reaction is offense (Mika, 2006). This can prevent people from broadly exploring other arguments (environmental, food justice, human health) that resonate with them and encourage them to move towards veganism and plant-based diets. At worst, this can result in a backlash against the organizations and a loss of credibility of the whole movement (Mika, 2006, p. 921), greatly reducing one’s predisposition to be a part of it. On the other hand, some studies have also shown their effectiveness in raising awareness and changing speciesist attitudes towards nonhuman animals (Scudder & Mills, 2009). The next section collects the main existent empirical studies on anti-speciesist visuals designed to produce moral shock, and some risks and considerations on the use of moral shocks are explored in the discussion.

Research on Effective Anti-Speciesist Visuals

Amongst the main research conducted on the effectiveness of images portraying nonhuman animals, it is important to highlight Robin L. Nabi’s (1998) examination of the relation between disgust and attitude-change in the case of animal experimentation. Nabi (1998) used an experimental research methodology with 134 students attending one of two Northeastern universities. The participants were exposed to four versions of a video message addressing the issue of experimental medical research on animals with the same audio and structure “but different combinations of visual affective intensity in the counterargument (the opponents’ arguments) and rebuttal (the proponents’ arguments) sections” (p. 474). The visuals included;

a) very graphic images of monkeys being inflicted with head injuries; b) images of monkeys in a laboratory setting; c) human babies with deformities and other sick people in the hospital as well as happy people presumably helped by animal research; and d) a researcher performing routine laboratory tasks. In every video, the narrator described the need for and benefits of animal research (Nabi, 1998, p. 476). Nabi's research suggests that "disgust can be the dominant emotion elicited by a persuasive message" (1998, p. 480) and that the exposure to graphic images of animal experimentation and the feelings of disgust toward them motivated attitude-change (p. 480).

In 2006, Mika examined the way PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) framed its advertising campaigns. Mika's research addressed the contemporary animal rights movement's framing by conducting focus group analyses of one pivotal audience: the non-activist population. Mika analyzed 13 different images that included Christian-religious content (allusions to Jesus's vegetarianism and Bible quotes), patriotic references (the slogan "proud to be an American vegetarian" with the U.S. flag), moral shock (the aforementioned comparison between farms and concentration camps and an image with "meat is murder" written in white and red capital letters with black background), absent referent (an image of a white thin nude woman with meat cuts drawn on her body and the message "all the animals have the same parts" and an illustration of a smiling pig with the slogan "meat's no treat for those you eat!"), two images of semi-nude thin and hegemonically attractive white and black women dressed in a vegetable bikini with the slogan "let vegetarianism grow on you" and an image of a peace symbol linking vegetarianism with non-violence. Mika classified the images according to their alignment to the frame categories of transformation, moral shock, extension, absent referent, and bridging (2006, p. 923). Her conclusion was:

The only potentially encouraging result for PETA is that the moral shock ads caught the attention of nearly every discussant and the responses were notably strong. Some of the other ads went unnoticed or elicited only tepid responses. (p. 933)

The strongest negative reactions from the audience were related to the images designed to produce moral shocks: the religious and patriotic ads, and the image of a nude woman with meat cuts drawn on her body. These strong negative reactions had different foundations: lack of credibility and

opportunism—in the case of the patriotic advertising, lack of identification with the values of the ad, a perception of a faulty interpretation of the Bible in the case of the religious ads and a significant challenge to deeply integrated cultural beliefs in the case of the moral shocks (Mika, 2006, pp. 937-938). Mika’s research leaves some of the big questions regarding the challenges faced by animal advocacy unanswered:

Is it better to conduct strong visceral campaigns that, at least, initially turn people off or is it better to offer more innocuous, less personally threatening campaigns that might not produce any significant reaction? (Mika, 2006, p. 938)

For Mika, the question remained unresolved in her research. The discussants’ struggle with their moral quandary may be resolved by not thinking about it, or maybe it “could represent the first step in a journey that will lead to joining the movement” (2006, p. 938). Another conclusion from Mika’s research is the importance of carefully targeting the audiences and delivering the appropriate message to each target audience, especially in broad-based campaigns.

In 2009, Scudder and Mills directed research on the credibility of PETA’s shock advocacy regarding factory farming. Done from the animal industries’ point of view, Scudder and Mills’s research addressed how PETA’s visual campaign could be detrimental to their corporate profits. The video they examined depicts an undercover investigation on a pig farm: “it documented abusive practices showing workers beating pigs with rods and hammers, killing runts by slamming them to the ground, and allowing sick pigs to starve” (p. 163). They used an experimental methodology with questions on the credibility of the animal industries and PETA before and after watching the video (2009, p. 163). The sample was formed by 53 participants (51% female, 49% male) who were communication students from a public university located in “an area where agribusiness interests loom large” (p. 163), with an average age of slightly less than 21 years old.

The main results were that (a) PETA’s moral shock video damaged the credibility of the animal industry, (b) “advocacy messages intensify already existing negative predispositions toward the animal food-processing industry” (p. 164), and (c) “the intense, negative nature of the video attacking the negative pig farming practices increased the credibility of PETA for the average viewer” (p. 164).

In his article *How Do Graphic Images Affect Animal Advocacy?* Hawthorne (2012) refers to research conducted by the non-profit organization FARM (Farm Animal Rights Movement). In it, three different images of a pig with different levels of explicit violence were shown to an audience: “a dead pig on a muddy slaughterhouse floor, a dead pig on a bloody slaughterhouse floor, a dead pig with its throat slit on a bloody slaughterhouse floor” (Hawthorne, 2012). FARM’s study showed that in this case, the most effective image was the one with the least explicit violence. However, it is important to consider that in these specific pictures, the pig shown was not alive, and this fact could also condition the perception of suffering and violence towards him/her.

In contrast, the Humane Research Council (2012) suggested that violent images that create moral shock are successful in producing behavioral change. In this work, they examined which videos were most effective for vegetarian/vegan promotion in a sample of more than 500 people aged between 15 and 23. Regarding gender,

women in this sample were significantly more likely than men to indicate that they currently “rarely” or “never” eat red meat, so it is unclear if this finding suggests women are willing to make more extreme changes than men (i.e., moving from regular meat eating to meat elimination), or if they are simply more likely to be meat reducers and so a shift to elimination is an easier step (Humane Research Council, 2012, p. 8)

The videos tested were *Farm to Fridge* (Mercy for Animals), an animal abuse video with graphic content which shows undercover investigations in slaughterhouses; a sequence from *A Life Connected* (Nonviolence United), focused on the environmental and human health benefits of vegetarianism; a sequence from *Geico Couple* (Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine), which refers to weight loss and health; and *Maxine's Dash for Freedom* (Farm Sanctuary), a non-graphic visual which narrates the story of a cow who escaped from the slaughterhouse and was rescued. The Humane Research Council study (2012) aimed to discover whether it was more effective to focus the message on health, the environment or ethics; the relative effectiveness of graphic images; and whether it is more effective to promote veganism or advocate a reduction in the consumption of animal products. The amount of people who said they had learned something new

was greater in *Farm to Fridge* and *A Life Connected* (62%), and smaller in the other two videos, *Maxine's Dash* and *Geico Couple* (53–54%). An average of 30% of the respondents said they would like to have more information about vegetarian/vegan food; in this case, the percentage was higher with *Farm to Fridge* (36%) and *Geico Couple* (34%), and smaller with *Maxine's Dash* (27%) and *A Life Connected* (25%) (Humane Research Council, 2012). This research shows that explicit violent images and moral shock (*Farm to Fridge*) have a greater correspondence with starting behavioral change. Other less shocking approaches and frames, as the video about health and weight loss, also prompt change towards vegetarianism or plant-based diet in these experiments. However, the use of the health and weight loss frame to promote a plant-based diet alone doesn't question human supremacy nor speciesism, as it is based on self-interest. While this strategy may influence some audiences, it can also reinforce sizeism and body dissatisfaction while reproducing body standards of thinness, as noted by Wrenn (2016a, 2016b).

More recently, in 2015, Doebel, Gabriel, and the Humane League analyzed different pictures of farmed animals and cruelty toward them in their report *Which Farm Animal Photos Are Most Likely to Inspire People to Eat Vegan?* to discover which of them were more effective in influencing people to reduce the consumption of animal products (Doebel et al., 2015). In their survey, participants answered the same three questions about a series of 30 photographs which included portraits and “cute” images of rescued nonhuman animals of different ages, animals encaged within factory farms and aquaculture facilities and severe injured, sick or dead animals. The questions required them: (a) to assess how much each picture incited them to stop eating animal products, (b) to evaluate the suffering of the animal(s) in the picture, and (c) to consider how much the animal(s) in the pictures looked like humans. With these three questions and a 10-level Likert scale, they evaluated the effectiveness of the images according to four different parameters: the animal species, the degree and type of suffering shown in the image, the age(s) of the animal(s) in the photographs and their effectiveness depending on the appearance of individuals or groups of animals. The findings showed greater effectiveness of the images of sick, injured animals or those of animals caged in a tiny space, followed by the ones of animals being kept in tight confinement. As for species, the most compelling photos are those of pigs, followed by photos of chickens and turkeys—with the

photos of birds being the most explicitly violent ones on average. Images that show individual animals are considered more effective than the group ones and, finally, the photographs of young animals suffering are framed as more effective on average than those of adult animals suffering (Doebel et al., 2015). To put it visually,

The five photos that scored most highly for making people want to stop eating animal products were: a photo depicting a pig in a gestation crate with piglets; a dead calf; baby chicks being killed in a grinder; dead piglets in a pile in a farm setting; and an adult cow with half of its face extremely disfigured. Photos of confined or crowded adult animals were somewhat compelling but not as much as photos of dead or disfigured animals, or young animals in dirty factory farm settings (Doebel et al., 2015, p. 10)

The same year, Carolina Bertolaso researched the moral shock strategy in Animal Equality's Facebook communication. Bertolaso (2015) conducted a two-phases experiment among 511 non-vegan females between 15 and 35 years old. She directed the research to non-vegan women because they are considered by previous studies the target audience of animal advocacy organizations. Participants were exposed to a total of six Facebook posts and their attitude towards animals and animal products consumption were measured both one week before and one week after the exposition. The methodology consisted of a 2 X 2 experimental design where the strategy of moral shocks and individualization were tested in combination with a focus on promotion or prevention (Bertolaso, 2015, p. 21). The "prevention focus" highlights responsibility and frames goals as obligations while the "promotion focus" emphasizes accomplishments and frame goals as ideals (Bertolaso, 2015, p. 10).

Bertolaso's research with the moral shock strategy included six posts, each dedicated to a specific animal product: beef, pork, chicken, fish, eggs and dairy (Bertolaso, 2015, pp. 21-22). The analyzed visuals included "an image of a visibly distressed sow enclosed into a gestation crate" (p. 22), brutal scenes of the traditional tuna slaughter in Italy, a "thirty seconds video showing the life of a pig from the birth in a gestation crate to the death in a slaughterhouse" (p. 23), "a five seconds video [...] showing the process through which newborn male chicks are ground up alive in the egg industry" (p. 23), "a seventy seconds video showing images from investigations of

Animal Equality in several European slaughterhouses” (p. 23), and a “one minute video revealing the process through which in the dairy industry newborn calves are systematically taken away from their mothers” (p. 23). Bertolaso concluded that the Facebook posts combining moral shock and promotion focused messages were the most effective for reducing female young participants’ consumption of animal products (p. 45).

From this empirical research into anti-speciesist communication, it is worth noting that the use of explicit violent images and moral shock were mostly effective in animal liberation activism. However, these studies are still not extensive enough to provide a basis for a meta-analysis, and more empirical research on the topic must be conducted. In my view, knowledge gaps that should be researched in the future include: (a) if the gender, class, age, and race of the recipient conditions the reception of moral shock, and how they do so; (b) how moral shock can be better complemented with other nonviolent visual communication strategies; (c) what audiences can be more adversely affected by moral shocks and what possible alternatives can be suggested for activists to persuade these audiences, e.g., children and parents, neurodivergent people; (d) the importance of moral shock for activist involvement and its role in motivation maintenance; and (e) the particular way moral shock reaches audiences in contemporary society with the rise of social media and a hyper-visual culture.

Discussion

As this literature review shows, it is difficult to draw clear conclusions about the most effective images and strategies, and to know to what extent explicit images of violence towards nonhuman animals may be effective means of raising awareness of speciesist beliefs and attitudes, as well as promoting changes in them. In addition, there is still not enough information about what communication strategies were effective in the case of those who are already part of the movement, that is, animal liberation activists. As a consequence, strategic visual communication in animal liberation activism and the use of moral shocks are topics that still need further research if we are to obtain more accurate results. Nonetheless, a few conclusions can be drawn from our comparative analysis of the research conducted so far on the use of explicit violence in animal advocacy (for my own empirical qualitative research on the topic, see Fernández, 2020).

A relevant number of findings show a positive correlation between

moral shock or explicit violent images and positive change in the field of animal advocacy, as shown by Jasper and Poulsen in their comparison to anti-nuclear movements (1995), in Nabi's experiment (1998) on animal experimentation and disgust-eliciting visuals, in Mika's approach to moral shock in the PETA ads (2006), in Scudder and Mills's research on PETA's graphic video of factory farming (2009), in The Humane League Labs's report on explicit violent images (Doebel et al., 2015) or in Bertolaso's analysis (2015) of Animal Equality Facebook posts. These studies confirm that animal advocacy is a field in which emotions and persuasive communication, especially moral shock strategies, play a significant role in the promotion of veganism and the dissemination of non-speciesist ethics because of their potential to elicit audience attention and promote action, encourage activist involvement and moralize attitudes—especially in the case of the perception of disgust (Nabi, 1998; Herzog & Golden, 2009)

Bertolaso suggests that “a possible explanation of the efficacy of messages involving moral shocks is that moral shocks work at an unconscious level and are, therefore, able to overcome the rational barriers that people build to resist the idea that animals are not resources” (Bertolaso, 2015, p. 43). Graphic images may promote conscious or unconscious boundary blurring and crossing (Cherry, 2006) when the audiences can relate those suffering experiences with their own personal or near experiences of oppression, violence, and pain. This emotional experience can create a blurring or crossing of the symbolic boundaries established among human and nonhuman animals or different nonhuman animal species, such as those considered companions and those considered food.

However, as some philosophers and social scientists argue, the use of the moral shock frame for nonhuman animal advocacy involves some dangers and risks. This fact points out some ethical concerns for communicators. The moral shock strategy shows how the audience and society can take responsibility not just as the strategic utilitarian view of “means to an end,” regardless of the costs to others outside the movement. Philosopher Elisa Aaltola suggests four main risks of using moral shocks and depicting explicit animal suffering: (a) the risk of aesthetics, which is related with the act of looking, and which could become aesthetic amusement and a form of spectacularization of suffering; (b) the risk of perpetuating moral wrongs, by desensitizing and normalizing violence; (c) the problem of privacy, which consists of the ethical implications related with the violation

of nonhuman animals' subjectivity and personhood by representing them in a violent context; and (d) the compassion fatigue generated in the audiences, which the author defines as "the wearing out of the ability to care about suffering" (Aaltola, 2014, p. 28) and could be linked to continuous exposure to shocking images.

Aaltola (2014) argues that the existence of these risks does not necessarily mean that moral shock must be completely rejected. On the contrary, they bring us to underline the importance of promoting the personalization of nonhuman animals in the images and of providing a context that prevents the denial of nonhuman animal agency (Hribal, 2010) and to accompany extreme images by efforts to promote action in response to the realities shown in those images (Aaltola, 2014, p. 29; Bertolaso, 2015). It is a good idea to announce the explicit content of images when possible, as a strategy of authenticity and respect for the audience (Freeman, 2009a). This would be especially relevant when the audiences exposed to such visual contents play a more indirect role in causing harm (Freeman, 2009a, p. 281) or when they are likely to struggle to manage the emotions triggered by the images, especially children and people with diverse mental functionality. In the case of children, an extra problem exists if the families get angry at the animal advocates because they consider their children to have been traumatized. This can promote hostility toward animal advocates and backlash towards their anti-speciesist message.

In sociologist Nik Taylor's approaches to media depictions of violence towards nonhuman animals, she notes that the use of moral shocks can run the risk of perpetuating the moral consideration of nonhuman animals as "others," which is directly opposed to breaking the speciesist mindset and could reinforce the human/animal binary and perpetuate the representation of other animals as humiliated and objectified. In her own words:

Because most nonhuman animals start from a point of being Other, it will be necessary to ensure that any portrayals of violence done to them, and/or images of their dead bodies if deemed necessary, are not done in such a way as to extend the perceived divide between "us" and "them." In other words, their deaths, their bodies, and the violence inflicted upon them, cannot become merely spectacle (Taylor, 2016, p. 50).

The spectacular society and the spectacularization of suffering are constant worries related to the use of moral shocks. In his analysis of this concrete

problem in the animal rights context, Lowe referred to the concept of “the spectacular society,” a hyper-mediated context in which persuasive visual stimuli are overwhelming. In the spectacle, showing the realities of nonhuman animals by argumentation supported by scientific evidence is not strategically sufficient, but a kind of inertia, which he called the “Enlightenment faith” (2008, p. 2). Lowe used the concept “sociological warfare” to describe the need for advocacy to disrupt the public’s moral imagination about nonhuman animals and the treatment they receive (2008, p. 1). In his words:

The term “sociological warfare” is intended to highlight the necessarily mediated persuasive efforts that animal rights activists and other liberation movements engage in that parallels state-based forms of persuasion like propaganda and psychological warfare, but also to emphasize that the ultimate goals of these efforts [sic] (are) to offer an alternative vision of current social arrangements. (2008, p. 4)

In the same vein as Lowe (2008), communication scholars and researchers describe the context in which animal liberation activists work as a hyper-visual spectacular context characterized by the “iconography of oppression” (Cronin & Kramer, 2018) and the speciesist ideology. In addition, Bertolaso’s research underlines Moscovici’s “minority influence theory” (1976), which shows the important difficulties that minority social groups face for their messages to be heard (Bertolaso, 2015, p. 6). Molloy’s work on the popular media’s representation of animal rights activists make clear how activists’ media representation is biased and mixed: activists sometimes appear as “animal lovers,” while other times they are represented in a stigmatized way as “terrorists” (2013, p.74, 75).

In this context of media marginalization of speciesism and animal liberation activism, Aaltola’s ethical analysis (2014) complements the empirical conclusions drawn from the literature reviewed in this paper. She considers that, despite its risks, shock tactics are needed to produce “cracks” in the strongly anthropocentric cultural ethos and to bring light to hidden animal suffering (2014, p. 28). Following Freeman’s examination of social movements communication ethics and its compatibility with public relations communication ethics (2009a), moral shock can be ethically justified as means to raise awareness of the situation of those who are worse off—nonhuman animals—and to promote individual and social changes that stop

the speciesist violence towards them. Freeman holds that the value of social responsibility should rank higher than the principle of respect in terms of respecting audience values (Freeman, 2009a, p. 282). These ethical guidelines “should also recognize the interests and integrity of the social movement organization’s ‘victims’ or disadvantaged parties, and how they deserve respect as primary moral claimants” (Freeman, 2009a, p. 282).

Considering that the explicitness of the violent realities of nonhuman animals can make people look away, it is necessary to find effective frames to explain these experiences of nonhuman animal suffering, as well as other frames that emphasize their personhood, individuality, sentience and complex emotions, also in a positive and nonviolent way. As argued by Cronin and Kramer (2018), photographs of nonhuman animals that live in animal sanctuaries let us “imagine how the absence of fear and suffering might feel” (p. 90).

In summary, it seems reasonable to conclude that animal advocacy can benefit from the strategic use of moral shock through explicit violence in visual communication campaigns to trigger changes towards non-speciesist attitudes, cross and blur symbolic boundaries among animal species and promote alternatives to animal exploitation, such as veganism. Much more empirical research, however, is needed. This research would ideally confirm the effectiveness of moral shock and provide activists with a better understanding of how it works with emotions, as well as knowledge of what to avoid for reducing the risks of using it.

As an unfinished conclusion, this review points to the extensive possibilities of moral shock to break with the silencing of speciesism and nonhuman animals’ voices by reaching people’s emotions. Moral shock may be the necessary stimulus that breaks media speciesist ideology (Nibert, 2002; Khazaal & Almiron, 2016), its iconography of oppression (Cronin & Kramer, 2018), and shift the species-based moral boundaries (Cherry, 2010). Moral shock may be, therefore, a noted communication strategy for transforming the “spectacle of real suffering” (Lowe, 2008, p. 22).

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JCAS Editorial Objectives

The *Journal for Critical Animal Studies* is open to all scholars and activists. The journal was established to foster 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 to facilitate 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 in any area of animal liberation philosophy from any discipline, and presenters are encouraged to share theses or dissertation chapters. Since 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.

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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.

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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 English grammar spelling.

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