

# **HYSTERICAL WOMEN AND WILD ANIMALS: PARALLELS IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF FEMALE AND ANIMAL ALTERITY**

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## **Abstract:**

In the present paper I aim to explore the connections between the discourses that structure female difference and those that structure animal difference by documenting three major convergence points: denial of reason, denial of language, and the insistence that both female and animal bodies are inherently wild, the origin of their difference.

## **Key words:**

Women, feminism, alterity, animality

## **Resum:**

En aquest text em proposo explorar la connexió entre els discursos que estructuraven la diferència femenina i la diferència animal trobant tres punts principals de convergència: la denegació de l'ús de la raó, la denegació de l'ús del llenguatge, i l'afirmació que tant els cossos femenins com els cossos animals són inherentment salvatges, originadors de la diferència.

## **Paraules clau:**

Dones, feminisme, alteritat, animalitat

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The idea of writing on this subject came to me as I mentally filed away instances in which the network of discourses that structure the multiple and intersecting oppressions of women appeared to converge with and be reinforced by those discourses that structure the oppression of other animals. These include, notably, the historical negation of access to reason or to bodily autonomy, as well as a heightened awareness of the bodies of both women and animals, which can be theorized as the materialization of alterity. In parallel, I began to be fascinated by certain elements of language used to reaffirm or criticize discrimination against women, such as “to treat someone like a piece of meat”. Why, I asked myself, was it acceptable to treat meat – that is to say, animals – like “meat”, when it is not acceptable to treat a person like “meat”? The answer that immediately comes to mind is, evidently, that animals are animals and people are people - but what are the defining limits of this scission?

Here it is not my intention to suggest that there exist absolutely no differences between human beings and the other animals (assuring readers that he has not fallen prey to this notion, Jacques Derrida (2006: 51) vehemently states that “Imaginer que je pourrais, que quiconque, d’ailleurs, pourrait ignorer cette rupture, voire cet abîme, ce serait d’abord s’aveugler sur tant d’évidences contraires”), but to propose that we are accepting a simple and binary classification at face value, and that perhaps this classification should be reevaluated. What is the nature of this division – is it a gulf or a gulley, or perhaps even a plane? What are the intermediary steps, if any, which structure this no-man’s-land?

In the present text I aim A) to document some of these intersections between conceptions of female-ness, and animality, and B) to show how the Western binary system of ordering the symbolic, along with the dependent notions of otherness, reason and language, constructs the categories of women and animals.

My motives are twofold. The first is to open feminism up to the idea of other axes of oppression to be explored in the pursuit of a truly intersectional and inclusive feminism. Rather than eliminate the limits between the human and the animal, I mean to probe them: to explore the depth of these divisions and their constitutional discourses, calling attention to the processes of power that delineate them, and how these use parallel strategies to define multiple categories as “other” to the normative human subject (in de Beauvoir’s parlance, “the One”). Second, in doing so it is my hope to unpack the concepts integral to the construction of what it is to be human, what it is to have reason, and what it is to be a subject. Perhaps my aim is not only to rethink what issues are feminist issues, but what it is to be “human”. It is my belief that confronting such distant Others as animals is a highly effective form of accomplishing this.

## 2. WOMEN AND ANIMALS AS INFERIOR OTHERS

Although these categories overlap and change over time, it is not difficult to see parallels between their statuses. It is evident that they occupy an inferior post in the social hierarchy – indeed, the very notion of alterity is built upon a hierarchy. In the words of Meri Torras (2007: 12), “esta gramática binaria de oposición y complementariedad [...] afianza una jerarquía en el par, de modo que una de las dos categorías –la hegemónica– se establece monolítica y se garantiza pura a costa de la otra que aglutina y condensa lo múltiple, lo contaminado, lo amenazador”. Much the same way light is valued over dark, life over death, and day over night, in our dualistic minds we value men over women, and humans over the other animals.

### 2.1 Women as Other

Women have occupied a secondary and inferior position in almost a totality of societies around the world throughout history: “ce monde a toujours appartenu aux mâles” (de Beauvoir, 1949: 111). In a specifically western context, women did not attain full suffrage – considered by liberal feminism to be a benchmark of emancipation - until less than a century ago, and it would be safe to claim that we have yet to gain fully equal status before the law<sup>1</sup>.

While women thus naturally deviate from the masculine norm, they also run the risk of deviating from the female norm. This is the subject that sparks de Beauvoir's work: She famously responds to the backlash provoked by the advent of the “new woman” after the first world war<sup>2</sup> and their further advance into the workplace and public life during the second by questioning what exactly a woman is, if it is necessary to exhort women to “soyez femmes, restez femmes, devenez femmes” (de Beauvoir, 1949: 14). Oddly, although gender differences must be zealously guarded<sup>3</sup>, they are conceived of as natural. Therefore, when confronted with inexplicable deviations from this norm explanations such as madness and monstrosity must be found. This symbolic straightjacket of naturalized gender differences has been one of

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<sup>11</sup> Relentless attacks on our bodily autonomy, for example, in the form of the infringement of abortion rights – see the vast array of measures directed at limiting access to abortion in 2012 and so far in 2013 in the United States – as well as the erosion of laws governing gender-based violence in the United States and Spain may well lead one to believe that women do not enjoy full personhood in these places.

<sup>2</sup> For further reading on the subject, see Thébaud, F. (2003) “La Primera Guerra Mundial, ¿la era de la mujer o el triunfo de la diferencia sexual?” en Duby, Georges y Michele Perrot, *Historia de las Mujeres en Occidente. 5: El siglo XX*. Madrid: Taurus, 1993, pp. 45-106.

<sup>3</sup> A similar phenomenon haunts homosexuality. If heterosexuality is natural, why must it be so strictly enforced?

the foundation stones of women's oppression.

## 2.2 The Animal as Other

According to ecofeminist analysis, "Gender hierarchies, in which men are thought to be separate from and superior to women share the same structure[...] as hierarchies that separate humans from other animals and justify human dominance over the allegedly inferior others" (Gruen, 2012). In his 2006 treatise on animality, *L'animal que donc je suis* ("je suis" here suggesting both "I am" and "I follow"), Derrida suggests that the human-animal division is upheld by a refusal to acknowledge the gaze of the animal. The text begins with an unsettling encounter with an animal's gaze: in this case, the gaze of his cat upon his naked body, before which he feels a difficult-to-explain sense of shame. Other thinkers who have tackled the subject, however, seem like "s'ils n'avaient jamais été regardés, eux, surtout pas nus, par un animal que s'adressât à eux" (Derrida, 2006: 32). Far from being a tangential point, philosophers' denial of an animal's ability to "address them" forms part of the very base of what it is to be human, according to Derrida (2006: 32): "[Cette dénégation] institue le propre de l'homme, le rapport à soi d'une humanité d'abord soucieuse et jalouse de son propre".

Indeed, the anthropocentrism of western thought is such that, for the most part, philosophy has not deigned to recognize animals even as "Other", preferring to conceptualize them as something more akin to inanimate matter than as subjects worthy of ethical consideration. In Genesis, when Man names all the animals he "instaure ou revendique d'un seul et même coup sa *propriété* [...] et sa *supériorité* sur la vie dite animale" (Derrida, 2006: 40). This superiority is "infinie et par excellence" (Derrida, 2006: 40) – the break between humanity and animality is portrayed as total and infinite. Thenceforth, from Descartes view of animals as organic machines (see section "Rational Animals?" below) to Heidegger's conception of animal life as an intermediary between rocks and people - an example of *Nurlebenden*, or "vivant sans plus" - the vast and diverse array of animal life has, as a whole, been placed below humankind in our hierarchy of existence (Derrida, 2006: 42).

This anthropocentrism has led to very real effects in the treatment of animals, particularly in the contemporary age, as the multiplication of new technologies and sciences has pushed provoked the passage from all those traditional methods of exploiting animals – farm labor, transport, fishing, raising animals for meat, animal experimentation – to their modern, massified counterparts, namely factory farming, large-scale artificial insemination and breeding, genetic manipulation, and all sorts of animal experimentation. Again, as with the subjection of women, it is beyond the scope of this paper to detail all the instances and extravagances of the subjugation of

animals; however, I do wish to establish that regardless of one's opinion on the matter, it is impossible to deny the "proportions *sans précédent* de cet assujettissement de l'animal" (Derrida, 2006: 46). Against this situation, however, "des voix s'élèvent", "minoritaires, faibles, marginales", but voices nevertheless. Among those calling for change in the treatment of animals and a radical re-thinking of the concept of "animal" are to be found, notably, that of Derrida, who joins other post-structuralist thinkers in using the idea of animality to question the limits of the Subject.

To begin with, Derrida vigorously decries the use of the term "the Animal" to refer to animality or animals at large. Recognizing that just as 'Man' or 'mankind' do not encompass the manifold manifestations of human life, the animal kingdom is vast and varied, he emphasizes that the question is not to determine or question "la limite entre l'Homme avec un grand H et l'Animal avec un grand A" (Derrida, 2006: 51); this suggestion parallels feminism's abandonment of "Woman" as an analytical category – it is too traversed by axes of difference to be viewed as a coherent whole. Furthermore, while Derrida (2006: 51) admits there is a "rupture abyssal" between these two groups, he states that it is not "la ligne unilinéaire et indivisible de deux bords". Finally, he points out that any debate on the topic comes, necessarily, from the human side of this "rupture", the side of "une subjectivité anthropocentrique" (Derrida, 2006: 51); this is highly reminiscent of Poulain de la Barre's pronouncement that "Tout ce qui a été écrit par les hommes sur les femmes doit être suspect, car ils sont à la fois juge et partie" (cited in Beauvoir, 1949: 9).

Although the limits between "man" (the ideal human) and "beast" (animals, as they are conceived) may seem clearly defined, humans and animals share a vast array of characteristics, not to mention DNA. An exploration of the similarities between human and animal can be found in Donna Haraway's 2003 publication *A Companion Species Manifesto*, for example when the author humorously compares herself to her dog:

"How would we sort things out? [...] One of us has a microchip injected under her neck skin for identification; the other has a photo ID California driver's license. One of us has a written record of her ancestors for twenty generations; one of us does not know her great grandparents' names. One of us, product of a vast genetic mixture, is called 'pure-bred'. One of us, equally product of a vast genetic mixture, is called 'White'. Each of these names designates a racial discourse, and we both inherit the consequences in our flesh" (Haraway, 2003: 1).

Transgressing against the normative function of hierarchical alterization does not mean the complete elimination of categories: "According to an ecological feminist

perspective, differences between groups and individuals can be acknowledged without attributing greater or lesser moral worth to those groups or individuals within them and just social relations require that such valuations be avoided" (Gruen, 2012). Yes, these differences exist, but while recognizing them we must also recognize that they are not set in stone, and that differences between categories are joined by infinite differences within categories. In this way, it may be wise to remember the words of Aristotle, according to whom "Nature proceeds little by little [...] in such a way that it is impossible to determine the exact line of demarcation, nor on which side thereof an intermediate form should lie." (Aristotle, c. 350 BCE).

### 3. REASON

#### 3.1 Definitions

The Merriam-Webster Online English dictionary defines 'reason' as follows:

*reason* *noun* \ 'rē-z<sup>ə</sup>n \

[...]

2 a (1): the power of comprehending, inferring, or thinking especially in orderly rational ways: intelligence (2): proper exercise of the mind (3) : sanity

b: the sum of the intellectual powers

Evidently, 'reason' is not dissociable from a certain aspect of prescriptive-ness: it is not just the exercise of intellectual powers, but their "proper" use, particularly in an "orderly" fashion that leads to a specific conclusion. The phrase "the power of comprehending", and indeed, "comprehending" itself suggests a limited or univocal object of understanding – in other words, he/she who understands "correctly" is who grasps a single, "objectively" "correct" explanation for whatever happens to be the object of analysis (accordingly, to "tener razón" in Spanish or "avoir raison" in French means to be right). Correct comprehension is equated not only with intelligence, but also with sanity, which suggests that failing to "comprehend" the accepted conclusion renders one insane. In this way, while *denying* access to reason is a speedy and effective way to silence a questioning voice, thus suppressing dissent and terminating discussion, *having* reason means being impermeable to questioning. Both ascribing reason and ascribing its lack come to signify, then, an end to questioning and an enforcement of homogeneity

Neither is the word 'rational' innocuous: to draw again from the Merriam-Webster, we have

*rational* *adjective* \ 'rash-nəl, 'ra-shə-nəl \

1 a : having reason or understanding

b : relating to, based on, or agreeable to reason : reasonable <a rational explanation> <rational behavior> [...]

Examples of RATIONAL

<human beings are rational creatures>

<insisted there was a rational explanation for the strange creaking noises and that there were no such things as ghosts>

Rational, then, can then mean both having *reason* – thought, understanding – or being *reasonable*, that is, conforming to certain notions of what is correct, ie, “not extreme or excessive” (to cite, again, Merriam-Webster). It is interesting to note the close connection between ‘reason’ and humanity – “human beings are rational creatures” - forged through over two millennia of philosophical discourse.

In this section I will describe this prescriptive and exclusive nature of “reason”, as well as the very real effects this theoretical construct has on the lives of those not included within its limits.

### 3.2 Rational Animals?

In French, saying or doing something stupid is referred to as a “bêtise”. This is accordance with popular opinion, wherein beasts – that is, animals – are considered to be mindless creatures incapable of rational thought. This is not due to a scientific understanding of animal minds: on the contrary, it merely participates in a long-standing tradition, as animals have popularly and scholastically been denied the use of reason throughout the history of Western civilization. This has had specific effects on their treatment at the hands of humans, as we will see clearly from the example of Descartes and his fellow vivisectioners.

Aristotle, to begin with, differentiates between ‘rational souls’, that only humans possess, and the ‘locomotive souls’ that both human and non-human animals share (see Allen, “Historical background”). Two thousand years later, Descartes seems to draw upon this distinction in his own theory of animals, which distinguishes the mechanical reflex he thought drove animal behavior from rational thought, which he considers to be the sole territory of human beings. In other words, he does not claim that animals have simply *less* reason than human beings, but that “ils n’en ont point du tout” (Descartes, *Discours de la méthode*, 165, cited in Derrida, 2006: 109). Although his mechanistic reflex theory is for the most part interpreted to mean that Descartes viewed animals as some sort of organic automatons, it is important to note, as does Allen, that Descartes “took mechanistic explanation to be perfectly adequate for explaining sensation and perception — aspects of animal behavior that are nowadays often associated with consciousness [;] He drew the line only at rational thought and understanding” (ibid). Despite allowing for sensation and perception,

later mechanisticists used the Cartesian denial of reason or a soul to animals as a justification for vivisection, arguing that the live animals on their tables were insensible to their knives. Thus, we see already how the (arbitrary) denial of “reason” to animals results in the justification of animal suffering.

Whereas Descartes’ famous *cogito* puts the emphasis on thinking, his successor Kant reaffirms “la différence de l’animal raisonnable qu’est l’homme [...] à partir du « Je »” (Derrida, 2006: 129). Defining “man” as he who “peut avoir le « Je » dans sa représentation” (cited in Derrida, 2006: 129), Kant raises humankind above all the other animals: “The fact that the human being can have the representation “I” raises him infinitely above all the other beings on earth [:] By this he is a person... that is, a being altogether different in rank and dignity from things, such as irrational animals, with which one may deal and dispose at one’s discretion” (Kant, from *Lectures in Anthropology*, cited in Gruen, 2012). It is not difficult to see how this idea that people are people, while animals are things that are ours to dispose of at will, could affect our treatment of animals. Indeed, Gruen observes that this notion of *personhood* “identifies a category of morally considerable beings that is thought to be coextensive with humanity” – in other words, those beings that *lack* personhood are not the subjects of moral consideration. As I mentioned briefly in the introduction, this oddly circular construction – people deserve special moral consideration because they are people – appears to permeate much common thought on the question of animality.

### 3.3 Women and Reason

“Somebody got to think for women and children and chickens and cows. I god, they sho don’t think none themselves” (The character Jody Starks, speaking in chapter 6 of Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*).

In her book *Women and Madness: The Incarceration of Women in Nineteenth-Century France* (1990), Ripa offers multiple examples of psychiatry’s prescriptive power over the lives of nineteenth century women. These include the story of a missionary’s wife who was institutionalized for not sharing one of her husband’s religious views (Ripa, 1990: 43-45), as well as those of the women locked away in the Salpêtrière for challenging their husbands (31), and of the women diagnosed with psychiatric disorders due to their participation in the commune (27-29).

Indeed, there has traditionally been a special affinity between the category of ‘woman’ and insanity. The latter was for many years considered to be the particular



province of women, as illustrated by the following sixteenth-century French proverb cited by Ripa: "One, two, three, women are all crazy, except for my nanny who makes apple pie..." (Ripa, 1990: 1). Leishman and Domenico similarly remark upon the pervasively feminine nature of madness:

"Indeed, the attributes particularly associated with madness such as passivity, emotionality, irrationality, dependency, the need for support and lack of initiative match stereotypical models of modern femininity. This is a point which is overtly made by Phyllis Chesler (1972) who proposed that madness has a profile that threatens and controls all women, not just a troubled minority" (Leishman and Domenico, 2009: 1).

This affinity is unsurprising given that the subjugation of woman was integral to the structure of the family unit, which in turn was integral to the structure of society. Thus, women's roles must be safeguarded to preserve the aforementioned structures. One way of doing so was to diagnose madness upon any deviation; another, closely related method, as we shall see in a later section, was the characterization of women's bodies as weak, passive, and dangerous both to their *se/ves* and to the world at large.

Even when not considered fully insane, women have historically been considered to lack the reason of the free male subject. In Beauvoir's opinion, Aristotle "exprime l'opinion commune" when he asserts that "L'esclave est entièrement privé de la liberté de délibérer; la femme la possède, mais faible et inefficace" (cited in de Beauvoir, 1949: 150).

## 4. LANGUAGE

### 4.1 Definitions

The idea of language, closely related to that of reason, consists in "the words, their pronunciation, and the methods of combining them used and understood by a community" (Merriam-Webster Online). As well as being understood by the community, it is "systematic" such that it is "meaningful"—if it is not "meaningful", it is not language. Therefore, like reason, language is circumscribed by a certain notion of objective correctness or intelligibility, as determined socially. Thus, language is also very much subject to mechanisms and processes of power such that it is "the ability of the powerful to create language and define reality" (Leishman et al, 2009: 2). In another parallel with the concept of reason, the corresponding encyclopedia entry describes language as being "used by people": assuming that here "people" is

used to mean “human people”<sup>4</sup> language is conceived as being co-extensive to humanity (Merriam-Webster Online). Wilce (2004: 415) clarifies: “The ability to speak coherently enough to respond appropriately to, and help create, recognizable social contexts helps define our sense of full humanness. [...] Radical deviation from normal speech interaction can cause interlocutors to judge one not only insane but less than completely human.”

In short, language, like reason, is a) intelligible as determined through social processes of power, often having to do with idea of what is b) correct or right<sup>5</sup>, and b) human. These characteristics resonate in the concept of *logos*. A Greek word originally possessing meanings as disparate as the mathematical ‘account’ or ‘measure’ and ‘explanation’, ‘reason’, ‘grounds’ or ‘discourse’, *logos* is, for Aristotle, “rational speech” (Rahe, 1994: 21)

## 4.2 Animals and Language

“Pour dire les plus longues phrases,/Elle n’a pas besoin des mots” (Baudelaire, *Le chat*).

While denying reason denies one’s interlocutor a voice, there is a shorter route:

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<sup>4</sup> Of possible relevance are the recent efforts to classify dolphins, for example, as “non-human persons” (See BBC News (2012). “Dolphins deserve same rights as humans, say scientists”, Accessed July 2013, *BBC News*, at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-17116882> . First published 21 February 2012). In the conclusion to this paper I will give further thought to other circumstances that suggest that the groups “people” and “humanity” are not co-extensive.

<sup>5</sup> Here one might argue that, unlike reason, language does not deal in what is “moral”; however, I would respond that just as morality is determined by the ruling classes, so too is normativity in language, and the two are closely correlated at certain points, such as when determining guilt or punishments for lawbreakers. Language is a symptom of social class, and class – as made evident by the examples of Social Darwinism, colonialism and black slavery in the Americas, and the rhetoric of today’s Republican Party – can be perceived as a sign of physical, mental or moral inferiority, such that discriminatory treatment towards them is justified. In this way, users of slang, such as many black people, may be handed down harsher sentences than smooth-talking white-collar criminals - one only has to take a look at the racial make-up of people on death row, which is entirely out of proportion, to see that this is indeed the case. See for example

- Death Penalty Information Center (2013). “Race of Death Row Inmates Executed since 1976”, Accessed August 2013, *Death Penalty Information Center*, at <http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/race-death-row-inmates-executed-1976>
- Amnesty International (2003). “United States of America: Death by Discrimination – the Continuing Role of Race in Capital Cases”, Accessed August 2013, *Amnesty International*, at <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AMR51/046/2003/en/bfe434a5-d712-11dd-b0cc-1f0860013475/amr510462003en.html>

denying the use of language altogether<sup>6</sup>.

The idea that animals have no language is hardly new. The view of animals as lesser beings incapable of language is well represented in foundational western texts such as, naturally, the Old Testament. Here animals are not only speechless, but bound by the speech of man: “L’homme appela de leurs noms tous les bestiaux”, reads Dhormes’ translation (cited in Derrida, 2006: 33). It is Man who, through language (either his own, in the act of naming, or God’s, in the act of ordering) exerts control over animals.

One way this control through language continues to be exerted is through the designation of the whole of animal life by one undifferentiated term – the “animal”. As Derrida criticizes, the reigning anthropocentrism is such that the entirety of the animal kingdom save humans, from brainless arthropods to dolphins, pigs and chimpanzees, are arranged neatly under the overarching term “animal”. This ‘animal’ “est un mot [,] une appellation que des hommes on instituée, un nom qu’ils se sont donné le droit de donner à l’autre vivant” (Derrida, 2006: 43). Through this rough heterodesignation we symbolically subjugate animals.

Humankind’s unique ability to exert control is in accordance with Aristotle’s characterization of “man” as a “reasonable animal” who differs from the other animals in that only humans, among animals, possess the use of language (cited in Derrida, 103). While Aristotle allows animals a variety of moods, characters, and sensibilities, - in his work “A History of Animals” (c. 350 BCE) he writes that “In the great majority of animals there are traces of psychical qualities or attitudes, which qualities are more markedly differentiated in the case of human beings.. “ (Aristotle, Book VIII) - He does not accord them the ability to speak. This apparent discrepancy is explained by Aristotle’s conception as language not as mere expression of, say, “these psychical qualities or attitudes”, but rather *rational speech*: “For Aristotle, *logos* [...] enables the human being to perform as no other animal can” (Rahe, 1994: 21).

In fact, all the philosophers examined by Derrida “d’Aristote à Lacan passant par Descartes, Kant, Heidegger, Lévinas, tous, ils disent la même chose: l’animal est privé de langage” (Derrida, 2006: 54). According to the author, all these thinkers concur in upholding the idea of «l’animal privé de *logos*, privé du *pouvoir-avoir le logos*”, thus holding logocentrism as a “thèse sur l’animal” (Derrida, 2006: 48). As Derrida establishes, even those thinkers that do accord animals some powers of communication deny them the ability to *respond* - “de *répondre* – de *feindre*, de *mentir* et d’*effacer ses traces*” (2006: 55) – thus constituting what he calls “la tradition

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<sup>6</sup> This is precisely what my French Linguistics professor at Berkeley (who shall remain unnamed) happily accomplished on the first day of class when he claimed that language is what makes humans unique – what distinguishes us from the other animals.

cartésienne de l'animal-machine sans langage et sans réponse" (2006: 163).

However, the animal kingdom is home to a great variety of languages of diverse forms and complexity. From the sign language and lexigrams that gorillas, chimpanzees and bonobos have used to communicate with humans, to bee's dances, to the whistles of dolphins<sup>7</sup> and songs of whales, it is simply disingenuous to claim that animals do not have recourse to language. As for whether this language is *rational*, I would posit that the anthropocentrism of the term currently inhibits any truly unfettered thought on the matter. I do not believe we yet possess the analytical tools necessary to analyze such a question; the consciousness and experience of animals remains, as ever before, unknowable.

#### 4.3 Women, language, and women's language

Like animals, women have historically been denied language. They participate in human language, yes, but their speech has been stripped of its political or performative potential such that the word of a woman has traditionally carried very little weight. This has manifested both legally – during the millennia of denial of citizenship and suffrage to women, to name the obvious example – and socially – with the characterization of women's language as frivolous, superficial, gossipy or false, as in Aristotle's pronouncement that women more false of speech and more deceptive (Aristotle, *History of Animals*), or in Hamlet's condemnation of how women "lisp [and] nickname God's creatures" (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act III Scene I).

Gayatri Spivak emphasizes the importance of political speech in her response to criticisms of her original article "Can the Subaltern Speak?", in which she incorporates Dhaliwal's contribution in "Can the Subaltern Vote"<sup>8</sup>, namely that "que de lo que se trata en el fondo es de la capacidad de hablar políticamente" (Spivak, 2002: 213). According to Spivak (2002: 213), "ésta es una forma muy interesante y fructífera de desarrollar la interpretación del discurso de la subalterna que [planteó] en [su] día para situarlo en el ámbito de lo colectivo". "[E]l acceso a la ciudadanía (a la sociedad civil)", she continues, "que garantiza la condición de votante (en la nación) representa el camino simbólico que sigue la subalterna en su lucha por conseguir la hegemonía". Therefore, at least in the Indian, "una negociación entre la

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<sup>7</sup> Who, among other communicative traits, call each other by name: KING, Stephanie L., and JANIK, Vincent M (2013). "Bottlenose dolphins can use learned vocal labels to address each other", Accessed August 2013, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS)*, at <http://www.pnas.org/content/early/2013/07/17/1304459110>. First published June 19, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> DHALI WAL, A. (1996). "Can the Subaltern Vote? Radical Democracy, Discourses of Representation and Rights, and Questions of Race". In TREND, D. (ed.)(1996). *Radical Democracy: Identity, Citizenship, and the State*. New York: Routledge.

liberación nacional y la globalización”, “se puede analizar el voto en sí como una forma de participación establecida que representa el “habla” de la subalterna” (Spivak, 2002: 213). If the vote is a form of speech, being denied the vote, surely, is being denied speech.

As well as lacking power through their speech, women have lacked the power to configure speech itself. Luce Irigaray claims as much in her article “The ethics of sexual difference”, in which she states that language is a masculine construction that does not permit an adequate representation of women or their experience, and in which women are present only as an other. Arguing that to simply fight for equal rights without first having “asegurado unos fundamentos distintos a aquellos sobre los que se cimienta el mundo de los hombres” would suppose a symbolic subordination, as the symbolic order upon which this “mundo de hombres” is based would remain unchallenged (Irigaray, 2010: 36).

## 5. THE BODY

Women and animals share a perceived condensation of their selves and their bodies: deprived of reason, these are the physical remainders they are left with. It is not my intention to reproduce the hierarchical mind/body binary in decrying the reduction of these “others” to their bodies; rather, I want to draw attention to the fact that it is a result of the identification of apparently inferior “others” with the inferior term of a binary pair. Furthermore, this identification physically shapes these bodies as inferior others, effectively materializing alterity. To this extent, Torras (2007: 15) notes that “el cuerpo –la materialidad del cuerpo– es causa y efecto a la vez”.

### 5.1 Of Bodies and Beasts

Animals, inasmuch as they are “animals” to us, are their bodies. Heidegger’s view on animal life, mentioned above, supports this view: in his opinion it would seem that animals are their live bodies and nothing more, “«vivre sans plus», la vie à l’état pur et simple” (Derrida, 2006 : 42). The classification and naming of animals<sup>9</sup>, based as it is on the physical structures of animals – Does it have a skeleton? Does it display radial or bilateral symmetry? – is founded in this conception, as does the primary use humans accord animals. I’m speaking, of course, of meat, that great human culinary institution in the service of which are killed “31.1 billion [animals] each year, 85.2

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<sup>9</sup> Classification is the dispositive through which language operates: through classification we understand, assign signifiers, and communicate. Although these classifications restrain us, they constitute, paradoxically, the mechanism we use to resist them – language.

million each day, 3.5 million each hour, 59,170 each minute"<sup>10</sup> (Adams, 2010: dedication). Being only bodies, it is acceptable to treat them "like a piece of meat".

Denied reason, minds, consciousness, animal bodies become the sole signifiers of their existence. An animal's fur, claws, tail, teeth – all become physical evidence of their essential other-ness, and provide the basis for how we treat them. Insects are repellent, so we squash them, and kittens are cute, so we pet them: animals' physical form justifies how we treat them. In this way, the characteristics that define animals as such appear to arise organically from their bodies in such a way so as to hide the traces of the categories' construction. In other words, animals' bodies become the scapegoat to which we attribute the rationale of the category's existence.

## 5.2 Women's Bodies, Women's Beauty, Women's Weakness

Whereas according to the Enlightenment binary system men are traditionally associated with mind and civilization, women are associated with the body and with nature. Women's bodies, which they must at times exhibit, and at times hide, is the "pretendido reducto de la identidad mujer" (Torras, 2005). The reduction of women to their bodies is longstanding: Aristotle, accordingly, declares that "la mujer es únicamente materia" (de Beauvoir, 1949: 143). In Thomas Hardy's infamous 1891 novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Tess, "a pure woman"<sup>11</sup>, is subject to a great many detailed descriptions of her physical appearance – as well as the curious or lustful gaze of most of her fellow characters. Through these the reader can discern a close identification of Tess' body with goodness –her moral, essential self– and the natural surroundings she so beautifully inhabits, pathetic scene after pathetic scene. Her reduction to a body is further emphasized by her passivity (a major theme) and lack of education. For example, before the eyes of Angel Clare she appears to embody an ideal, and perhaps divine, physical female form: "no longer the milkmaid, but a visionary essence of woman – a whole sex condensed into one typical form" (Hardy, 1891: 167).

Tess' heavenly beauty, as it results, is somewhat of a curse. After catching the attention of Alec, whose sexual mistreatment of her is nothing short of rape, it inspires the love of Clare, who will fall in love with her apparent goodness only to later abandon her upon learning that she has been tarnished by another. Tess is aware of the double bind of her physical appearance, as made apparent by the great lengths she goes to disguise her beauty; these include cutting off her eyebrows (Hardy, 1891: 357). She identifies her own body as the source of the treatment she receives from

<sup>10</sup> These may even be conservative numbers, as a quick Google search (July 2013) turns up numbers varying from 57 to 100 billion animals killed for meat each year.

<sup>11</sup> The novel's original and much-contested subtitle

persons external to herself. In other words, her physical body is determined to be the categorical origin of the men's discriminatory treatment, whereas it is precisely the men's discriminatory treatment that marks her as "woman": here, again, what defines a category appears to arise organically from the body in such a way that obscures the category's construction, not to mention the other players in the game. The men's harassment is conveniently concealed behind the screen of biological difference.

As Tess discovered, beauty, or the lack of it, is indeed quite a double bind for women. Although the condensation of women's selves with their bodies is enforced by religious and medical discourse, by fashion both throughout history and in the modern fashion and cosmetics industries, by women's publications, and by the mass media, it is also a source of derision, as women who care for their appearance are judged as vain and superficial. Thus, when Hamlet chides Ophelia's for women's shortcomings he jeers, "I have heard of your paintings too, well enough. God has given you one face and you make yourselves another. You jig and amble [...]" (*Hamlet*, Act III Scene I). Similarly, he mocks women for adorning their bodies, noting that although Ophelia may "paint an inch thick, to this favor [death and decay] she must come" (*Hamlet* V.I).

It would follow, then, that women would be encouraged to leave their bodies unadorned. Obviously, this is not the case. Rather, the unadorned, unshaven, uncontrolled female body not only transgresses social norms, but is positively grotesque, as it is utterly unequipped and unable to conform to an increasingly artificial ideal of beauty. Furthermore, as Naomi Wolf criticizes in *The Beauty Myth*, the accusation of unattractiveness is levered at women who dare voice unpopular opinions, seeking to "punish women for their public acts by going after their private sense of self" (Wolf, 1991: 19). Thus, feminists are "dogged" by "the caricature of the Ugly Feminist", a long-standing thought-terminating cliché which, as Wolf (1991: 18) notes, was created in the nineteenth century to ridicule first-wave feminists.

Not only are women less than full humans, given their lack of rational faculties, but the bodies that women are reduced to are inferior as well. In his work *Making Sex* Thomas Laqueur describes how a "one-sex", "carne única" conception of biological sex formulated in antiquity changed to the two-sex model established in the eighteenth century; in both of these, women's bodies are inferior. In the first, which Laqueur postulates was created to "dar valor a la extraordinaria afirmación cultural del patriarcado, del padre, frente a la reivindicación sensorialmente más evidente de la madre", all human structures were perceived to be masculine, inasmuch as the masculine was equated to the human - for example, when ovaries were discovered, they were thought to be "female testicles" (Laqueur, 1990: 47). The limits between 'man' and 'woman' were "de grado y no de clase": in addition to the evident patriarchal bias of conceiving of the only sex as masculine, women were

denigrated in that their bodies were not able to achieve the superior masculinity of those of men (Laqueur, 1990: 55).

In the posterior conception of biological sex women do not fare better. As the centrality of medicine increased, in part due to the hygienism movement of the early nineteenth century, women were constructed as patients: "The general theory that guided doctors' practice as well as their public pronouncements was that women were by nature weak, dependent and diseased. Thus, women were portrayed as not strong, not competent help-givers but patients" (Ehrenreich and English, 1979, cited in Leishman et al., 2009: 1).

This conception of women's bodies as weak and inferior undoubtedly plays a role in constructing women's bodies as such, and thus perpetuating itself as a popular notion. For example, in Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* the protagonist's husband's insistence that his beloved not exert herself, or travel, or do anything even remotely intellectually stimulating results in her gradual physical weakening – she progressively reports being "tired" more and more frequently – and her final undoing. Similarly, it is unsurprising that in the Victorian era (middle- and upper-class) women were seen as frail creatures, prone to fainting as they were due to their corset-restricted airflow. These women were hobbled by foot-binding, high-heels and lace-up pointed-toe ankle-boots, hindered by layers upon layers of skirts, petticoats and even, at one time, bustles, and prohibited from participating in activities deemed unladylike: in other words, women's weakness was essentially created by the very processes designed to enshrine it. Unfortunately, the traces of this construction are hidden by women's physical materialization of inferiority in terms of strength, speed, and the ability to move effectively through space.

Women, then, are considered to be prey to a great innate weakness; However, this is paradoxically viewed as a source of terrible danger that had pernicious effects upon their sanity: "Women's bodies were taken over by their devouring wombs which destroyed their mental health" (Ripa, 1990: 1). Leishman and Domenico concur with Ripa's description, and remark upon the role of medical discourse in "returning to what was defined as the nature of the female to be seen as the root cause of women's 'madness' ". In this way, "The menarche, menstruation, childbirth and the menopause, with the womb as the main protagonist, were seen as sapping women of their mental stability and intellect and as the sources of this madness" (Leishman et al, 2009: 3).

Women's bodies were considered to be a determining factor in woman's behavior, as well as in their sanity. Prostitution, for example, was explained by Cesare Lombroso, the founder of criminal anthropology, as originating in the very physical constitution of prostitutes. These could be differentiated from "good" women by their "small brain and eye capacity, astonishingly heavy mandibles," "hypertrophied and



irregular" occipital bone, wide foreheads and abnormal nasal bones, as well as their "asymmetrical face[s] and eyebrows", "fat thighs", small size and unusual hirsuteness (Ripa, 1990: 17). This idea that women's biological constitution conditions or even dictates their sanity and behavior continues in a subtler, yet widely accepted, form today: I am referring, of course, to the mythology of the menstrual cycle and the hormonal surges of irritation, melancholia and outright "bitchiness" that come with it. Curiously, men's hormones don't seem to have the same de-stabilizing effect on their psyche – regardless of the havoc they wreak on what were once full heads of hair, now reduced to shiny pates off-set by thickly hirsute backs, chests and shoulders.

## 7. CONCLUSION

As we have seen, women and animals are constructed as inferior, unknowable Others who have been denied the use of reason, denied the use of rational language just as they have been subjected by it, and who have been reduced to their physical bodies. Why does the subject continue to inhabit this clearly deeply flawed system? Why do women participate in a system that Others and demeans them by not questioning their place? Furthermore, why do those who demur in some way from taking part in this system of limits and categories- whether it be through reclusion, differing political views or sexual practices, or unusual gender presentation – appear straightaway dangerous and insane?

One answer, of course, lies in the comfort bestowed by familiarity and a sense of knowing. Through categorization, we can approximate knowledge or understanding, deprived of which it is possible to feel naked (again, that property of the Other) or ill at ease. Likewise, when categories shift we may experience the nausea of confusion (that which we must at all costs defend ourselves from – or at least defend our children from, as exemplified by a popular argument offered in resistance to LGBT parenthood). Naturally, this represents quite the conundrum for us verbal creatures, dependent as we are upon the very categorical nature of language that binds us to struggle against the pernicious effects of the same. Some thinkers, such as Derrida, have responded to this quandary by communicating not through the terse, direct and active parsing so favored by the English and Americans, but rather through language that ebbs, flows and folds upon itself in a multiplicity and intersection of meanings.

Another is inherent to the very structure of power, which, as Torras (2007: 23) notes, is not a fixed and unyielding fortress that one may simply climb out of, but, rather, ever-changing and evolving. Transgression carries a severe penalty: "Cuando un sujeto sale de las leyes del sistema es castigado o amenazado con el castigo y la punición; si su desvío resulta excesivamente peligroso, las instituciones actúan según su potestad de silenciarlo, neutralizarlo, apartarlo e incluso recluirlo" (Torras, 2007: 23).

Finally, we may find yet another answer in be the threat of the monster. In this hierarchical binary system, the monster is enlisted as an incarnation of their unknowable alterity - but what if what is truly unknowable and terrifying about these figures is not their alterity, but the similarities they share with the One, the master subject? Perhaps the whole mechanism of alterization serves as a dam against the potential destabilizing effects that these similarities might have on the clear delineation of the category of the One, the rational, sane, male human subject. This would explain the necessity of figure of the monster: a grotesque warning against slipping over the border of these categories, and a terrifying reminder of the consequences of doing so. In this way, while appearing to embody the unknown, the impossible and the uncontrolled, monsters may in fact be guardians of the established symbolic order.

However, monsters may simultaneously be our hope to escape from this order. In their mutations and border-crossings they may draw a path to be followed, which leads not to the opening and re-definition of categories but to a blurring and shifting of the lines between them. Monsters transgress against the normative order by slipping over limits and combining forbidden characteristics: aggression or rebellion in women, for example, or the features of different animal species in monstrous animals. In order to overcome these limits ourselves, perhaps it will be necessary to accept the possibility of this monstrosity, and, in so accepting, take it from the realm of the unknown to the known, from the impossible to the possible. In other words, by accepting the full range of possibilities – accepting the monster -, the monster will, by definition, cease to be one, and so cease to police categorical limits.

One way of “accepting the monster” is to see the similarities between animals and women, and between them and the master subject, as well as the interior schisms of these categories. Another useful strategy is to re-appropriate the liminal condition of monsters by recognizing animals and women as liminal creatures perched on the boundary between One and Other. In so perching, they can erode the limits circumscribing each category: if animals are not an entirely distinct Other, for example, and if women’s bodies and women’s selves are not distinctly and solely feminine, then how are we to unequivocally state “*this* is human, *this* is a person, *this* is a subject”? If we can state these things, would it be possible to find a way to define them positively, and not through negative contrast with an Other? Can we conceive of these kaleidoscopic similarities and differences without clearly defined limits, but without erasing them either, and rather “multiplier ses figures”, “compliquer, épaissir, délinéariser, plier, diviser la ligne justement en la faisant croître et multiplier” (Derrida, 2006: 51)? In other words, can we queer these categories and the limits between them? Sedgwick writes that “queer puede referirse [a] el amplio amasijo de posibilidades, huecos, solapamientos, disonancias y resonancias, lapsos y excesos de significado que hallamos cuando los elementos constitutivos del género o de la

sexualidad de cualquier persona no están hechos para [...] significar de forma monolítica [;] Queer designa aventuras experimentales” (Sedgwick, 2002: 37) – can we use this idea of the queer as dissonance and resonance, multiplication and lack, to re-imagine the limits of the Subject and of the Other?

Perhaps one way of doing this is to appropriate the monstrous guardians of normativity by replacing them with a new conception of chimeric creature. In *A Cyborg Manifesto*, Donna Haraway (1985, revised 1991) provides the figure of Cyborgs, “figures for living within contradictions [which she now sees] as junior siblings in the much bigger, queer family of companion species” (Haraway, 2003: 11). “Cyborgs and companion species”, she writes, “bring together the human and the non-human, the organic and the technological, carbon and silicon, freedom and structure, history and myth, the rich and the poor, the state and the subject, diversity and depletion, and nature and culture in unexpected ways” (Haraway, 2003: 4) – could the notion of companion species help us understand the blurring of the limits of what was once a monolithic Subject? After all, it is evident that it is not the monolithic figure but “the split and contradictory self is the one who can interrogate positionings and be accountable” (Haraway, 1991: 193)

It is my hope that this multiplication, this de-drawing and re-drawing of limits will deconstruct the essentialist justifications for the subjugation of animals, just as they are beginning to do so for women. In doing so, however, it is necessary to recognize from within feminism that if we allow borders to stand unquestioned in other domains, we endanger the emancipatory project of feminism itself. If we problematize the categories that bind women but leave intact those that circumscribe other groups, which are constructed from the same or similar assumptions, how can we hope to successfully challenge our own? Gruen (2012) writes, “Like many social justice perspectives, the eco-feminist perspective maintains that no one will be free unless everyone is free, and that includes non-human animals”. I am not advocating awarding suffrage to rodents, but it is clear to me that if we maintain the hierarchical structure of unknowable Otherness that justifies atrocities such as animal experimentation on rodents, we will be bound by this structure as well. We must recognize that these categorizations are not absolute and inherent truths, but rather the effects of power that shapes these groups in parallel ways. Only when we recognize the arbitrary and constructed nature of these categories in all their permutations will we be able to end their dominion over women as such.

This may seem like an impossible, utopian project. After all, the effects of power are “constantes, profundos, adquiridos” and strenuously difficult to change (Torrás, 2005). However, this is the terrain in which feminism plays: identifying unjust norms as the effects of power, not of “nature”, “reality”, or “truth”, and struggling to change them. Torrás indicates that feminism differentiates itself from other intellectual and

social movements through its talent to do just this: she accentuates feminism's "indocilidad frente a lo prescrito, a incomodidad con lo existente y la voluntad de cambio" (Torras, 2005). This must be a willingness to change not only that which is external to feminism, but feminism itself, and indeed feminism has changed to encompass the needs of different groups and to adapt to changing times and opinions. Now I challenge feminism to change once again, and for feminists to strive for a new theory in which we no longer rely upon the specters of frightening and unknowable alterity.

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