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Edited by Dario Martinelli and Viktorija Lankauskaitė

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Introduction

Dario Martinelli and Viktorija Lankauskaitė

Whether a simple coincidence or not, it is of a certain significance that so many "firsts" in the history of cinema are marked by the presence of non-human animals. When Eadweard Muybridge created the first prototype of a movie projector in 1878, he chose a galloping horse as the quintessential example of cinematic movement. When the Lumière brothers shot their first movie in 1895, *La Sortie de l'usine Lumière à Lyon*, we see dogs and horses, along with the human employees of the Lumière factory. When, one year later, Georges Méliès invented the horror genre with *Le Manoir du diable*, the first character we see is a vampire. And so on and so forth. Non-human animals and film industry constitute an intense and enduring relationship that has strongly affected, and is in turn affected by, popular culture. As Jonathan Burt remarks [2004; p. 18-19], zoocinema is a staple in all genres of film throughout history: from wildlife films to Hollywood mega-productions, from sci-fi to animation, from mainstream cinema to the vast, albeit often overlooked, area of avant-garde and experimental films. Not forgetting how many non-human animals actually *announce* films: Pathé's crowing rooster; MGM's lion, Metro's parrot, the flying horse of TriStar... in a way - and that tells us something different but equally interesting - one could also count the fishing boy of Dreamworks, as a classic example of animal abuse within the zoo-anthropological relationship.

There is more. Non-human animals in film can take up any role: from antagonists to protagonists, from donors to helpers. They can stay in the foreground and or in the background of a story, they may represent themselves but also convey a (usually

ethically-charged) message about human beings. They are symbols, projections, stereotypes, allegories, taboos, myths and superstitions.

As mentioned before, the interaction between zoocinema and popular culture goes both ways, when it comes to impact and influence. On the one hand, in movies we witness the reiteration of (or, more and more often in recent times, the challenge to) longstanding perceptions and interpretations of what a given species, or "animals" as a whole, means to humankind: faithful and intelligent dogs like Lassie or Rin Tin Tin, ruthless and always-too-many insects and spiders in the so-called "ecokill" sub-genre, strong and loyal horses like those from western movies... And on the other hand, given cinematic narratives have touched so deeply the viewers that the whole perception of the particular animals/species therein represented ended up changing. Sociologists in the 1940s began studying the *Bambi syndrome*, that mixture of compassion and guilt that viewers felt (and were since affected by) when Bambi's mother is murdered by the offscreen hunter. Films like Spielberg's *Jaws* directly affected sharks' over-fishing; the reputation of species like the *Orcinus orca* was ping-ponged from hatred to affection, depending on releases like *Orca, the Killer Whale or Free Willy*.

The filmic non-human animals are often imaginary creatures, or maybe we should say that they are *always* imaginary creatures, as there is always one or more fictional element in their representation. We may identify four main types of imaginary animals. First, we have those that are taxonomically real, yet fictional in some of their characteristics/actions. Bambi is a White-tailed deer of the species *Odocoileus virginianus*, yet he speaks human language, has numerous anthropomorphized physical features, and does several uncharacteristic things for his species. Second, we have those that are taxonomically fictional but verisimilar. The character Scrat from the *Ice Age* saga is the

specimen of a fictional species, obtained by combining two existing ones (squirrels and rats) in a rather intelligible way. Besides all the comic, unrealistic, situations he faces, we see him displaying characteristics and behavioral patterns that are recognizable within our empirical experience of squirrels and rats: size, fur, tail, rapid and sudden movements, etc. There is no risk of mistaking him for, say, a vulture or a swordfish. Further, we have those that are taxonomically fictional and unlikely, but display empirically-recognizable characteristics. Often, particularly in sci-fi, we see unrealistic species who, nevertheless, bear features that we can easily associate to a species from the real world. Many imaginary animals, for instance, serve a recognizable function of "dogs" (i.e., faithful, brave and smart pets) or "horses" (loyal means of transportation). Finally, we also have animals that are fictional and unlikely at all levels. While seeing the Alien monster we certainly recognize elements from human beings, other mammals, reptiles, fish, insects, but the result is not a tangible combination of all these features, but rather a new species.

A recurrent motif, across all these groups, is their confrontation/ opposition with the human characters, either fully or simply more human than their counterparts (Mickey Mouse is a mouse and Pluto is a dog: yet, Mickey is the "human" of the situation and Pluto remains unmistakably a dog – a situation that is aggravated by the fact that Goofy, too, is a dog, but for some reason he has all the characteristics of the human being). Especially when cast in an antagonist/villain role, the imaginary animal is depicted in terms of basic "opposition" or "great difference" to humanity as such. The confrontation establishes boundaries between, e.g., instinct and reason, violence and non-violence, wilderness and civilization. Even the introduction of super-natural features in the imaginary animal can be an excuse to remark this opposition. When we see the

"beast" moving too fast, reappearing out of nowhere, getting bigger, and so on, we are re-evoking our ancestral struggle with nature, when this intelligent, but physically-limited species, *Homo sapiens*, had to deal with creatures that were always bigger, faster, stronger.

Last but not least, and in a way we get here to the core of many, if not all, the contributions contained in this issue of *HumAnimUs*, all these possible representations, plus others we have not even mentioned, tend to share a fundamental feature. That is: the most important role that non-human animals are assigned within a film is that of the "excuse", the narrative, ideological and moral bait and switch. Films use non-human animals to share in a more symbolic, often but not necessarily more elaborated, way, reflections and feelings on humankind and humanity, for the better and for the worse. Just like, at the end of the day, Melville's white whale is pretty much everything except a whale, the movies analyzed in this issue are filled with what Lunardi and D'Este justly call "mirror animals".

The first contribution, authored by Nathan Feltrin, offers an all-round examination of bears and their presence on screen. Covering *The Edge* (1997) and *Grizzly Man* (2005), the author moves beyond the narratives in the films and discusses the symbolic significance of the animal, its depictions both as a predator and as a representative of wildlife and reconnection with nature, and what such representations say about our society, as well as considers the need to advocate for a multi-species cinema.

The essay by Viktorija Lankauskaitė focuses on the multitude of roles and meanings the animal image may carry, and how it becomes a tool of expression – an objective correlative – for actors, filmmakers, and the audience. Within this notion, concentrating on the formal aspects of filmmaking, the author investigates Peter Morgan's The Crown, and discusses the role of

montage for different approaches to non-human animal representation.

Luca Lunardi and Fabiano D'Este also turn their attention towards the film form – by focusing on the syntactic and formal aspects of audiovisuality, the authors explore the films offering a new viewing experience attempting to shift away from the anthropocentric perspective. By discussing *Nénette* (2010), *Becoming Animal* (2018), *Gunda* (2020), *Cow* (2021), *Leviathan* (2012), and *Animal Cinema* (2017), among other films, the authors bring forward the possibilities of cinema to create a hybridized gaze, by experimenting and abandoning formal aspects of traditional cinema.

Following that, Roberto Marchesini's contribution explores animal epiphany in Fellini's cinema. The author guides the reader through the ideas of human-animal-nature connection, discusses the revealing, inspiring, and enhancing animal presence in cinema, and brings attention to the indispensable nature and profound significance of animals in the films of Fellini and beyond.

Dario Martinelli provides an updated reading of the Hitchcock's *Birds* (1963). Documenting the origins of the film, its plot, symbolism, and cinematographic techniques, the author covers the plenty of allegorical applications found in the classic, influenced by the wide range of psychological, social and anthropological perceptions and projections related to non-human animals.

Finally, a contribution by Cosetta Veronese presents an in-depth look at Vittorio De Sica's *Umberto D.* (1952). The author shifts her analysis away from the social realism of the film and, adopting a zooanthropological lens, explores the themes of silence and separation, distance and proximity, hierarchy, and discusses epimelesis as an antidote to possessiveness.

As this issue is mostly an eclectic, coherent but not

interconnected, collection of essays, there seems to be no need to structure the contributions in a particular sequence, therefore a neutral alphabetical order is chosen.

As guest-editors of this issue of the journal, Dario Martinelli and Viktorija Lankauskaitė would like to thank all the friends at *HumAnimUS* for the pleasant and friendly cooperation. We hope it resulted in an interesting and inspiring collection of essays.

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Bears on Screen: From Cinematic Monsters to Agents of Multispecies Empathy

Natan Feltrin

Introduction

In the present essay, I intend to deploy the analytical framework provided by zoo-anthropology to elucidate the multifaceted portrayal of bears as co-protagonists within cinematic narratives. Spanning a diverse spectrum, these narratives range from tales depicting the bear as emblematic of untamed, ferocious wilderness to those exploring the reconciliation and intersection between human and more-than-human worlds, symbolized through the merging of bipedal *Homo sapiens* with the sometimes-bipedal plantigrade bear. This dichotomy prompts critical inquiry: What constitutes the essence of the bear in these narratives, and what does our dualistic and sometimes delusional portrayal of it reveal about ourselves and our society? This investigation seeks to unravel the symbolic significance of the bear in Western culture and examine how cinematic representations have shaped our perceptions of this iconic large carnivore, oscillating between its depiction as an anthropophagic monster in horror genres and as a symbol of wisdom and the wild, capable of inspiring a reconnection with the suppressed animality inherent in our species.

This paper delves into the enduring presence of narratives centered on bear violence in 21st-century cinema, as showcased by films like *Backcountry* (2014) and *Cocaine Bear* (2023), which, despite their divergent tones, perpetuate a cultural phenomenon that could be termed *bearanoia*. This apprehension, more psychological than physical, underscores a societal wariness

towards bears, fueling misconceptions and unwarranted anxieties. In contrast, the cinematic realm also offers deeply philosophical animated films such as *Brother Bear* (2003) which is richly imbued with North American indigenous epistemologies. These narratives not only strive for a deeper connection between human and non-human realms, but also echo a collective yearning for a more integrated coexistence [Frank et al. 2019].

The thematic investigation reaches its zenith with Werner Herzog's documentary *Grizzly Man* (2005) chronicling the life of Timothy Treadwell, an emblematic figure in bear advocacy. Herzog's work intricately explores the complex relationship between humans and the more-than-human world, positioning it as a central narrative that challenges us to venture into new realms of hybridity. It envisions futures of multi-species coexistence and a multi-species cinema that is yet to be fully defined. Furthermore, this analysis touches upon the notion of human rewilding, drawing from cinematic moments such as the poignant encounter between Christopher McCandless and a bear in the final scenes of *Into the Wild* (2007).

The exploration within this paper goes beyond a mere recounting of cinematic stories to critically engage with these narratives, examining their impact on our understanding of the multispecies community, animality, and the possibilities for coexistence that transcend anthropocentric views. By analyzing these films through a zoo-anthropological lens, this study contributes to a nuanced comprehension of how tales of wildness and domestication mirror and influence our cultural attitudes towards non-human others. It advocates for a reevaluation of our position within the more-than-human world, suggesting that our future interactions with non-human species could be re-imagined and redefined by the stories we choose to tell and the perspectives we choose to adopt.

This study embarks on an exploration that initially seeks to delineate a partial ontology of the bear in Western culture through a genealogy arising from biocultural perspectives. It raises the question: What constitutes a bear in its essence, both as a biological entity and as a symbol deeply entrenched within our collective consciousness, stirring our deepest fears and aspirations in a profoundly visceral manner? This inquiry lays the foundational groundwork for understanding the bear as a formidable creature that occupies a significant place in human imagination, reflecting a complex interplay of admiration, fear, and reverence. In this initial section, an attempt is made to summarize the historical and cultural significance of the bear for Western culture, more specifically with the European context, shedding light on its multifaceted role across epochs and narratives [Nevin et al. 2019].

Subsequently, the analysis turns to how cinematic portrayals, exemplified by films such as *The Edge* (1997) have magnified the bear's image as a fearsome hunter and antagonist, distorting the reality of tragic human-wildlife conflicts documented globally. This exaggerated representation serves as a lens through which to explore the broader implications of such narratives on our perceptions of wildlife and the more-than-human world, contrasting markedly with actual bear behavior and the nuanced circumstances under which bears and humans intersect. Within this discourse, two sections are dedicated to anthropophagy – one more general and the other focusing specifically on the portrayal in *The Edge*.

The narrative then transitions to explorations of human-wildlife reconciliation through the metaphorical act of dressing the skin of the wild ones, as attempted by figures like Timothy Treadwell and depicted in the children's animation *Brother Bear*. These stories represent varying degrees of engagement with the wild, ranging from literal immersion in the bear's world to

metaphorical journeys toward understanding and empathy. Through these narratives, the paper aims to probe the extents and limits of human identification with the non-human, assessing the potential for a cinema that transcends anthropocentrism to foster genuinely multi-species representations of otherness and coexistence.

By examining these layers – the bear's ontological standing, his portrayal as a menacing other, and the cinematic exploration of reconciliation with the wild – this study endeavors to sketch a broader understanding of how the bear, both as a symbol and a reality, navigates the boundaries between human and non-human worlds. The ultimate goal is to advocate for a multi-species cinema that not only reflects but also enriches our relationship with the myriad forms of life with which we share our planet. This perspective challenges us to envision modes of coexistence that honor both our differences and our interconnectedness, thereby fostering a more inclusive and empathetic engagement with the more-than-human world. Through this holistic examination, the paper contributes to the burgeoning field of multi-species studies, offering insights into how our cultural narratives and representations can evolve to better reflect the complex realities of our intertwined existences with the non-human.

1. In the Biocultural Ontology of Bears

In the bio-cultural landscape of Europe, where biology and culture converge, deeply interwoven into the narrative fabric of human history and mythology, the significance of bears transcends mere physical existence [Bieder 2005]. Within ancient Greek society, bears symbolize more than just their biological life form; they embody divine and nurturing qualities, highlighting their intricate symbolic importance in Hellenic

culture. This rich symbolism finds vivid expression in myths featuring themes of human-bear hybridization and transformation, illustrating a seamless blend between human identity and this revered animal. Understanding these themes of hybridization and transformation is crucial for appreciating why the boundaries between humans and bears are perceived as almost permeable even today [Corvino 2013]. The telling of stories about humans turning into bears reveals insights into the antiquity of this concept.

It is noteworthy that this concept of hybridity extends beyond Western cultures, finding resonance in the indigenous traditions of North America [Storl 2018]. Among the narratives within the Hellenistic tradition, the myth of Callisto holds particular significance. It intricately weaves together stories of celestial punishment and maternal heritage, ultimately leading to the creation of the constellations of the Great Bear and Arctophilax (the Bear Watcher), thereby showcasing the profound cultural and symbolic connections between humans and bears in ancient Greek mythology [Arena 1979].

Set in Arcadia, a region deeply connected with bears both through its name and its legends, this ancient myth does more than narrate a tale of transformation and celestial ascent; it mirrors Greek interpretations of the complex interactions between gods, humans, and the more-than-human world. Alongside the story of Callisto, other myths, such as that of Polyphonte, explore themes of hybridization and the magical offspring born from unions between women and bears. These narratives emphasize a consistent motif of the bear's link to motherhood and protection, a theme that transcends cultural borders and is acknowledged almost worldwide [Brunner 2007].

The relationship between the goddess Artemis and bears adds depth to these stories. Artemis, who is the protector of hunters, mothers, and adolescents, as well as a patron of the

wilderness, is often depicted in close connection with bears. This bond symbolizes the wild and feminine aspects of nature[1], highlighting the bear's intrinsic association with untamed femininity and maternity. However, the precise nature of this symbolic connection remains elusive, hinting at a broader cultural ambivalence between the concepts of wilderness and civilization. This mysterious bond mirrors the ancient Greeks' broader contemplations on the intersections of nature, divinity, and humanity, illustrating the multifaceted roles that bears occupied in their mythologies and cultural awareness.

Before delving into the cultural transformations ushered in by the Roman spread, it is crucial to note that while the Greeks provide a clear example of a nuanced, multispecies understanding of the world, from the standpoint of critical animal studies and contemporary views on animal liberation and ethics, the Greeks should not be idealized or overly romanticized [Lonsdale 1979]. This paper's aim is not to idealize ancient Greek perspectives but to present a variety of biocultural lenses - some more generous than others towards wild beings, with a particular focus on bears [Rozzi 2018].

As Roman civilization ascended, the bear's once sacred status in Greek culture transitioned into a role centered around the spectacles of cruelty and entertainment in the Colosseum [Rea 2002]. This marked a broader shift in human-animal relationships and the valuation of wildlife. From being revered as a mysterious and semi-divine creature, the bear was relegated to an object of amusement in Roman gladiatorial and venatorial games, illustrating a drastic move away from its mystical origins [McElduff 2020].

The Roman terms for the sounds bears make, *uncare* and *saevire*, unveil a cultural view of bears as emblems of ferocity and brutality, characteristics that were accentuated and used for public amusement. *Uncare* mimics the sound of a bear's growl or

roar, embodying an auditory symbol of their perceived savageness. On the other hand, *saevire* translates as to become cruel or to become fierce, underscoring how the bear was emblematic of cruelty and ferocity within Roman culture. This linguistic choice reflects the Romans' interpretation of the bear's nature and its symbolic significance in their society [Bettini 2018]. This shift marks a fundamental change in the human relationship with the wild, transitioning from a state of reverence and mythological significance to one of domination and spectacle. The use of bears in horror stories and films could be seen as a continuation of this violent spectacle, where wild creatures are sensationalized. In many people's minds, bears are still viewed as fearsome opponents akin to those faced by gladiators. The bear's transition from the revered forests of Arcadia to the bloody arenas of Rome narrates a story of cultural change, in which attitudes towards hunting, wildlife appreciation, and conservation have been profoundly transformed [Bomgardner 1992].

Under Roman dominion, the plight of bears highlights not only the exploitation of wildlife for entertainment purposes but also illuminates the wider ecological and cultural consequences. The creation of specialized roles for hunters charged with procuring bears for the spectacles, coupled with the extensive persecution of these creatures across the Empire, reflects a broader story of ecological control and the commodification of nature [Dawson 2016]. This era represents a significant deviation from previous traditions that revered the spiritual and symbolic roles of animals, resulting in a legacy of wildlife exploitation and multispecies extractivism. This legacy has profound impacts on contemporary views and interactions with the natural world, demonstrating how historical practices of animal use and representation can influence societal attitudes towards conservation and wildlife management [Descola 2013].

The bear's presence in the bio-cultural landscape of Europe provides a compelling lens through which to examine the evolving dynamics between humans and the natural environment [Grimm 2023]. Tracing its path from the sacred spaces of ancient Greece to the brutal arenas of Rome, the bear embodies the wider cultural transitions in attitudes towards wildlife and wilderness. As the Roman Empire waned and Christianity spread across Europe, a pivotal cultural transformation occurred, intertwining the taming of wild fauna with the conversion of pagan societies. In this era, the imagery of saints subduing wild beasts, especially bears, became symbolic of the transformative influence of Christian doctrine.

The portrayal of bears as subdued companions of saints signified a shift in societal values, moving from reverence of these creatures within natural and mythical contexts to symbols of Christian dominance and spiritual conversion. Figures such as Ursula, Sergius of Radonezh, and Gall are celebrated for their miraculous ability to tame bears, illustrating the Church's perceived control over both the chaos of the natural world and the spiritual *wilderness* of paganism. This narrative not only reflects the changing human-animal relationship but also highlights the broader theme of how religious and cultural shifts influence perceptions and treatments of the natural world [Rao 2018]. Through the lens of the bear's journey, we can observe the historical interplay between humanity's spiritual aspirations, its domination of nature, and the profound implications these relationships have had on our understanding and interaction with the wilderness.

During the Middle Ages, the study of animals was more aligned with theological and moral symbolism than with scientific inquiry. Animals were often seen not as subjects worthy of curiosity or companionship, but as vessels for anthropocentric allegories. This perspective, where animals mainly served as

metaphors in human-centric stories, mirrored Roman tendencies to exploit rather than coexist harmoniously with nature.

The bear, in particular, held a multifaceted symbolic role in medieval political and moral discourse. She represented a wide range of concepts, from lust and maternal care to warrior-like ferocity and the machinations of political power. As European societies shifted from the Early to the Late Middle Ages, perceptions of the wilderness and its denizens underwent a significant transformation. The bear, which had once symbolized a form of partial harmony between humans and the multispecies community, came to be seen as an obstacle to the civilizing endeavors of saints and the broader project of Christian expansion.

In a symbolic effort to dissociate from European pagan roots and forge a new identity, the Church sought to replace the bear's imagery with that of the lion – a creature without direct ties to European paganism [Pastoureau 2011]. This move was indicative of the Church's broader attempts to redefine the symbolic animal kingdom within a Christian context. However, the inherent qualities of strength and nobility that the bear symbolized could not be entirely supplanted. Despite the Church's efforts, the bear's enduring attributes ensured his continued respect and symbolic relevance within European culture, demonstrating the complex and evolving relationship between humanity, his mythologies, and the natural world. Names bearing etymological connections to the bear, like Bernard, Beorn, and Bjorn, reflect the animal's valor and warrior spirit, while names like Orson and Ursula denote direct relationships to bear-like qualities. This linguistic legacy underscores the deep cultural resonance of the bear's symbolic attributes.

By the High Middle Ages, the forest and its denizens became more deeply woven into the economic and social fabric of medieval life, with hunting standing out as a key activity. Yet, as

the Late Middle Ages brought about significant agricultural changes, perceptions of wild animals and their environments started to shift. The bear, previously regarded with a certain degree of familiarity, was increasingly vilified, and the forest began to be seen as a domain of hostility and darkness. This evolving perception of the bear – from a creature of mystical respect to a symbol of the untamed wilderness that needed to be controlled or eliminated – underscores the intricate dynamics of Romanization, Christianization, and the enduring fascination with the wild. Despite the cultural transformations that led to the bear's vilification, her image occasionally resurfaces in modern consciousness, eliciting admiration and a mystical appeal that surpasses her historical demonization.

In contemporary Europe, the in-depth understanding of bear behavior, ecology, and coexistence strategies often exists on the fringes of societal awareness. Predominant are the lasting cultural constructs – filled with fears, superstitions, and biases – that shape how people perceive bears, frequently in the absence of direct experiences or scientific knowledge. This cultural backdrop has shifted bears from active participants in Europe's ecological fabric to symbols burdened with misconceptions. This transition highlights a crucial element of human cultural development. Human identities and cultures have been molded through interactions and confrontations not just among themselves but also with non-human entities, both animate and inanimate. However, as bio-political power structures and territorial control mechanisms have advanced, human engagements with the non-human realm have become more one-sided. This has reduced the autonomy and agency of non-human actors, including bears, thereby elevating human authority. Such dynamics illustrate the complexity of our relationship with nature, showing how cultural, historical, and political changes can profoundly affect how we view and interact with the more-

than-human world. Despite the growing scientific understanding of animals like bears, cultural narratives and perceptions continue to play a significant role in shaping human attitudes and policies regarding wildlife and conservation efforts [Drenthen 2015].

Currently, despite a wealth of research and knowledge about bears, perceptions of risk often remain exaggerated [Kruuk 2002]. This discrepancy between perceived and actual threats is particularly pronounced in regions such as the eastern Italian Alps, where political, cultural, and ecological disputes intersect, offering a microcosm of broader societal conflicts over wildlife conservation [Zeni 2016]. Specific studies or incidents illustrating these perceptions and conflicts can shed light on the complexities of promoting coexistence.

The transformation in the perception of bears – from revered symbols to misunderstood objects of fear – highlights the intricate relationship between culture, ecology, and human attitudes towards wildlife [Marchesini and Tonutti 2007]. This journey through time not only reflects changes in societal values but also the consequences of these shifts on the broader ecological landscape. Modern media, wildlife conservation efforts, and environmental education play pivotal roles in shaping contemporary attitudes towards bears and nature. As emblematic figures in European mythology and ecology, bears continue to provoke and alter human perceptions, inviting a reevaluation of our relationship with the world and its co-inhabitants.

When we examine movies that portray bears, our perspective is often shaped by North American cinematography. As such, it is common to encounter notions of wilderness and frontiers, characteristics of a distinct North American understanding of nature that blends the cowboy mindset, pioneer spirit, indigenous epistemologies, and more. However, it

was necessary to complement this understanding with a brief overview of bears' cultural significance in European history to illustrate that the white, Western mindset of North American cinema about them is genealogically connected to these diverse roots. At the same time, this paper aims to reveal the backdrop against which these Hollywood productions are perceived, especially when viewed in contexts like Europe, highlighting the different cultural interpretations and receptions of such portrayals.

2. Bears or Monsters: The Anthropophagy Topos

In the expansive narrative landscape of cinema, portrayals of bears frequently transcend mere depiction, serving as a rich medium through which human-nature interactions are explored. Delving critically into the myriad ways these creatures are adapted to fit narratives replete with symbolism and worldviews paves the way for a deeper understanding of non-human nature. This examination is essential for challenging and dismantling the skewed perceptions of bears that prevail beyond scholarly discourse—namely, outside the community actively engaged in the study of bear behavior and ecology. Such an endeavor advocates for a shift from superficial representations to a more profound engagement with a world characterized by its rich biodiversity, fostering nuanced portrayals of fauna in movies. Despite the potential for depth, mainstream cinematic portrayals often depict bears unfavorably, primarily as monstrous beings. Narratives centered on bears typically present these animals as symbols of relentless aggression and anthropophagic tendencies. By emphasizing characteristics such as fierceness, immense strength, innate predatory behaviors, and an inclination towards consuming human flesh, these films perpetuate an image of bears as fundamentally nightmarish entities.

Films such as *The Edge* (1997), meticulously directed by Lee Tamahori, and *Backcountry* (2014), under the guidance of Adam MacDonald, underscore a cinematic trend where narrative tension significantly intensifies with the introduction of anthropophagus bears. These works skillfully evoke the primal fear of being hunted, portraying bears as unyielding stalkers of human prey. The thematic undercurrent of survival against a nearly mythological adversary lends a palpable sense of urgency and tension to the narrative framework. This cinematic motif extends beyond these examples to include films like *Grizzly* (1976), commonly described as "Jaws on land" tapping into the primal dread of being pursued by a colossal predator, and *Into the Grizzly Maze* (2015), which delves into the intricate interactions between humans and wildlife. These movies push the limits of suspense and horror, further solidifying the depiction of bears as nightmarish figures within the cinematic landscape. The narratives typically center on one or more bears demonstrating extreme aggression and predatory behaviors, a stark contrast to their actual disposition, where encounters with humans are infrequent and attacks are even rarer [Herrero 2018].

Prophecy (1979) significantly broadens its narrative by integrating an environmental plot, showcasing a mutant bear as a harrowing outcome of industrial pollution. This film acts as a poignant critique, spotlighting the grave consequences of environmental disregard and decay. Through the metaphor of a mutant predator, it enhances the horror while delivering a crucial message on the sustainability of human activities and their environmental ramifications. These endeavors elevate bear portrayals, transcending typical representations of raw aggression to encompass themes of survival, environmental ethics, and a vivid reminder of human vulnerability amidst untamed forces.

Similarly, the more recent *Cocaine Bear* (2023) melds horror and comedy to critique harmful human behaviors. Despite its genre-blending approach, it too displays the unintended, often catastrophic, consequences of human interference with nature. The film, featuring a bear impacted by human-produced cocaine, humorously highlights the extensive and sometimes ludicrous effects of such interference. Both films contribute to a broader cinematic discourse on human-environment interactions, stressing the need for responsible engagement with our world and its species.

These two films align with the *ecorevenge* genre, where narratives revolve around nature's backlash against human exploitation and environmental damage. Encompassing tales of animals, plants, or the Earth itself retaliating against human-induced harm, *ecorevenge* films blend entertainment with cautionary tales. They underscore the fragile balance between humanity and the environment, emphasizing the critical consequences of ecological degradation. With a focus on environmental themes, these narratives underscore nature's retribution for human wrongs, urging a reevaluation of our relationship with the natural world while employing horror and suspense to captivate audiences.

Aiming to raise awareness of environmental neglect, these stories subtly highlight that creatures often labeled as inherently dangerous might actually be reacting to human provocations. This narrative strategy, while intending to alert audiences to the consequences of environmental disregard, also risks reinforcing the perception that certain animals inherently pose a danger because they are predisposed towards human aggression. This play on monstrosity, inherent to the ecorevenge genre, carries its own set of complications. Consider the timing of the release of *Cocaine Bear* in Italy, coinciding with a tragic incident where a runner died after a confrontation with a bear in Trentino [The

Guardian 2023]. How do such portrayals, even when well-intentioned, impact real-life conflicts?

This representation becomes problematic within a culture that often seeks to dominate perceived non-human threats, promoting a theological and ontological viewpoint that places humans at an exceptional peak, removed from natural cycles and processes. This anthropocentric perspective contributes to the environmental exploitation and degradation we witness today. The cinematic depiction of bears as monstrous others not only entertains, but reflects and intensifies a societal tendency to vilify, and estrange the other-than-human.

Such narratives underscore the urgent need for a paradigm shift towards a more symbiotic and thoughtful relationship with the multispecies community, acknowledging our interconnected destinies within the complex web of life. This shift requires reevaluating our portrayal of the natural world, moving beyond fear and antagonism to foster a deeper understanding and coexistence.

In cinema, bears undergo a transformation from creatures of the wilderness to symbols of nature's formidable forces. This transformation is profound, recasting bears as apex predators with an exaggerated hunger for human prey. Such depictions, which represent popular sentiments, starkly contrast with the bears' actual behaviors and ecological roles, illustrating the significant impact cinema has on shaping public perceptions and attitudes towards wildlife. These portrayals not only misrepresent bears but also contribute to a cultural narrative that frames nature as an adversary, amplifying fears and misconceptions and supporting a human-centric view that prioritizes human interests over ecological justice.

The cinematic depiction of bears often involves exaggeration of their size and aggression, portraying them as larger and more formidable than in reality. This misrepresentation enhances their

perceived threat, positioning them as antagonists in a human-centric narrative. Such portrayals ignore bears' natural tendencies to avoid human contact and their complex behaviors, including play, maternal care, and hibernation, thereby distorting public perception and potentially influencing policies that compromise bear habitats for human safety.

Moreover, depicting bears as monstrous figures taps into deeper human anxieties about nature's unpredictability and wildness. It reflects a broader narrative of human dominance over nature, a theme explored in cinema through the dynamic between humans and the wilderness, embodied by the bear. This narrative underscores the ongoing debates around conservation, coexistence, and the impact of human activities on natural habitats.

Cinema's portrayal of bears as nature's daunting forces highlights the intricate and often contentious relationship between humans and the natural world. Challenging these portrayals can lead to a more respectful and coexistent future with wildlife. Cinema holds the power to educate and advocate for environmental understanding through accurate and nuanced representations of bears, dispelling myths, and fostering a culture of wildlife appreciation. Educational films that accurately portray bear behavior and highlight their ecological significance can shift perceptions and inspire conservation efforts. By transforming narratives towards non-anthropocentric, empathetic, and ecologically informed representations, cinema can influence conservation strategies and promote a balance between human development and environmental restoration. Portraying bears as integral to our ecosystem, rather than monstrous adversaries, can facilitate a cultural shift towards conservation support and understanding.

Conclusively, cinema's depiction of bears sheds light on human perceptions of nature, illustrating our fears and

highlighting our capacity for empathy and coexistence. Moving beyond narratives of fear to acknowledge bears as sentient beings deserving of respect and protection, filmmakers and audiences can contribute to a more compassionate and ecologically congruous world. This transition reflects a collective aspiration for a future in fellowship with the multispecies community.

3. The Edge, Wilderness, Machismo, and Monstrosity

The Edge (1997) emerges as an instructive example in the study of cinematic representations of bears as symbols of nature's untamed and formidable essence. Starring Anthony Hopkins, Alec Baldwin, and Harold Perrineau, the film delves into survival, the essence of human nature, and the fundamental conflict between humanity and the wilderness. By positioning a bear as the primary antagonist, *The Edge* scrutinizes the contentious portrayal of bears in films. Set in the stark Alaskan wilderness, the plot unfolds following a plane crash that strands billionaire Charles Morse (portrayed by Hopkins), fashion photographer Bob Green (portrayed by Baldwin), and assistant Stephen (portrayed by Perrineau) in the unforgiving terrain. Their battle for survival intensifies with the emergence of a Kodiak bear, transforming their fight to remain alive into a more daunting endeavor as the bear persistently hunts them, adding a profound sense of menace to their already precarious situation.

In *The Edge*, the Kodiak bear is depicted as a formidable and almost unstoppable force, deviating significantly from its real-life behavior. While Kodiak bears are indeed powerful animals, they typically avoid confrontations with humans unless provoked. However, the film exaggerates the bear's aggression, size, and predatory instincts, portraying him as a constant threat to the protagonists' survival. The depiction of the bear in *The Edge*

amplifies the tension inherent in the classic man versus nature conflict, perpetuating the myth that nature is inherently antagonistic towards human existence. This oversimplification overlooks the intricate dynamics of human-environment interactions and bolsters narratives that emphasize human dominion over nature, thereby reducing the nuanced and often symbiotic relationships that can exist between humans and the multispecies community. The bear in *The Edge* is anthropomorphized to a certain extent, endowed with qualities usually attributed to human villains, such as desire to harm and vicious cunning. This anthropomorphism contributes to the film's suspense but falls short of providing an accurate representation of bear behavior.

In *The Edge*, the film's narrative trajectory underscores a profound yet troubling metaphor for societal struggle within a context marked by racial and economic disparities. The first of the three survivors to perish is the assistant photographer, who is both economically disadvantaged and the sole non-white character among them, portrayed as the weakest link. This depiction serves as an allegory for the brutal realities of a racist, capitalist society where nature – and by extension, the bear – becomes an arena where only the fittest survive, echoing the harsh tenets of social Darwinism.

The film strikingly contrasts the character of Charles, the billionaire protagonist, with the bear, yet intriguingly, they both emerge as "supernatural" entities. Charles is portrayed as an almost superhuman character, distinguished by his extensive knowledge, shrewdness, and, occasionally, an almost detached demeanor – save for a few significant exceptions. This characterization elevates him to a superhuman status, adding complexity to the narrative's examination of power dynamics. A crucial scene that pits Charles against the bear in a dramatic showdown highlights the film's framing of the bear as a

monstrous adversary. Here, Charles's deployment of survival skills and improvised weaponry to outmaneuver the bear accentuates the narrative's emphasis on human ingenuity and physical prowess as essential tools for overcoming formidable challenges.

While *The Edge* delves into themes of human resilience and the primal will to survive, it largely overlooks the opportunity to integrate deeper environmental or ecological insights. The storyline predominantly casts the bear as an obstacle to human survival rather than a key component of the natural ecosystem, reinforcing a one-dimensional view of wildlife.

Moreover, the film weaves a narrative replete with tension and complex human emotions such as friendship, jealousy, and power struggles, yet it continues to propagate detrimental stereotypes about bears that pervade contemporary culture. *The Edge* offers a visually compelling yet inherently pessimistic portrayal of the wilderness, filtered through a North American white male perspective that depicts it as an unspoiled, hostile expanse poised to engulf individuals with its violence and predation. In this story, the wilderness and the bear, represented by the renowned bear actor Bart, stand for more than just physical threats; they epitomize a profound disdain for humanity. The movie portrays anthropophagy not simply as a part of the natural life cycle or a philosophical notion but as an unfair repudiation of human intrusion. This contributes to a distorted and culturally prejudiced depiction of the more-than-human world and human ontology.

The cinematic narrative of *The Edge* starkly contrasts with the philosophical insights of the Australian philosopher Val Plumwood [2012]. Following a life-threatening encounter with a saltwater crocodile, Plumwood called for a nuanced understanding of the predator-prey relationship, underscoring the intrinsic value and rightful existence of predators. Her

reflections culminated in a profound ecological philosophy that champions the interconnectedness of all life within the food chain, advocating for equality among beings and the notion of multispecies justice marked by reciprocity.

In contrast, *The Edge* simplifies these multifaceted interactions into a primal survival contest between humans and the natural world, anchored in a narrative of dominance. From an ecofeminist viewpoint, the film embodies the very essence of heroic machismo, reinforcing negative ontologies and a dualism that ultimately advocates for «mastery over nature» [Merchant 1990]. Specifically, Charles, the protagonist, symbolizes not merely a dominant individual but modernity's broader project of progress through the subjugation of other-than-humans, promoting specific male-centric rational values – evidenced by his predominantly emotionless demeanor throughout the film [Plumwood 2002].

The Edge is permeated with anthropocentrism and a palpably masculine ethos of conflict, focusing on two male characters whose conquest of their bear adversary is achieved not through respect or understanding but through violence. This portrayal not only conflates their victory over nature with personal and class conflicts but also perpetuates the film's underlying themes of ownership, power, and control. Paradoxically, despite surviving the bear, the main characters engage in a fatal confrontation, with the more "irrational" character ultimately causing his own demise in pursuit of his conception of "justice". The narrative implies that survival favors those who are resourceful and emotionally detached, presenting a distorted depiction of friendship and failing to authentically explore the wilderness as anything beyond a domain of fear and conquest, upheld by an archaic and hierarchical view of nature.

The film missed a crucial opportunity to reflect Plumwood's philosophical musings on vulnerability and interconnectedness

within the natural world, opting instead for a narrative that amplifies nature's peril and the imperative to dominate. Such a story could have encouraged audiences to reevaluate their place in the natural order – not as overlords but as integral components of a complex web of life, emphasizing our profound connection to the non-human world.

The discrepancy between the portrayal in *The Edge* and Plumwood's transformative insights highlights a missed opportunity in cinema to engage deeply with themes of anthropophagy, nature's disquiet, and a philosophical understanding of our role within the natural ecosystem. Films have the capacity to reshape our views, promoting a more empathetic and ecologically aware perspective on our interactions with the natural world. This narrative shift could cultivate an enhanced appreciation for life's complexity, moving away from narratives centered on survival and dominion to acknowledge our collective vulnerabilities and shared destinies within the vast fabric of existence.

Emerging from her harrowing encounter, Val Plumwood's philosophical journey confronts the prevailing norms of Western individualism, advocating for a worldview that recognizes the fundamental connection between humans and non-humans within an ecological continuum.

James Hatley's exploration in *The Uncanny Goodness of Being Edible to Bears* delves into the phenomenology of vulnerability and being prey, highlighting the importance of acknowledging our integration into the ecological web. Hatley [2004] draws on stories of human survivors of bear encounters, noting that many such individuals develop a deeper connection to the natural world, often advocating for the protection of the very creatures that once threatened them. This perspective champions a form of self-rewilding, advocating for a recognition of our place as part of the ecological collective, not as its dominators but as

participants. Mateusz Tokarski's work on rewilding extends these concepts, emphasizing the value of embracing ecological discomfort to enhance both human and ecological well-being [Tokarski, 2019]. Tokarski suggests that resisting discomfort can obscure the value of such experiences, advocating for a greater openness to the vulnerabilities of coexisting with other-than-human entities as a path toward deeper coexistence and ecological ethics.

Additionally, despite being set in Alaska, *The Edge* notably lacks the exploration of non-Western epistemologies that emerge from tragic encounters between bears and humans, such as anthropologist Nastassja Martin's near-fatal encounter with a Kamchatka bear. Martin's experience led her to explore what it means to become, as described by the Evens people, a *miedka* - a being that transcends the human-animal dichotomy [Martin 2021]. This concept underscores the need for her to continue her anthropological work and to reconstruct her identity.

In stark contrast, *The Edge* exemplifies the film industry's tendency to depict bears and the natural environment as antagonistic forces. Despite presenting a gripping narrative of survival and human conflict in the Alaskan wilderness, the film positions the bear as a monstrous other, supporting a narrative of conquest and human supremacy. This portrayal starkly contrasts with the nuanced insights offered by Plumwood, Hatley, and Tokarski, who advocate for a deeper, reciprocal relationship with the natural world.

Therefore, *The Edge* highlights cinema's powerful role in shaping public perceptions of wildlife and the environment, underscoring the critical need for narratives that accurately reflect the ecological roles of animals like bears and promote a respectful, enlightened understanding of our entanglement with the natural world. By embracing the philosophical insights of thinkers like Plumwood, Hatley, and Tokarsky, filmmakers and

storytellers are presented with an opportunity to foster a narrative that is ecologically informed and ethically committed, advocating for a world that honors the interconnectedness of all life and champions coexistence over dominion.

4. *Grizzly Man*. Thinking Boundaries and Hybridity

Werner Herzog's 2005 documentary *Grizzly Man* delves deep into the life and tragic end of Timothy Treadwell, who saw himself as a guardian of grizzly bears, though his methods were not widely accepted by environmentalists and experts for being radical, unconventional, and unsafe. Treadwell spent thirteen summers in the wilderness of Alaska's Katmai National Park and Preserve, ultimately meeting his demise along with his girlfriend, Amie Huguenard, due to a bear attack in October 2003. The documentary, through Treadwell's own footage, interviews, and Herzog's reflective narration, explores the fragile line between human society and the wild. It questions the traditional division between humanity and nature by presenting a dual perspective: Treadwell's, with his non-anthropocentric view, and Herzog's, characterized by cosmological pessimism and cynicism. This approach illuminates the complex interactions and inherent dangers of such close encounters with the non-human world.

Herzog, through *Grizzly Man*, masterfully presents grizzly bears in their natural splendor, as captured by Timothy Treadwell's lens. This depiction includes moments of feeding, play, and tranquil existence within their untouched environment, evoking deep admiration and awe for these majestic animals. Herzog carefully maintains this balance, consciously avoiding the romanticization of the bears' lives. Instead, he presents a stark view of their territorial instincts and survival strategies. Herzog's portrayal acknowledges the beauty of the bears and the Alaskan wilderness while presenting

evolution and ecology as relentless, directionless, and unsympathetic forces. This approach straddles the line between contemplation and disenchantment, leaving viewers with a bittersweet sense of awe. By adopting this approach, Herzog emphasizes the innate wildness of the bears and nature's apathy towards human aspirations and endeavors. He underlines what he perceives as the stark reality of the natural world, a perspective that showcases the unembellished truth of nature's operation beyond human sentiment and control.

Herzog's storytelling in *Grizzly Man* positions Treadwell as a symbol of the intricate and often paradoxical dynamics between humans and the broader community of species. Treadwell's deep-seated passion and dedication to the grizzlies were driven by deep love and a protective instinct. However, his practice of closely engaging with grizzlies showcases a flawed effort to diminish the divide between human communities and those of wild animals. This blurring of boundaries, shifting from observation to direct engagement, not only unveils a desire for connection but also reflects a significant misunderstanding of the core characteristics of these creatures. As such, Treadwell's story serves as a warning about the pitfalls of overconfidence – a stark illustration of the mistake in believing that human-made divisions can be easily crossed in the wild. It underlines the perils of ignoring the potential dangers involved in close interactions with grizzly bears, warning against the misjudgment of their unbridled power. Adding a note of caution to my analysis, this notion of impermeable divisions, deeply ingrained in the conventional wisdom upheld by much of scientific thought, is neither inherent nor absolute. Instead, it arises from a human versus other-than-human dualism that Herzog's representation fully embraces.

Grizzly Man artfully contrasts the untamed expanses with human narratives, using Treadwell's journey and unfortunate

demise to probe deep existential and ethical questions about our role within the broader community of species. The film prompts viewers to reconsider idealized perceptions of the wilderness, fostering reflection on the ethical, philosophical, and existential aspects of our engagements with other species. Herzog's narrative critically addresses the folly of underestimating the wilderness's raw aspects and our limits in interpreting them, pushing for an acknowledgment of the wilderness as a domain of both splendor and peril. It stresses the importance of maintaining and respecting the distinctions between human beings and other species, highlighting the need to adhere to the fundamental principles and boundaries that govern our shared existence. The portrayal of bears in the documentary acts as a stark caution against the dangers of attributing human characteristics to wild animals. Treadwell's approach to viewing bears as friends or companions sharply diverges from Herzog's perspective, which views these creatures as motivated by instincts distinctly different from human feelings or social constructs. For Herzog, the tragic conclusion of Treadwell's ventures into the wild underlines the risks of imposing human-like qualities on subjects that operate according to the stark, merciless rules of the wilderness.

Herzog's depiction of Treadwell's attempts to present a figure who is at once creative and brave, yet also marked by folly, a flair for drama, and excessive confidence. Treadwell's approach, characterized by a youthful and simplistic affection for other species, neglects what Herzog considers a crucial ontological separation between humans and the untamed – a neglect that jeopardizes the potential for mutual respect and living together. From Herzog's viewpoint, overlooking this crucial distinction not only endangers human safety but also compromises the inherent sovereignty and wildness of animals, thereby disrupting the balance vital for harmonious coexistence.

Critiques from environmental circles suggest that Treadwell's fusion of love and hubris may have been more detrimental than beneficial to the creatures he sought to safeguard. His unfortunate end, along with the fate of the bear involved, highlights the intricate consequences of his approach. Treadwell's pursuit of a connection with the untamed and other species echoes a wider cultural tale, resonating with figures like Charlie Russell [2011] or Douglas Peacock [2009]. This narrative, embodying a sort of self-rewilding ethos, represents a quest for human integration with the wild, yet it also illustrates misguided attempts toward achieving such rewilding.

Driven perhaps by a blend of masculine bravado or a modern-day romanticism reminiscent of Henry David Thoreau or Christopher McCandless, this story encapsulates a desire to escape societal limits through an elemental return to the wilderness [Krakauer 1997]. Herzog's *Grizzly Man* critiques Treadwell's humanizing perspective as overly simplistic and naive, using Alaska's harsh wilderness as a setting for personal transformation and societal escape. The film issues a clear caution: such wild landscapes are not inherently welcoming to human presence.

This motif finds echoes in *Into the Wild*, where an isolated, ailing McCandless encounters a bear in his final moments. Contrary to what might be expected, the bear does not attack but instead moves on, in a moment that appears to be a compassionate recognition, underscoring the bear's symbolic significance as a healer in various indigenous cultures and McCandless's lack of readiness for life in the wild.

Treadwell's fate, as interpreted by Herzog, underscored by an inability to fully grasp the bear's perspective, acts as a stark warning about the risks of ignoring the deep-seated distinctions between humans and the other-than-human realm. In the quest for rewilding, it is imperative not to disregard these essential

separations. Figures like McCandless and Treadwell, for all their intriguing adventures, also serve as warnings about the perils of naïveté and overconfidence. Herzog's narrative in Grizzly Man marked by a blend of cosmic pessimism and blunt realism, aims to unravel the complex and often disquieting aspects of our allure to bears and the wilderness, urging viewers to reckon with the profound, sometimes grim realities of our engagements with the wild.

After presenting Herzog's interpretations of *Grizzly Man* in a somewhat favorable light, acknowledging multiple compelling arguments, I now aim to highlight its limitations. The dichotomy Herzog draws between humans and the more-than-human world, his overlook of the emotional lives of bears, and the portrayal of boundaries between human and non-human life-forms as rigid – along with the depiction of wilderness almost as an anti-human realm rather than a space of multispecies agency – suggest that Herzog's perspective may still be uncomfortably aligned with contentious ideas. However, possibly inadvertently, thanks to Treadwell's voice, the film opens up a discordant and dissonant yet richer possibility for multispecies generative cinema.

Viewing Herzog's perspective as unassailably correct, especially from a Western standpoint, may be instinctual, but it's important to recognize that *Grizzly Man* does not merely set a naive, romantic protagonist against a dispassionate, rational narrator – Herzog's own voice. The film showcases the conflict between two potentially flawed viewpoints: Treadwell's excessive anthropomorphism and Herzog's stance, which could be seen as reflecting Cartesian views of animals as mere automata.

This raises a crucial question: Does Herzog, by not portraying nature as a nurturing mother but as a domain of cosmic indifference, align his views with narratives similar to

those in *The Edge*? If so, Herzog may not be promoting a rational ecological philosophy but highlighting a narrative steeped in deep cynicism. This interpretation invites viewers to see the documentary not just as a critique of Treadwell's approach to the wilderness but as a reflection on Herzog's own philosophical stance towards the natural world, revealing a more intricate and nuanced critique of humanity's relationship with the wild [Boonpromkul 2015].

In this conversation, I suggest revisiting our understanding of Treadwell. The issue might not stem entirely from how Treadwell interpreted the bears' behaviors and signals but could also reflect Herzog's potential oversight of animal consciousness and autonomy [Mighetto 2007]. Herzog appears to portray bears primarily as elements of a vast, impersonal wilderness, devoid of distinct identities or emotional capacities. On the other hand, Treadwell, through his documentary endeavors and written accounts [Treadwell and Palovak 1999], presents himself as an unconventional ethologist, possibly possessing a more profound insight into the bears' emotional states than many of his detractors have acknowledged. His methodology, which blurred the distinction between observer and subject, and his tendency to attribute human characteristics to bears while also acknowledging bear-like traits in humans, imply a deep connection with the bears' experiential worlds. Yet, in his compassionate journey, Treadwell did not fully consider his physical limitations as a human. Within the realm of bears, where physical altercations are a part of existence, Treadwell's lack of natural defenses marked a mismatch for life amidst bears. The fundamental oversight might not be a misinterpretation of bear behavior, but rather a neglect of his own human vulnerabilities.

Treadwell's contributions to multispecies cinema, through his non-anthropocentric narrative and unparalleled closeness

with the non-human, arguably exceed those of the filmmaker chronicling his life. Hence, there's a need to ethically and pedagogically reevaluate our approaches to understanding the bear experience, aiming for an insight that fosters multispecies coexistence and justice. Films like *Brother Bear* (2003) which offer a narrative of self-discovery grounded in indigenous knowledge, exploring the shared vulnerabilities of humans and bears and advocating for a more interconnected existence, exemplify this approach.

Cinema that speaks to our era of ecological crisis and relational injustices, particularly regarding our connections with the natural world, should be inspired by stories like *Brother Bear* Such narratives ought to navigate beyond tales of horror, bravado, or cosmic pessimism and avoid simplistic romanticization. Achieving this balance requires a critical reevaluation of historical misconceptions, a close examination of prevailing ontologies and ethological theories, and a challenge to the binary views often dominating our understanding of the human and non-human relationship [Calarco 2015]. This reflective effort could pave the way for the development of rich, generative multispecies narratives.

Conclusion. Thinking Multispecies Cinema

The investigation of bear narratives within cinema unveils a revealing perspective on human interactions with the natural environment. These stories fluctuate between themes of fear and admiration, horror and wisdom, showcasing the complex relationship humans have with bears. They extend beyond mirroring societal fears, encapsulated by the term *bearanoia* to reveal a deep-seated wish for reconnection with the wider community of life. Examining the portrayal of bears in films underscores the critical need for a cinema that includes

perspectives from multiple species. This filmmaking approach aims to celebrate and recognize the diverse array of voices that constitute our shared planet, promoting a shift from human-centric tales to those that honor the inherent worth and autonomy of all life forms. Werner Herzog's documentary on Timothy Treadwell exemplifies how cinema can push the boundaries of our ecological consciousness. Treadwell's unique approach to studying animals, alongside the philosophical layers in movies like *Brother Bear* provide a foundation for innovative storytelling. These narratives aspire to move beyond traditional wildlife depictions, towards a framework that is inclusive, empathetic, and comprehensive in its portrayal of living in harmony with other species.

Amid the current ecological challenges, the call for a cinema that adopts a multispecies viewpoint has never been more critical. By reflecting on our shared vulnerabilities and listening to the insights offered by non-human entities, we are poised to create narratives that not only entertain but also enlighten, leading the way to a more balanced and enduring coexistence.

Notes

[1] In this paper, I use the word "nature" for accessibility to a broader audience. However, my intended meaning refers to the multispecies real, the "symbiotic real" [Morton, 2017], or the more-than-human world, thereby negating any dualism of "human" versus "nature."

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Non-human Animals as Objective Correlatives: Peter Morgan's *The Crown* and the Role of Montage

Viktorija Lankauskaitė

Introduction

Animal imagery in film, influenced by other storytelling traditions, existing stereotypes, and perceptions, often serves as a tool to tell human-focused stories, rather than represent itself. Yet, while undeniably anthropocentric, not all these images can be evaluated equally in terms of human and non-human animal relations, and their reflections in cinema. Allegorical portrayals, where non-human animal characters are placed in human-like storylines, and are given a human language, clothing, family structures, and other human-like qualities; stories about animals that contain messages for humans, such as animal rights, ecocriticism, or human and nature relations in general; true to life animal representation, such as documentaries, although still affected by human understanding of the world, e.g., different personalities or social behaviour assigned to animals; and animals with certain roles assigned to them within a story, such as a representation of the emotional state of the character, illustrating relationships of humans around them, or other more symbolic meaning – all of these different approaches can inform about different attitudes towards other animals, and require different use of film grammar. The aim of this paper is to explore the distinctions between different forms of animal symbolism in audiovisual storytelling, with specific attention paid to the role of montage. The paper covers the current understanding of animal imagery and its use in film, montage practices in cinema, and the ways they can be connected to create different meanings.

Animal Imagery for Meaning Making in Film

Conceptually speaking, film is inherently anthropocentric. This is especially evident when it comes to non-human animal representation, wherein, influenced by other storytelling traditions, existing stereotypes, and perceptions, as well as by the limits of the medium, film employs animal imagery to stand for human matters more often than for itself. Discussing film, DeMello [2021; p. 401–404] separates between portrayals: using animals as stand-ins for humans in allegorical stories, where non-human animals play characters with human qualities, such as social hierarchy, family structure, speech, clothing, and others; telling stories about animals that contain messages for humans, such as animal rights, or ecocriticism (thereby ending up being about humans anyway); and true to life animal representation that is still affected by human understanding of the world, with, for example, animals in documentaries having different personalities or social behavior assigned to them [DeMello 2021; pp. 401–404]. Another common use of animal imagery involves assigning certain meanings and roles to animals in film, such as representing an emotional state of the character, explaining storylines, or illustrating human relationships around them, thus «burdening» them with «metaphorical significances» [Burt 2004; p. 11]. As these images are often dispersed throughout the film, and can be less clear in their intention, a closer look at them specifically could be of benefit in clarifying the landscape of animal portrayal in film and how form relates to content in such portrayals. This is where, in combination with the limits of the film technology available, human gaze becomes an important notion.

One of the first encounters of *human gaze* can be found in Randy Malamud's writings on animals in visual culture. Malamud [2012] draws parallels between Mulvey's *male gaze* and the

masculine point of view that objectifies women, and the human gaze, and suggests replacing the «objectified woman» with «animal», resulting in the characterization of «the image of the animal as passive raw material for the active gaze of the human» [p. 74]. He also points out that the use of Mulvey's terminology emphasizes the political implications of the human gaze: «The animal is rendered vulnerable, free for the taking, in whatever way the human viewer chooses» [p. 74]. While these mostly cover the idea of looking at animals and the *use* of animal imagery, Malamud also notes the *understanding* side of it, and argues that most of the animal imagery and references are there to highlight the human presence: «when people look at animals, what we see most clearly with the human gaze, is, unsurprisingly, ourselves» [p. 76], which supports the hierarchical view towards species on screen as well.

In contrast, McMahon [2014], quoting Fay [2011] and Pick [2008], discusses their theoretical view towards cinema as being non-hierarchical, and «indifferent to the difference of species» [p. 195], and, exploring Denis Côté's *Bestiaire* (2012), argues that cinema is moving beyond anthropocentric understanding of reality. Yet, the images described still lean towards the human gaze, such as animals staring directly into the camera, taxidermy sequences showing human superiority, close-ups in certain emotional sequences for human-like storytelling, and so on, and do not deny the presence of animals in film being a symbolic one. The question that remains here, is how much her «impassive lens» (after Bazin [1967]), is really impassive, and whether it is really capable of not privileging certain features or not supporting certain misconceptions. McMahon addresses this by quoting Côté: «Is it still possible today to film animals in an original way?»; «Is it possible to film an animal for what it is: an animal?» [Côté 2012 in McMahon 2014; p. 200], and notes the stylistic elements of the film, such as cropping the frame to

resemble the works of certain photography artists, employing montage to simulate human experience when visiting a zoo, and similar. Thus, the impassivity of the lens in these sequences is difficult to demonstrate. Another argument against that impassivity can be found in the writings of Mills [2024], who argues that the shark's Point of View shot in *Jaws* (1975) never belongs to the shark, but to humans who control the camera, and is contained within the limitations of the film medium and human perception. This point of view manifests itself, of course, not only in the technical aspects but also in the attitude shaped towards the animal and the atmosphere its presence is supposed to create – one of danger and fear.

The human gaze and its influence on the use of animal imagery manifests in several ways, and anthrozoomorphism can cover a significant part of this discussion. The term, a combination of anthropomorphism and zoomorphism, as Martinelli [2014a] explains, embodies how humanity and animality can «co-exist in a single character» [p. 295]. Going further, the anthro- quality confirms the human gaze, and how it dictates variations of zoomorphism and anthropomorphism. An example of such anthro- influence can be found in the presence of non-human animal stereotypes within language, where, for example, certain animal names are viewed as insults, others as praises. Expressions such as *stubborn as a mule, as slippery as an eel, as sly as a fox* in comparison to *as brave as a lion, as wise as an owl, as busy as a bee, as gentle as a lamb* seem to put non-human animals in a certain hierarchy. Similarly, calling someone *a pig, a cow, a snake,* or *a rat* also has different connotations than calling someone *a dove, a hawk,* or *a bear* [Sommer & Sommer 2011, Gutauskas 2021]. Stories with animal characters often follow the same stereotypes as well: owls are wise, snakes are sly, bears can be large and scary but caring at the same time, lions are brave, ants and bees are workaholics, rabbits can be cowardly, but

often face danger in the end, and so on, although such stereotypes also depend on culture [DeMello 2021; p. 368]. The human gaze is also evident in seemingly innocent representations of animals as well – Stanton [2021] points out the discriminatory depiction of certain animals and their treatment in Disney films. According to her, animal harm and objectification in Disney films is romanticized, humorized, or generally minimized. Additionally, certain narratives are favored, as are certain species, for some of them are anthropomorphized to become the main characters and some are not, and remain in the background [Stanton 2021]. Martinelli [2014b] also provides examples from Disney animated films when it comes to anthrozoomorphism, and the ways non-human animals are anthropomorphized or humans zoomorphed in specific ways: animals get very human-like eyebrows and eyelashes, bigger eyes, acquire the ability to smile, laugh, and walk on hind legs, and other similar *Homo sapiens* qualities [Martinelli 2014b; pp. 24–27]. Humans, in contrast, usually get animal ears, paws, tails, fur on their backs, fangs and similar qualities that are made to fit human physiology but would not interfere with it – phenotypic transformations are more common than morphological – as Guitton [2013] writes. The human influence is visible in such images, hence *anthro*zoomorphism. When it comes to the *use* of the animal image and the human gaze, other more striking examples include using real animals for meaning making. Stan Brakhage and his *no camera* film *Mothlight* (1963) was made by gluing moths onto a strip of celluloid which was then projected onto screen. Similarly, Ladislas Starevich switched legs of dead insects, such as beetles, grasshoppers, and dragonflies, with wire and used them as puppets – shaped them into various figures for stop-motion animation (e.g., *Cameraman's Revenge* (1912)). While the used insects were dead, such approach highly signifies the existence of hierarchy of species and their images on screen:

Moths, butterflies, beetles, grasshoppers, dragonflies, and other insects are accepted image making materials, while other species are not, or are more suited to be represented in a different way.

This *use* of non-human animal images, and the anthropocentric understanding of them is undoubtedly influenced by human and non-human animal relations, and their complicated nature. The complexity of these relations is often viewed from a human perspective and explained by the idea of likeness and difference – how alike and unlike humans an animal can be – and this categorization is also evident in animal representation as well, with a focus on difference, where non-human animal (or their certain parts and characteristics) can be seen as an image of *otherness*, and with a focus on likeness, whether it would be stories, showing how similar humans are to animals, or the ones encouraging a better understanding of the animal world, and connection with the environment. However, these two categories do not necessarily divide animal representation into either a negative or a positive one: stories that talk about otherness can have a message of tolerance, and acceptance of that otherness at their heart, while human and animal likeness can be approached from the point of negativity and critique. Animal representation can also be divided into categories based on the human and non-human animal relations in practice, with animals to slaughter, eat, and torture at one end of the spectrum, and animals to worship – on the other. These relations, of course, depend on different cultures, and the categories themselves are not entirely homogenous, as, for example, animal worship in certain communities can include sacrifice. The understanding of *otherness*, on the other hand, could be complicated by the idea of animal being «the wholly other, more other than any other» [Derrida 2002; p. 380], which Gutauskas [2021] explains as theory of an animal being «transcendental» – completely incomparable and unapproacha-ble to humans, and having its

own point of view, its own identity, thus not giving in to objectification, or at least not being objectified by Derrida, in the discussed case [p. 184]. This reference is important for the idea of representing the animal as sacred – the other that is treated differently (or is different) from other *others*, perhaps emphasizing the possibility of a different human and non-human animal relationship, its symbolism or cultural meaning, and allows to question whether certain approaches are better suited for one or the other type of animal representation, especially when it comes to film grammar and other technical aspects of filmmaking.

DeMello's [2021] distinction between allegorical stories, stories about animals, true to life representation, or Burt's «metaphorical significances» [2004; p. 11] can be found not only in content or diegesis of the films, but in the form as well. Allegorical stories, for example, would use animal imagery from the beginning to the end of the film, and if one could perceive two layers of meaning, such as the story and what it represents, only one layer would be visible on screen. For example, Wes Anderson's *The Isle of Dogs* (2010) has been described as an allegory for racism, immigration issues, and general political situation in the United States, as well as Japan, where the animated film is set [Hong 2018]. In the film, dogs and cats represent different races, speak English, while humans speak Japanese with no subtitles, signifying the inability to communicate between species (as well as different races) and so on, but only that layer of the story, the animated film with anthropomorphized dogs with occasional scenes involving humans, is shown on screen. Stories about animals could be approached similarly, with animal characters included in the storyline and their screen time varying depending on the story, yet the meaning is usually revealed more directly: through plot, actions of characters, the lessons they learn and emotions they

experience. Examples include Jean-Jacques Annaud's *The Bear* (1988) and *Two Brothers* (2004), Bong Joon Ho's *Okja* (2017), and others. True to life representation, such as documentaries, mostly includes animal images from the beginning of the audiovisual story to the end, but while telling a rather direct story about certain animals, it might aim for emotional impact through film grammar: composition, framing, camera angles, and montage. Finally, the film grammar is especially important in metaphorical representation, which can be found in various films, but animal imagery there can be arbitrary, and deciphering such images can be difficult. Burt [2004; p. 54] references Robert Redford's *The Horse Whisperer* and how the frequent close-ups of the horse's eye exemplify the link between horse and human and suggests that the film is shown through a perspective of a camera and the animal rather than a human. The arbitrariness of such shots does not mean that they seem meaningless, but that they might appear at any point in the story, and for any amount of time. In these cases, montage plays the most important role in carrying the meaning across, and the following section will be devoted to discussing exactly that.

Montage and Animals as Objective Correlatives

The discussion can start from Eisenstein and his idea of montage as such, claiming that «cinematography is, first and foremost, montage» [Eisenstein and Leyda 1977/1949; p. 28]. He argues this by saying that in cinema, similarly to Japanese writing, we are «combining shots that are *depictive*, single in meaning, neutral in content – into *intellectual* contexts and series» [1977/1949; p. 30, emphasis original]. From this he raises the idea of *conflict* as necessary for meaning making through montage, which for him is characterized by collision: «from the collision of two given factors arises a concept» [p. 37]. Eisenstein also notes that his

viewpoint is completely different from that of Pudovkin and Kuleshov, who see montage as *linkage* [pp. 36-38]. This linkage is visible in Kuleshov's editing experiment: a long take with a close-up of an expressionless actor's face was intercut with different scenes, a bowl of soup, a woman in a coffin, and a child playing with a toy bear. When it was projected to an audience, the audience saw different emotions in the actor's face after each scene, although Kuleshov knew that the face has not changed, and the understanding of the reaction depended only on the preceding image, and this is now known as the Kuleshov's effect - meaning created by juxtaposition [Frierson 2018; p. 149]. Citing Bordwell [1993], Frierson sees Eisenstein as a more inventive and radical filmmaker, while Pudovkin follows a more traditional style [p. 152]. With this background, and a number of disagreements perhaps, the importance of montage for the impact of cinema remains clear, and one could easily agree with Pudovkin's argument regarding film editing for an «invisible observer», where the cuts resemble attention and focus changes, control the narrative, and allow to guide the viewer [Frierson 2018; p. 152]. From a more current and practical perspective, Hurbis-Cherrier [2018] bases the practices of editing on continuity and how it is manipulated, where on one side is a continuous take and invisible editing, and on the other the elimination of time and space through visible cuts - both of those extremes, and everything in between, can be used intentionally to create meaning, and guide the viewer [p. 492].

Parallel to these, Metz differentiates types of montage into «syntagmatic categories» - a binary system to describe various manifestations of montage and its functions. While the method can be confusing and some shots difficult to distinguish between one or another, Monaco [2000/1977] argues that it is the only attempt to synthesize all the possible intricacies of montage and remains a valuable tool for its logic [p. 186]. The eight segments

Metz describes are as follows: 1) *Autonomous shot*. It is a sequence shot that stands on its own, unrelated to other shots. The shots related to other shots, syntagmas, are then split into two categories of Achronological and Chronological syntagmas. Achronological syntagmas are: 2) *Parallel syntagma*. It is a combination of scenes with similar motifs, but unrelated spatially or temporally; often used in a metaphorical way. 3) *Bracket syntagma*. It is described by Metz as brief scenes representing the same order or reality, as examples of certain occurrences, but not related chronologically [p. 126]. Chronological syntagmas then are split into two more categories: 4) *Descriptive syntagma*. A combination of scenes aiming to describe something, related spatially; and narrative syntagmas: 5) *Alternate (narrative) syntagma*. Similar to the parallel syntagma, but has elements that are narratively related, such as simultaneously happening shots of the chase, with pursuer and pursued shown interchangeably. Another category of narrative syntagmas is *Linear narrative syntagmas*, and they are separated into 6) *Scene* and *Sequence*, with sequence being separated into two more: 7) *Episodic* and 8) *Ordinary*. The scene, the way Metz describes it, has a linear continuous narrative. The narrative in the sequence is broken up. As Monaco says, «it is still linear, it is still narrative, it is still chronological, it is still related to other elements, but it is not continuous» [Monaco 2000/1977; p. 189]. The episodic and ordinary sequences are distinguished by their discontinuity, which in the episodic sequence is organized, and in the ordinary sequence is not. Monaco also adds that the elements in the episodic sequence are organized so each of them appear to have their own identity [p. 189].

From these, parallel syntagmas seem to be the most fitting for metaphorical use, where unrelated images brought together can mean more than the sum of their parts. Frierson [2018] notes a couple of similar distinctions of montage in film studies.

First comes from Pudovkin, who distinguished a montage of symbolism, providing an example from Eisenstein's *Strike* (1925), where the killing of the strikers is intercut with the images of cattle being slaughtered, thus creating a comparison in the viewers' minds [Frierson 2018; p. 154]. This type of montage is also compared to Idea-Associative Comparison montage, which, as Frierson, citing Zettl [2017], describes, helps to reinforce thematically related events. Animal imagery here prevails as well: an example of Eisenstein's *October: Ten Days that Shook the World* (1928) is provided where the shots of Alexander Kerensky, leader of the provisional government occupying the czar's palace are intercut with a shot of a mechanical peacock, signifying the vanity of Kerensky; as well as the already discussed example of *Strike* (1925). Overall, parallel syntagmas, symbolism montage, and Idea-Associative Comparison montage seem to have the same approach and intention – intercutting sequences with thematically related images as a form of comparison or emotional expression. A similar approach to editing can also be found in Pudovkin's idea of plastic material, which Frierson [2018] compares to T. S. Eliot's *objective correlative* [p. 150].

According to Pudovkin, plastic material is something that is expressed on screen visually, something that describes the text, as well as allows the actors to downplay their acting, since what they are feeling or experiencing will be illustrated through associated images. Objective correlative similarly describes the use of various objects and images to express emotions in different forms of art: «The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an objective correlative; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion» [Eliot 1954, as cited in Frierson 2018]. Frierson gives an example of this in the scene of Pudovkin's *Mother* (1926), where a mother is sitting in a room with her dead husband, and the shots are intercut with a water

dripping in the pan, illustrating the somber evening and the slowness of time [Frierson 2018]. While T. S. Eliot's objective correlative is mostly applied for analyzing poetry, this only adds to the idea of film being used as language, as Metz [1974] or Monaco [2000/1977] write, with its own signs and system developed. From this perspective one can identify montage as defining sentence structure, where cuts act as punctuation marks separating different clauses (shots of different length, for example), and, most importantly here, help to create comparisons - metaphors and similes. Objective correlative in audiovisuality might be understood either as a simile, with illustrative objects and situations having the word *like* in front of them: the time is slow like dripping water; the strikers are slaughtered like cattle; Alexander Kerensky is proud and vain like a peacock; and so on; or as a metaphor: time is dripping water, the strikers are slaughtered cattle, Alexander Kerensky is a proud peacock. While technically different (especially from the anthrozoomorphic point of view, with differences between comparing someone to an animal, and calling them an animal), the main idea here is the possibility to create a comparison in general and explain how the characters might be feeling and what they might be experiencing, without saying it directly.

Animal imagery for this purpose seems to be a popular choice, and this covers both the already discussed tendency to use animal images to represent human related meanings, the familiarity of the animal image, although, often influenced by stereotypes, and the fact that animals are a simple choice for an objective correlative in the environment of one or the other character: pets can be as sad as their owner, birds can sing their songs in the park as a happy character is walking through, birds flying in the sky can be seen both in the city and in the wilderness, and so on. While such animal characters often end up being in the same diegetic environment, they can be

considered objective correlatives or plastic material, because they help to convey emotions and describe the situation of human characters, provide a possibility of comparison, and, from a practical point of view, technically might not be in the same environment and rely on montage anyway. This is where the main issue arises, as pure spatially and temporally unrelated animal imagery, included in a parallel montage, is rather specific and rare, thus calls to broaden the understanding and interpretation of the animal image used in a metaphorical way. Some help for that can be found in writings on film metaphors by Forceville [2016], as he distinguishes three types of metaphors: contextual, where the source and the target of the metaphor are not shown but suggested by the visual context; hybrid, where the target and the source are physically made one, often non-existing item; and simile, where the target and the source are juxtaposed, without manipulation [2016; p. 20]. While these distinctions are clear and allow to systematize the understanding of the film metaphor as such, Forceville [2016] also notes that it is difficult to clearly determine something as being a metaphor, and suggests referring to «construing a metaphor», or «interpreting something as a metaphor» [p. 25]. Additionally, the author later argues that the relevancy of the metaphor aids in its recognition as a metaphor better, rather than the way it clearly fits into a category [Forceville 2024]. These ideas then, the interpretation, relevancy, and the importance of montage, seem to lead to a broader use of non-literal imagery, which can be described as exactly objective correlative or plastic material.

Furthermore, expanding the interpretation of animal imagery allows to expect a spectrum of images – parallel montage, with spatially and temporally unrelated images on one side, and diegetic human and non-human animal interaction on the other side, with montage only guiding the viewer towards

specific details, allowing to interpret the image as a metaphor, or having a symbolic aspect to it.

The following section aims to apply these ideas and explore a case study, investigating the animal images used as objective correlatives, relying on montage.

Case Studies: *The Crown*

The television series *The Crown* (2016–2023) has been here chosen as a case study to illustrate the concepts so far discussed. The series, produced by Netflix, consisting of 60 episodes spanning through six seasons, has been created by Peter Morgan, and is based on the lives of the British Royal Family – the former Queen Elizabeth II and her family specifically. Several episodes focus on different members of the family and provide storylines for supporting characters, but the main story follows the Queen from her ascend to the throne, through her reign, until around 2005. Real-life events and personalities inspiring the stories are highly dramatized, and while well researched, along with knowledge about the Royal Family, the series provides entertainment and indulges in a few creative liberties [Rampazzo Gambarato and Heuman 2023; pp. 807–808].

The analysis here will cover one single episode and several sequences from different other episodes including animal imagery and the role the montage plays in their symbolic depiction. *The Crown* was chosen for this analysis for a number of reasons. First of all, the contents of the series do not revolve around non-human animals, thus the animal images are fewer and more specific, allowing to expect certain symbolism. Second, Peter Morgan, as a writer and creator of the series, tends to include metaphors in other sequences and episodes, not necessarily related to animals. Although coming later in the series than in the analyzed episode, a great example of his

metaphorical storytelling is delivered in the first episode of the fifth season called "The Queen Victoria Syndrome", with the Queen at her later stages in life played by Imelda Staunton. With aging being the main theme of the episode, another aging counterpart, the royal yacht *Britannia*, is introduced, and flashback images of how it was launched into the sea are followed by the sequences of the Queen having a medical checkup, signifying her age. Later, the episode hints that the decaying yacht is in a similar state as the monarch. «It shouldn't come as a surprise she's falling apart. She's a creature of another age. Effectively, a World War II cruiser with soft furnishings. In many ways, she's obsolete», Prince Philip, played by Jonathan Pryce, says about the yacht during a conversation at dinner with the Queen, but it could be read as describing herself as well. Thus, a metaphorical approach is expected based on the writer's body of work. Third, animals are included in several royal traditions, with an ancient tradition of *telling the bees* being one of them – informing the bees about important events, such as their keeper dying [Burnside 2015], which was done after the Queen died in 2022 [Victor 2022]. Thus, a more symbolic understanding of the animal image is expected as well. Finally, since the series is based on true events and focus on real-life persons, certain emotions and situations might be familiar, allowing to find relevant objective correlatives and interpret something as a metaphor easier. The following will adopt a descriptive analysis, exploring the animal imagery prevalent in the chosen episodes, and how it takes on a role of objective correlative through montage.

The main episode chosen for the analysis is the second episode of the fourth season, titled "The Balmoral Test". The episode is set over a few days during summer holidays, which the Royal Family spends in Scotland, in Balmoral castle, and host two consecutive guests: the prime minister Margaret Thatcher,

played by Gillian Anderson, and Diana Spencer, played by Emma Corrin. The focus of the episode are the tests that the Royal Family supposedly subjects its guests to, such as games after dinner and how well one plays them, preparedness for the Scottish weather, and ability to spend time in nature. This is where the animal imagery comes in, as the main test ends up being stalking and hunting the imperial, 14-point stag which was shot and wounded in the neighboring estate. The first stalking outing is taken only by the Royal Family in the beginning of the episode, the second one with the prime minister who is visiting at the time, and the third and final one sees only prince Philip and Diana driving out, spotting the stag, and killing him. While an interesting storyline on its own, the wounded stag, its stalking, and eventual killing ends up being a metaphor for Diana Spencer entering the Royal Family.

Such symbolism of the stag is not new for Peter Morgan who wrote a similar storyline into *The Queen* (2006), where Queen Elizabeth was played by Helen Mirren. The 14-point stag then was shot by a businessman in a neighboring estate, and the Queen only saw the killed animal, yet parallels between the stag and princess Diana, since the story is depicted to happen soon after the death of the princess, are often mentioned [Flitterman-Lewis 2007]. Stags, deer, or hart have often been used as symbols associated with royalty, representing longevity and endurance. Fletcher writes about the popularity of elite red deer among European monarchs and aristocrats, who would attempt to reserve their hunting for themselves, and recounts several myths and stories about collared deer and their killing as a proof of divine right and legitimacy to rule [Fletcher 2013]. While the symbolic meaning of the stag in *The Crown* (as well as *The Queen*) is undeniable, the attention should be drawn at how the symbolism is achieved through montage, and how the animal becomes an objective correlative in these circumstances.

A total of 8 instances of the stag are visible in the episode, ranging from only showing it briefly, to longer sequences separated by the so-called reaction shots. The first instance occurs at the very beginning of the episode, when the stag is shot, and, wounded escapes a pair of men, later revealed to be the landowner of the neighboring estate and a visiting businessman. The opening sequence starts with an image of a Scottish landscape, cuts to a herd of deer, and then to the stag itself, framed within a wide shot. After the stag is wounded, the Royal Family is shown to be staying at Balmoral, and the Queen is informed about the escaped stag at breakfast. The stag «needs finishing off on compassionate grounds», says Prince Philip. As the conversation continues in the background, the view cuts to the shoulder mount of the deer hanging in the room, focusing on it for a moment. After that, the episode cuts to the sequence of Diana and Prince Charles at the Opera. Once their date ends, they say goodbye and Diana gets into the car, a 14-second shot of the wounded stag walking towards a stream in the forest is shown. After that, the intro sequence starts, followed by the part of the episode focusing on Margaret Thatcher and her "Balmoral tests", with no images of the stag shown. Halfway through the episode, the prime minister leaves and Diana arrives at Balmoral, to experience, as her grandmother says to her, «the most important weekend of your life». A short dinner sequence at the castle that evening ends with Diana's close-up and is followed by an 18-second shot of the stag bellowing in the moonlit forest. While only two images of the stag after it is wounded in the beginning are shown, the specificity of their positioning, after Diana at the opera, and after her at dinner, informs about the source and the target of the metaphor being set up. The montage between these images could be considered something between parallel and alternative syntagmas, as the images are not connected spatially, but have a limited temporal connection –

they belong to the same diegetic space but are not necessarily happening at the same time. For example, the image of the stag at night is happening the same night as Diana is staying over, but not necessarily at the same time as the dinner sequence, from which it cuts to the image of the stag. However, parallel approach is relevant here, because from the two images with their own meaning, another one can be construed: Diana is a hunted stag.

Based on this, while the symbolism is becoming clear, it is difficult to determine the stag as an objective correlative yet. That happens in a later sequence, once Diana is woken up and invited to stalk the stag together with prince Philip. After walking and talking for a while, Diana spots the stag and the hunting sequence begins. First of all, an extreme wide shot of the stag is shown, where only a little silhouette is visible far away, then the hunters are shown to look at it through binoculars, and the view cuts to a wide shot of the limping stag. After that, as the gun is being prepared, before the animal is shot, the view cuts between the medium wide shot of the stag and a close-up of Diana, resulting in something that resembles their conversation: the stag looks at Diana and she looks back. In a couple of seconds then, the stag is shot and falls to the ground, and the view cuts to Diana's face again, staying on it longer, with even slow motion introduced. This is where the stag's role as objective correlative becomes clearer: Diana's success at Balmoral secured her place in the Royal Family and became something of a killing shot for her, and while the character's emotions are not reflected in the animal, her situation is. This is emphasized by two other sequences where that same stag appears. The first of them is when it is being skinned and visible in a wide-angle shot, in the background of Prince Philip and Prince Charles discussing Diana, although inaudibly. Prince Charles retells that conversation on a phone call to Camilla, referring to himself as the stag being skinned. While possible for the animal to represent how Prince

Charles was feeling at the time as well, the image relates to Diana as she, after the successful hunt, has to be taken care of too – a proposal is imminent. The second of the final shots of the stag show it already taxidermized, being hung on the wall opposite another shoulder mount of a stag. Then, after a wide shot of the two stags opposite each other, the view cuts to Diana's face as she walks through the crowd of paparazzi, and the episode ends.

The montage in these sequences plays a part as a formative element of the Diana and the stag metaphor, and the three final sequences – shooting, skinning, and hanging the animal on the wall – is where the animal also takes on a role as an objective correlative, indicating the situation of the character. While the first two instances of the animal imagery work as metaphor building blocks, they happen too early and rather establish the objective correlative to be understood later. They also help in developing empathy for the wounded animal, and, as Rhodes [2021] notes, urges «to consider hunting from the animals' point of view» [para. 10], illustrating the idea of specific, symbolic montage being kinder to the animal representation. On a related note, the series returns to the Diana and the stag symbolism in the tenth episode of season four, titled "War", at the end of which Diana is shown walking down the stairs in Balmoral castle, surrounded by antlers hung on the wall, although composition plays a bigger role here than montage.

Another, perhaps a more specific use of animal as objective correlative can be found in the fifth episode of the third season, titled "Coup". Per the title, the episode revolves around the Queen on several field trips aimed to improve her horserace management, while Lord Mountbatten (played by Charles Dance) is planning to overthrow the government at the same time. The places and practices of horserace management that the queen sees remind her about the life she could have had, and the horse becomes a symbol of her unfulfilled dreams.

After her horse fails to win a race, the Queen is introduced to the idea of visiting horserace management facilities abroad. As she waits for the trip, her daily duties appear not so interesting anymore: during a meeting with the prime minister, she is shown to be looking at the painting of a horse. The montage in this case draws the audience's attention to the plastic material. First the Queen is shown to be directing her gaze away from the prime minister, another shot shows the prime minister turning his head and following her gaze, then the third shot reveals what they are looking at (a scene syntagma). At that point the painting of a horse becomes not only a painting but a symbol of her thoughts and the activities she would rather be engaging in. This sequence also illustrates Pudovkin's point that the actors can downplay their expression once plastic material is available: the audience can understand the Queen is thinking about horses and horseracing and is not necessarily interested in the conversation happening at the time, but the actress does not have to express these emotions so explicitly – a look at a painting, at the image of a horse, is enough.

Another instance of animal imagery within the series can be seen in the second episode of the fifth season, titled "The System". The episode opens with Prince Philip giving an interview about his carriage driving hobby, but he is distracted by a bird, a hawk, judging by the screech, in the sky. He is shown to look up, then a clear shot of the bird in the sky is shown, followed by another shot of the reporter looking at the sky, as well as Prince Philip. A couple of moments later, a screech is heard again, as Philip looks at the sky, indicating that he is still distracted, but the bird is not shown again. After that, the character is informed about the death of a daughter of a relative. A few scenes later, Philip is shown coming to visit that relative after the funeral, and as he is getting out of the car, the screeches are heard, he looks up, and the bird in the sky is shown again.

Finally, towards the end of the episode, Philip visits Diana, and as he is walking towards his car to leave, another screech is heard, he looks up, and the image of the bird in the sky follows. While such symbolic use can achieve more than one meaning, perhaps related to freedom per the episode title and the circumstances of the appearance of the bird, but undisclosed in the episode, it is constructed mainly through montage, the scene syntagma, also illustrating Kuleshov's effect very well, as the character and the bird do not have to be in the same space at the same time (although some manipulation does take place, as in two out of three cases, tops of some buildings, indicative of the same space are shown in the same frame as the bird, although from the practical perspective, it is difficult to imagine the filming crew waiting for the bird to fly through the exact spot), but the combination of shots makes it appear so. Additionally, the image of the bird does not provide enough information to be considered a metaphor or an objective correlative, but arguably, the specificity of the montage allows for a more respectful use of the animal imagery: Kuleshov's effect implies that the sequence could have been taken from anywhere without causing harm to the bird, and the way the image is used, as something having a bigger meaning that does not have to be explained or read in human terms, relating to its *other otherness*.

Finally, a significant sequence of animal imagery and its symbolic use can be found in the sixth episode of the fifth season, titled "Ipatiev House", covering the Queen's visit to Russia. At the beginning of the episode, a sequence from 1918 is shown, when the Romanov family was murdered. The gruesome shooting of the household is intercut with the images of king George V on a pheasant hunting trip, with the sounds of the shotguns from two scenes echoing each other. The sequences then continue showing the results of the shooting: the pheasants being collected from the cart, and the bodies of the members of

the Romanov family being put into one. These images together can be interpreted as a metaphor, achieved through parallel montage. While the people here are compared to the killed birds, and the impressive use of imagery might also invite to consider animal perspective in terms of hunting, similarly to what Rhodes [2021] wrote about the stag, there does not seem to be too much focus on that. The birds are firstly shown as targets being far away in the sky, and later quickly as trophies, without assigning too much empathy to them. In contrast, empathy and the animal point of view can be considered when the Romanov family gathering in the basement of a house, unaware of their fate, is revealed to have a tiny dog with them, held in somebody's arms. The dog in turn, might act as an objective correlative in terms of how unaware the family is, and what a terrible fate awaits them, resulting in more empathy. So, in this case, while the montage helps to construct a metaphor, clearly placing target and source next to each other, the impact of animal imagery does not necessarily have to belong to only one or the other element.

Overall, these cases illustrate the ways in which the animal image can be used in a symbolic way, becoming a part of a metaphor, or acting as a plastic material, and how montage helps to achieve that. As evident, pure parallel syntagmas are difficult to achieve in a more traditional narrative and require a level of temporal or spatial connection. Objective correlatives, while rather specific as well, can be achieved through montage, but also require a level of context to be associated with the character or the situation they are representing. The analyzed examples also provide some ideas about the role montage can play in the way animal representation is approached, with shorter arbitrary sequences taking animal imagery into account more, acknowledging its possible symbolism, point of view, and empathy.

Conclusion

With the review of the theoretical concepts related to the use of animal imagery in film and the role of montage covered, several ideas can be emphasized. The anthropocentric perspective and its manifestations in animal representation in audiovisual stories are influenced by the human and non-human animal relations, considering animals from the point of likeness and difference, focusing on their otherness, or on connection and acceptance, while often maintaining a hierarchical approach as well. These relations and representations then are reflected in the human gaze and the way it influences animal representation in its various forms: as allegories, stories about animals, true to life representations, and as symbols.

Based on that, the forms available can suit certain approaches better than others, with allegories, stories about animals and true to life representations covering full narratives, and relying on a variety of film grammar, and symbolic representation being more arbitrary, requiring specific film grammar, especially montage. In terms of montage, symbolic, idea-associative comparison montage, and parallel syntagmas can be relied upon to construct metaphors and guide the audience's attention towards objective correlatives.

The examples from the case study of Peter Morgan's series *The Crown* illustrate these approaches and provide instances of animal imagery used as more specific objective correlatives, as sources of metaphors, and as symbolic images carrying a less determined meaning. Montage in these instances range from parallel to alternate and to scene syntagmas, in some cases being the main indication to interpret something as a metaphor, and in some cases only guiding the viewer towards objective correlative. Additionally, the animal imagery discussed, that of the stag and of the hawk in particular, allow to attribute the level of empathy

and respect created towards animals to the role of montage, as the specific shots shown can invite such considerations.

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Transcending the Anthropocentric Vision: the Non-human Animal as Subject in Contemporary Cinema

Luca Lunardi, Fabiano D'Este

Introduction

The scientific and philosophical interest in non-humans has become central in the current debate, so much so that there is talk of an authentic turning point, the *animal turn* [Ritvo 2007], in redefining the themes of the human animal relationship, otherness, the ontological status of the animal, and the meaning of the human and animality.

As argued by Salzani [2017], this turning point is more generally part of the crisis of traditional humanism at the end of the 20th century. In fact, according to Wolfe [2010], the *animal question* is part of the broader question of posthumanism.

Looking at non-human from a non-anthropocentric perspective calls into question the posthumanist philosophical perspective. In the current philosophical debate [Ferrando 2019], posthumanism is acquiring ever more importance, and here, we refer particularly to ecological posthumanism [Marchesini 2022]. Philosophical posthumanism is emancipated from humanism, from anthropocentrism, and from dualism [Ferrando 2019]; it aims to overcome traditional philosophical thought which, from Descartes to Heidegger, continues a humanistic, anthropocentric and dualistic perspective of non-humans as a subordinate. Instead, posthumanism recognizes, in the wake of philosophers like Derrida [2006], that the human does not dominate the non-human, but is on the same ontological level; not separate, but contiguous. Marchesini says:

«the other species and I belong to the same *way-of-being* even if we express it with different declinations» [Marchesini 2022; p. 65].

However, the dominant vision of non-humans in cinema and other media reflects and reinforces a long-established cultural context: the anthropocentric perspective. The human places itself at the center and subordinates other living beings and the environment to its needs; the impact is there for all to see. There is ample evidence that the spread of zoonoses is linked to the consequences of typical Anthropocene phenomena, from deforestation to biodiversity loss. Destruction of entire habitats has led to the migration of wild species, increasing the spillover to humans of dangerous pathogens, previously relegated to inaccessible natural environments [Liz Paola et al. 2022, Carlson et al. 2022].

The anthropocentric gaze reflects the invasive, destructive, and disrespectful way in which humans regard nature, and which compromises human health. In fact, it is not enough to take care of human health to face future health challenges, such as possible epidemic emergencies, but it is necessary to move to an integrated approach in which humans, non-humans and environmental health are interconnected, i.e., the One Health approach [MacKenzie and Jeggo 2019].[1] Freeing ourselves from our anthropocentric perspective is a necessary step for humans and all forms of life.

This reversal of our gaze on non-humans has important implications concerning animal representations in cinema. Because the dominant, stereotyped representation of non-humans is a consequence of that anthropocentric perspective that has been absolutely dominant since the origins of Hollywood cinema.

Furthermore, this non-human representation is mostly bent to logics of pure entertainment and confirms clichés and

stereotypes of the humanistic-anthropocentric perspective. This applies to international mainstream cinema, especially Hollywood. There, the non-human depiction reaffirms our domination, even on the linguistic level, so the non-human remains an object of vision. One example is the screenplay technique known as *Save the Cat* [Snyder 2005]; this contains a crucial moment in which the human protagonist saves a cat, i.e., performs an action that triggers a sort of emotional blackmail towards the viewer.

The novelty of our contribution lies in offering an alternative view, by identifying some recent films that move away from the logic of pure entertainment and the dominant anthropocentric perspective to attempt a hybridized gaze. These films allow us to reflect on the relationship between cinematic time and non-human animal life [McMahon, 2021]; simultaneously, they have absorbed the lesson on becoming animal [Deleuze and Guattari 2002]. Some examples are attributable to slow cinema [Romney 2010], others are multi-species documentaries [MacDonald 2013].

Here, we investigate how it is precisely the syntactic and formal aspects of these films that offer a different viewing experience, capable of re-establishing a relationship with the non-human that minimizes the human intervention. Even if they do not openly affirm a posthumanist approach, these films carry the germs of change that might be awoken in the viewer.

As Lanfranchi writes:

> to investigate the position of the viewer with respect to the anthropocentric and normative structure of the film, it is necessary to go beyond the exclusively figurative and content analysis of the filmic object [...] Rather, it is a question of relating the textual structure of the film to the corresponding diegetic representation, remembering that the signifier articulates, precedes and provides a pre-understanding of the

> meaning. Anthropocentrism in cinema therefore has to do with the linguistic modalities of reproduction, articulation and representation of the image. [Lanfranchi 2021; p. 20]

Films like *Becoming Animal* (2018) and *Nénette* (2010) stimulated new perspectives of the non-human and *infected* the more traditional narratives of mainstream cinema by suggesting that the non-human owns its subjectivity and is not simply represented as an object [Past 2019]. In this cinematic form, the non-human does not *play* a pre-packaged part, is not caged in a forcibly human narrative, but is a narrative disruptor [Pick 2011] bringing spontaneity, unpredictability, and natural action to the screen. As we will see, these attempts are useful to create new perspectives, and to rethink the logic of human domination that subjects all animals, both non-humans and humans.

In our study, the films represent varying degrees of success in demonstrating, both conceptually and in terms of cinematographic technique, how a pathway of dialogue and engagement with non-human otherness is achievable in various ways. Throughout history, humans have enriched their cultural heritage by establishing relationships with non-humans [Marchesini 2003]. Similarly, in cinema, it might be possible to draw inspiration from the non-human world to develop a visual vocabulary and imagine a continuously hybridizing living kingdom.

Beyond the human gaze: the non-human animal as subject of vision in Contemporary cinematic Experiences

If we quickly examine mainstream Hollywood cinema, we find traditional theriomorphic archetypes that highlight the ambiguity of the process of separation from, or continuity with, the non-human. These archetypes can also be understood in the context of the fears and desires of the human psyche that

characterize specific historical periods. In our analysis we have reduced these archetypes to two main dichotomous categories.

The category of the *monster animal* [Gregersdotter et al. 2015, Aaltola 2002] encompasses not only various non-human figures as threats – in this case the human characteristics, particularly those of darkness and evil, are projected onto non-human creatures, as seen in films like *King Kong* (1933) or *Tarantula!* (1955) – but also processes of metamorphosis of the human into a monster as in *The Fly* (1986) or processes of overloading of powers of non-human origin to the human, as seen in characters like *Spider-man* (2022) or *Catwoman* (2004);

In the category of *mirror animal* [Baker 1993, Zipes 1999, Burt 2002, Moscariello 2016] the non-human animal undergoes the projection of purely human characteristics. This category includes portrayals of non-humans as friends of children, as seen in films like *Lassie Come Home* (1943) or *Okja* (2017), as well as companions and partners in adult adventures, exemplified by films such as *Dog* (2022) or *Turner & Hooch* (1989).

Both *monster animal* and *mirror animal* are, in fact, denials of animal referentiality and assertions of full ontological autarchy of the human being.

However, all these processes fall within a broader framework of objectification of the non-human that develops in cinema both narratively and linguistically. Indeed, the dominant anthropocentrism has rarely given due recognition to the referentiality of the non-human, in the name of a presumed innate purity opposed to any form of contamination and asserting the superiority of human moral values over animal values.

For example, in horror cinema the triggering cause of the threat always seems to start from a transgression committed by a non-human animal (or species) that attacks or infects the human and develops by achieving the punishment of the non-human to restore an entirely human order. In this way, the horror

manifests itself as a direct or indirect non-human attack on humans. The established separation confirms that humans have moral (human) principles, but non-humans are without moral principles, implacable predators, incapable of showing mercy. The only way for the former to protect themselves from the latter is to become even more ferocious and kill them [Alaimo 2001].

But the non-human is not a passive being, it opposes our imperialist desire to restrict nature solely for human use and consumption [Armstrong 2002]. Many of these films, such as Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963) or Spielberg's *Jaws* (1975), also conceal an unconscious sense of rebellion against human domination and belong to a subgenre known as eco-vengeance.

Although these films propose a narrative in which the non-human *object* must be annihilated in order to restore the pre-established human order, these films can also be considered a desperate attempt at a metaphysical revolt of the natural spirit against humans. Eco-vengeance film has reached our days: see the *Planet of the Apes* saga (1960–2017), the *Jurassic Park* series (1993–2022), or *Rampage* (Peyton, 2018), in which the real threat to humans becomes the very presence of non-humans on the planet.

Even the stereotype of the theriomorphic child is inherently ambiguous, often portrayed as a pure being living in harmony with nature and capable of forming a special bond with human children due to a shared sense of original innocence. However, the symbolic use of this stereotype may actually conceal a paternalistic attitude of humans towards non-humans [Marchesini 2003].

If the *monster animal* embodies qualities that humans perceive as degrading and inhuman, the *mirror animal* reflects only feelings and emotions considered exclusive to the human experience. In this depiction, the non-human experiences

emotions from a purely anthropocentric perspective, lacking autonomous subjectivity.

Moreover, we must not forget that cinema is influenced both by symbolic imagery and by economic output. If entertainment cinema originates with a purely commercial logic, the non-human is also part of this logic and becomes itself an object of consumption. Consider, for example, the merchandising strategies typically associated with Disney production.

To facilitate the marketability of a product like this, the cinematic language must conform to this logic. The technique of invisible editing in classical Hollywood cinema as well as contemporary cinema represents the best tool for conveying the dominant ideology: the camera continues to follow the characters according to the anthropocentric point of view, allowing the viewer to follow the progression of the narrative.[2]

In this way, however, dominant ideologies and cultural legacies also end up influencing the narratives. Consider, for example, gender relations, racial discourse, and the representation of concepts such as good and evil. This logic more or less coincides with the same development, whether in the case of the *monster animal* triumphing over the non-human monster or achieving a goal, such as the alliance between non-human and human.

But is it possible to liberate the non-human from this perspective that confines it to a role assigned for the needs and desires of humans? Is it possible to restore a relationship with the non-human without imposing a pre-established narrative and, at the same time, utilize a cinematic language capable of valorizing this relationship?

To break free from the cage of the anthropocentric perspective, it will be necessary to reattribute an anthropopoietic meaning to the non-human in cinema, recognizing it as a partner of knowledge and therefore of vision.

«Because while the human eye exerts dominance, the animal eye reveals the partiality of the human eye dominance; zoopoietic hybridization constructs an expanded domain bridging these two realms, allowing for a redefinition of visual performances» [Marchesini-Andersen 2003; pp. 124-125]. The human/non-human combination must become an indivisible reality again, in continuous evolution and transformation, being able to trigger processes of cultural hybridization.

For this purpose, in our analysis we will focus on audiovisual experiences that depart from traditional cinema and break away from the anthropocentric framework. These works, keeping in mind the posthumanist lesson, try to adopt a perspective worthy of the non-human by necessarily relying on hybrid formats, halfway between fiction and documentary, within the field of experimental cinema. In the films we will analyze, human centrality is reduced to a minimum, to stimulate a change in the spectators' approach towards non-humans.

We can use an analogy to define this paradigm shift: just as harmful manifestations of anthropocentric logic, such as deforestation, urbanization, or the exploitation of natural resources, alter the environment, new sustainable practices could improve life on the planet. Similarly, the purely anthropocentric representation (the monster animal and the mirror animal) distorts the identity of the non-human, but new visual and linguistic experiences could offer a more respectful approach to acknowledging the subjectivity of non-humans.

Nonetheless, if we try to break away from an anthropocentric point of view, we immediately find ourselves facing the impasse mentioned by Malamud [2010]: «We want to be in two types of relationships that are mutually exclusive: close to nature and separate from it at the same time».

In the last phase of Godard's cinema, the film *Adieu au Langage* (2014) stands out as perhaps his most extreme attempt

to transcend the limits of language and audio-visual techniques. Here, the image is reduced to fragments, embodying pure visuality as theorized by Derrida [2006].

In fact, the film seems to follow the philosopher's lesson; it is no coincidence that the true protagonist of the film is a dog, a symbol of resistance to the trivialization of the link between reality and image and, therefore, a symbol of cinema.

Instead, the *monster animal* and the *mirror animal* portray a non-human subjected to human observation, constrained within a traditional time/space framework, thus emphasizing a preference for the human perspective, exemplified by techniques such as montage and shot/reverse shot.

A fundamental step out of this human perspective is found in the thinking of Bazin [1999], who shows that the montage does not allow respect for the ambiguity of the real, because it does not leave the viewer to decide what to look at or where to look inside the frame. Slow cinema is linked to this historical reflection by Bazin and is more than a school; it is an approach that unites even very different films that share the intention of going beyond traditional non-human representations (and not only these films). Since the beginning of the new millennium, slow cinema has stood out as a counter-trend in contemporary cinema: its aim is to elude the bombardment of images that characterizes the current digital cinematic age and comply with the need to slow down viewing time [James 2010, Romney 2010].

A distinctive trait of this approach is the sequence shot, which denotes the need to abandon times, rhythms of observation and spaces attributable to the human gaze, and to attempt a different type of gaze. The static shot and the long take permit not to interrupt the flow of time, which in the standard cinematic approach is usually achieved by eliminating all so-called "dead time" via montage. Slow cinema utilizes as few cuts as possible, producing a wider segment of reality. This means

that there are moments in which, even though nothing seems to happen in the frame, different or unexpected movements perfectly suitable for non-humans can be recorded. The non-human is in the foreground, it is the subject of view, but is not a mere object of vision or symbolization by the human [De Luca 2016, McMahon 2021].

Numerous recent films used this approach to investigate non-human gaze. In many cases, these are hybrid films that elude any real categorization. In other cases, these are fictional films that blend into documentary, such as *The Tourin Horse* (2011) and *The Four Times* (2010), or the multi-species documentary genre [Eben Kirksey and Helmreich 2010], with films like *Bovines* (2011), *Cow* (2021), *Leviathan* (2012) and *Nénette* (2010). Uniting them is the presence of non-humans that slows down/stops the traditional narrative rhythm, to go beyond the needs of the typical human observation rhythm. The most emblematic case is the horse protagonist of *The Tourin Horse*, in which the horse, always a symbol of movement, is a figure of death and immobility. Time dilation allows for a cinematic experience that is different from traditional editing. Manipulation of the images is minimal due to sequence shots. In *Bovines*, the observation of the daily ruminating cows was defined [Deleuze 1985] as image-time or a direct representation of time, and it is detached from narrative cause/effect, distant from anthropocentric image-movement. In this perspective, the human is peripheral. Similarly, in *The Four Times*, humans and non-humans, plants and minerals are not arranged on a hierarchical pyramid but on «a horizontal, fluid, sequence plan that transmigrates from one body to another, as souls are sometimes believed to do» [Filippi and Maggio, 2014; p. 122]. The same thing happens at the auditory level; the soundscape has no hierarchy, silence opens up a horizontal acoustic space, so the acoustic space is filled with sonic details that carry equal weight [Past 2019].

In slow cinema, therefore, the gaze follows the time of rituality, and of the cyclicality of the seasons. This different conception of time leads to a repositioning of the human in the frame. Maggio and Filippi [2014] suggest, referring to Agamben [2002], that if the viewing time is no longer that of the human, but of Zoé, or of bare life, then the non-humans' positions in the world also change. The human returns to be just one among many other animals, with the same vulnerability and submission to nature. The film's point of view is no longer anthropomorphized, but there are multiple points of view, one for each creature. This approach (call it a perspective reversal) is necessarily accompanied by a change of gaze in the cinematographic technique. If cinematographic techniques are formalized in the rigidly codified shots that always refer to an ideal human figure (close-up; American shot; full shot, etc.), in slow cinema and multispecies documentaries, the shots are reformulated on the basis of a non-anthropocentric *multiper-ceptive* gaze.

Frammartino's film tries to free the viewer's gaze, inducing him to find the connection that animates everything that surrounds us. It is an approach that can be considered *derridean*, in which it is not us who look at the non-humans, but rather, we feel watched by them.

The problem of which point of view to adopt reveals a fundamental ambiguity that is central in an exemplary film like *Nénette* (2010). Despite its good intentions, the film actually leaves an ambiguity in the viewer's gaze – especially in the cinematographic technique used. Because on the one hand it suggests an approach that respects the subjectivity of the non-human but at the same time confirms its objectification. But the question of feeling seen by non-humans is necessarily linked to other issues such as the role of the cinematographic medium and the spectator's relationship with the screen.

Barbara Creed [2013] identifies how the film tries to overcome, by exploiting the language of cinema, the anthropocentric point of view: for the entire duration of the film *Nénette*, the orangutan who is the protagonist, is in the foreground inside of the fence, between the straw and the glass wall. The presence of the human is only given by the audio: the comments of the visitors and zookeepers. We never see the human except as an occasional reflection on the glass wall.

The documentary not only seeks to represent a symmetrical relationship between human and non-human but also reveals the possibility of establishing a more fluid and dynamic relationship between species. Precisely because he prefers long and static shots on the body, gestures and movements of the protagonist, Philibert wants to bring out Nénette's identity through a tactile visualization, as Barbara Creed calls it. This stands in opposition to language as a human prerogative.

But at the same time this cinematographic technique still seems to lead back to an anthropocentric perspective if we focus on the condition of *mediality* of the non-human that emerges from the documentary: according to Laura McMahon and Michel Lawrence [2015] the non-human present at the cinema and at the zoo is not simply *the animal*, but it is part of a hierarchical order that makes it the object of human observation.

The zoo thus becomes a visual backdrop that frames the non-human, and the cinema offers the viewer a perspective of the non-human that aligns with that experienced by visitors to the zoo. The use of long times allows us to question ourselves about the imprisonment and suffering of the non-human, but also about the very gaze to which the non-human is exposed.

As we have seen, the question of the non-human animal gaze is very complex and the two interpretations proposed by *Nénette* certainly make it an emblematic case study. *Nénette's* fixed gaze certainly undermines human cinematic structures based on the

hierarchization of the gaze and voyeurism. But in *Nénette* there is an immersive look into the non-human environment that could help restore subjectivity to non-humans and stimulate us to re-consider the role of partnership with the non-human.

Indeed, this immersive look proposes a different way of experiencing cinematography, requiring the spectator to undergo a «visual/auditory training to appreciate the experience of immersion in natural processes» [MacDonald 2017; p. 16], transcending the logic of mere entertainment.

Recently, more films have used both traditional viewing techniques (nature documentaries like *Microcosmos* (1996) or *Winged Migration* (2001) and more experimental ones (mini cameras like GoPros, underwater cameras, camera traps) to evoke greater immersion in the viewer and to approach non-humans with more respect. However, not all new technologies or cinematic developments produce significant or transformative changes. In the context of ecocriticism [Rust et al. 2022], the new possibilities offered by cinematic technologies do not automatically mean that ecological issues or underlying power dynamics have been addressed.

We will now discuss three films/attempts that, while demonstrating greater attention to immersion and a sincere desire to meet non-humans at eye level, reveal some ambiguities that betray an anthropocentric perspective. A desire for immersion characterizes the documentary *Becoming Animal* (2018). In the film, the more than human world within Grand Teton National Park, US, is interconnected so everything is alive and expressive; humans, non-humans and landscapes are inextricably interdependent. In a conversation with Peter Mettler, Roberto Marchesini [2018] argues that in this film every entity that moves becomes an epiphany: the entity that expresses itself, not only manifests itself as a phenomenon but announces the epiphany of a widespread feeling.

The sensory experience of sharing the world and overcoming inter-species barriers is technically rendered not only by relying on typical characteristics of slow cinema, long shots, and fixed shots, but also by amplifying the audio-visual impact of nature. The beginning is a long sequence shot dedicated to two moose roaming in an autumn landscape, the next sequence is a low-quality night shot with audio recording of their mating rituals. The change of scenery is also a change of technique and leads to great sensory immersion in the natural world. Even though the filmmaker wished to elicit empathy with nature, the film excessively follows the philosophical thinking of David Abram: nature is excessively manipulated, which makes the film too human-centric. The most extreme case of intrusion into nature occurs when, to share the gaze of a flying non-human, the film uses aerial images taken from a camera attached to a bird.

Is this immersive capacity really able to free the viewer from the anthropocentric prison? According to Schultz-Figueroa (2022), films like *Gunda* (2020) or *Cow* (2021) are less interesting as attempts at immersive experiences than as proposals for political imaginaries that highlight the absurd logics of the non-human industry and suggest different political visions. Despite using immersive techniques (Steadicam, long takes, fixed shots, only ambient sound) to add empathy and get closer to the daily life of a sow, in *Gunda* «the most promising aspects of the film are connected to its status as a speculative work of fiction rather than immersive reality» [Schultz-Figueroa 2022; p. 52].

Cow, which also leverages formal techniques to elicit as much authenticity as possible – think of the continuous reactions of the cow, Luma, to the intrusiveness of the handheld camera – treats the non-human as a pretext to express ideological thought. On one hand, Luma lives her daily life always hidden due to zootechnical practices; on the other hand, Luma is a symbol-object referring to social issues of gender, reproduction, and

injustice in industrial farming production systems. In other words, Cow opens «a space for allegorical readings of livestock as political subjects of an inexplicable oppressive regime» [Schultz-Figueroa 2022; p. 56].

As suggested by our analysis, it is difficult to completely get away from anthropocentric perspectives even when resorting to immersion. Still, these experiments offer representations of the lives of farm animals that could motivate the public to consider the question in more depth and to develop greater awareness of the industrial production system and the exploitation of non-humans for food.

We conclude our study by analyzing two films that appear to push the boundaries of immersive research, as already highlighted in the films previously analyzed: *Leviathan* (2012) and *Animal Cinema* (2017).

Leviathan, created by two anthropologists from Harvard University's Sensory Ethnography Lab, offers the viewer a *multiperceptive* experience aboard a fishing boat. Despite being along the coast of New Bedford where Melville wrote Moby Dick, the focus is not on the challenge between human and non-human. *Leviathan* goes further by presenting itself as a sort of floating film capable of eliciting continuous sensory stimuli through navigation on the open sea. This sensation is achieved through the use of numerous GoPros scattered throughout the fishing boat. Thus, there is not a single point of view, but rather a plurality of perspectives, ranging from details at the water's surface to close-up images of fish and fishermen, all seemingly carrying the same ontological weight. The sources of observation multiply, and the film seems to almost create itself, offering an unpredictable vision free from the constraints of a predefined authorial point of view.

The next step in this kind of *immersive* filmmaking could be an audiovisual experiment like Emilio Vavarella's *Animal Cinema*.

Here, the technological eye is not directed by the human but by the non-human. It is an even more extreme attempt at non-human perception than the films previously analyzed, a utopian fantasy in which, to investigate the gaze of the non-human close up, human technology is used, but which radically breaks the rules of cinematic language. It is a short film edited by the author using numerous videos uploaded on YouTube, in which the protagonists are non-human that have accidentally found themselves interacting with a camera. Arcagni [2018] claims that *Animal Cinema* proposes a gaze disintegrated in its normal functions, a visual environment where the medium is no longer conditioned by any author's (or operator's) strategy, as could happen, for example, in *Leviathan*, and which becomes biological art. Viewers witness movements of bodies, claws, tentacles, fangs, claws and paws that replace any directorial premeditation. The result is certainly extreme, but it constitutes an attempt to arouse in the viewer an observation decentralized from the human, more similar to a vortex of forms and ways of being in constant evolution: an assemblage of humans, non-humans and technologies of which all are part.

Conclusion

In mainstream Hollywood cinema, the non-human remains trapped in anthropocentric gaze; this is both from an ontological point of view, because it reaffirms a hierarchical order of living with humans on top and non-humans below, and from a linguistic point of view, because the human conception of cinematic space/time and scene setting subject the non-human to the classic rules of editing and scenic requirements. Instead, the cinematographic approach involving experimentation and research goes beyond the limits of mainstream perspectives [Casetti 2005] by making choices that are more radical.

In the films we have discussed, we can observe a direct confrontation with the non-human, as they focus is on a concept of hybridized perspective of time and space shared with the non-human.

In films like *The Tourin Horse*, long shots and close-ups of humans and non-humans create an inclusive space for both. Additionally, shot durations define viewing times closer to natural action times. The repetitiveness of actions, that both humans and non-humans share, puts both on the same level and ontological plane. Direct sound allows the viewer to listen to the non-human without an interfering musical score (these lead to risky musical underlines). *Becoming Animal*, *The Four Times* and some multi-species documentaries abandon some formal aspects of classical cinema, exploring new perspectives.

These films, in their more or less successful results, demonstrate the complexity of this topic, as they follow two contrasting perspectives that also distinguish recent studies on ecocinema [Rust et al. 2022]. On one hand, a utopian vision considers cinema as a tool to reconcile/interconnect with nature. On the other hand, a more critical and political cinematic approach emphasizes the urgency of addressing environmental damage in order to raise awareness and denunciate the current predicament.

Nowadays, it is crucial to spread new cinematographic experiences that seek to overturn traditional logic, wherein the perspectives of domination and exploitation prevail. The proposed approaches should serve as the basis not only for future cinematographic visions but also to advocate for more sustainable practices that respect the subjectivity of non-humans and their environments

Notes

[1] One Health, a holistic healthcare model, based on different integrated disciplines, that recognizes human, non-human and ecosystem health are interconnected, is officially sanctioned by the EU and international organizations [https://www.cdc.gov/onehealth/basics/index.html].

[2] Several authors have investigated the relationship between cinema and capitalist ideological logic. We can mention Jonathan Beller, who explored how editing and other visual techniques have been used to capture and direct the viewer's attention for commercial and ideological purposes, and Laura Mulvey, who also examined editing in Hollywood cinema through a gender lens, highlighting how this technique can be employed to reinforce certain patriarchal and capitalist-commercial perspectives in mainstream film production.

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Fellini and Epiphanic Animals

Roberto Marchesini

The emergence of the fantastic in the poetic register of the human condition is closely connected to the sudden appearance of the theriomorphic sublime, a presence in which humans somehow recognize and – I dare say – mirror themselves. Additionally, the fantastic introduces an element of wonder, simultaneously stirring excitement and reverential fear. This is why zoomorphism flares up whenever the real needs to yield to its mysterious, fantastic, and mythical correlates, and connect with the transparent and the shining, with the evanescent and the intangible. When narrators want to show that things are not fully given, that the plot conceals unexpected elements, and that reality is overflowing, brimming, and redundant – hence more virtual than rational – they need a spiritual guide to proceed with the plot, like a shaman who must summon the spirit of a twin animal.

To understand this narrative mechanism, which has been present since the dawn of literature – from *Gilgamesh* to *The Odyssey* – we must explore animal epiphany as a catalyst for evocative suggestions. Non-human otherness never fully manifests itself. It always takes on hybrid forms resulting from the different ways in which humans have projected themselves onto the heterospecific. Consequently, the appearance of an animal always transcends the strictly phenomenological dimension and acquires an epiphanic significance; it anticipates something. Epiphany is also a *caesura* and a *crasis* in the flow of time: It exceeds the chronological continuum while also cancelling the present through a strong connection between past and future. Animal epiphany represents the archetype of the

mystical attitude, of the ecstatic experience, and of every form of ontological dissolution that liquefies identity.

The epiphanic resonance of the theriomorph serves as a narrative device to evoke the archetype of religious experience. It is a form of suspension that introduces a new temporal dimension – the *kairotic* dimension. The latter contradicts the linear flow of chronology, transforming time into something very different from mere clock ticking. Epiphany disrupts the rhythmic flow, diverting the temporal stream from falling into the large basin of a different temporal space, where presence inexorably transforms into absence. Epiphany allows us to be present elsewhere, beyond the self that unfolds in the current moment. The moment of epiphany has freed itself from the dread of transience. It has shipwrecked in a temporal space that is not imprisoned in the fleeting now, but it is also totally protected and sheltered. Encountering the epiphanic element is one of our most powerful existential experiences; it elevates us by translating into poetry, religion, philosophical enthusiasm, the admiration of nature, and the palpitations of mathematical intuitions.

Animal epiphany therefore offers an immersion into what lies beyond the human, a condition that can find different declinations. For example, it can inspire new existential dimensions – the seeds of all cultural expressions. It can also inspire mystical experiences, a leap into the dream-like and psychotropic dimension, and a visitation of the eternal. When the epiphanic animal appears, it surprises us through its excess, through the unusual, the unpredictable, and the augural – I would even argue the banal, if it is out of context. The epiphanic animal creates a dimension of experience that is detached from reality, yet it does not deny reality. Being present while retaining a hyperreal dimension emphasises its transposed character, appeals to something off-text, and offers an implicit suggestion.

The atmosphere of magical realism, characteristic of Federico Fellini's cinema, extensively employs the epiphanic device, transforming its various characters into highly evocative tropes. Watching a Fellini film means being catapulted into a world on standby, where, amidst the flow of everyday life, there is always a looming sense of something about to happen, something which, though absent, is already present. Therefore, even if deeply rooted in reality, the narrative retains the fairytale atmosphere, simultaneously imaginative and hypnotic. This is the meaning of the adjective *felliniano* – usually translated in English as "Felliniesque" – namely an effect that neither blurs reality nor takes distance from it, but rather sharpens its rough edges. To achieve this, the director utilises transitional figures. Just as in Greek tragedy the chorus appears on stage to announce an imminent event that justifies the pathos of the moment, so does the plot in Fellini's cinema remain open to the hypertext hovering in the air – its voice, like a sword of Damocles, looms over the protagonists.

In their primordial characteristics, natural phenomena, such as wind, rain, and thunder, are the prevailing epiphanic elements in the production of the director from Romagna. In many of his films, the wind appears eager to sweep away the present and bring back fragrances from the past and developing aromas, reminiscent of Proust. The wind remains an undisputed protagonist. With its different sounds, it caresses the worldly things. It also acquires different intensities, ranging from long rustlings to vibrations, and even laments. In addition to, or in combination with these elements, Fellini uses the sudden appearance of animals. Since their enhanced epiphanic presence is almost alien to the story, it captures the viewers' attention and cuts the narrative fabric. Yet, it does not discontinue the story but serves as a form of anticipation revealing the intimate connection between the present and other times, as if only a

temporal elsewhere could explain the here and now. Epiphany builds expectations, akin to an uncertain dawn laden with signs, like black clouds heralding a summer storm. It is interesting to observe how the protagonists are fully engaged and suddenly immobilized by the epiphanic element.

The dreamlike dimension we breathe, almost like a nocturnal visitation, relies on a sort of interruption in the flow of time: by expanding, the moment enables us to traverse different phases of experienced life. Entry into this universe, where the seasons of existence are co-present and merge, is always signalled by the unexpected appearance of a natural element, which transcends its immediate relevance to the story event, and serves as a signpost. We can finally perceive the spatial dimension of time, walk the intertwining paths of different ages, and admire the diachronic panorama of a life that is never confined to the present. Time is no longer a series of instants that erase each other in their succession, but a perspective on static images that are present simultaneously.

It is as though the sand in the hourglass remained suspended; or as if it created a vortex of ascent and descent, bringing the past into the future and viceversa. The narrative texture becomes liquid as sequential inconsistency is characteristic of narcosis; interruption and resumption constitute the mechanism that weaves and undoes the web of dreams. Whether emerging from the fog or suddenly landing amidst people, exhibiting its grandeur or mimetic dimension, the animal on the scene, like the peacock in *Amarcord* (1973), brings silence to the human world, interrupting its careless flow and almost suggesting the resilience of a moment no longer fleeting. A sense of foreboding ensues, as if the world moved so slowly that it could withhold all its chronological folds, allowing them to settle and merge so that, eventually, we can fully savour the sense of existence. Fellini's cinema employs forms that enable us to think about the

correlation between the times of lived experience: It not only explains the future through the past, but also paradoxically reverses sequentiality and shows the past through the future.

Rather than as mythological entities, angels, or chimeras, Fellini's epiphanic animals present themselves as nature intermediaries, as omens. They are expressions of a profound culture – rather than merely popular or peasant – in which animals have always been regarded as auguries. This might be a legacy from classical antiquity, when flying birds were considered to bring auspices – from *aves specio* = I observe the birds – a *topos* that recurs throughout Roman history, as seen in Livy's *Ab Urbe condita*. The epiphanic significance of animals is evident in the religious silence that accompanies their sudden appearance on the scene. Fellini also employs zoomorphic caricatures to accentuate the distinctive traits of his characters, as evidenced by the figure of Zampanò in *La Strada* (1954). All the characters in this film, from Gelsomina to the Fool, are skillfully animalized through a zoophysiognomy that makes their features immediately evident, as in *commedia dell'arte*.

In *8½* (1963), this transfer is introduced by the satyr, Ian Dallas, who suddenly emerges from the darkness with a thunderous laughter, in a skillful play of light and darkness that breaks the flow of rhythms and dances from different times. At that moment, epiphany peeks through the beyond-human paradox, like a magic key that can open the portal of time. Epiphany resonates in the *masa* – a Rimini dialect word meaning "to hide" – catapulting the protagonist into the seraphic dimension of a lost childhood, both remote and present, perhaps yearned for. This dimension becomes a pure aspiration for a female cocoon where to seek shelter from the cruelty of loss. The scene of the eternal feminine, fragmented as if in a hall of distorting mirrors, where various women are transformed into

beasts to be tamed with a whip, recalls circus images more akin to a caravanserai than a real harem.

Further into the story, animal epiphany becomes even more explicit, and marks a rupture in the existential journey of the protagonist, a *Doppelgänger* of the director himself. It is the birds' mournful song in the scene where Guido turns to the spiritual fathers in search of a solution to his personal and creative crisis. The prelate suddenly diverts his attention from Guido's requests to the prolonged song. The sound takes over the whole scene; its repetition breaks temporal continuity, ushering in an augural suspension. The cardinal urges Guido to listen to it and explains that the birds' name - *diomedeo* - derives from the legend that at the death of Diomedes, his sobbing companions were turned into birds. The mournful singing seems to confer meaning to the protagonist's encounter by bringing him into close contact with his problems. This tear in temporal continuity enables him to return to his first adolescent upheavals through the mediation of Saraghina, another figure that transcends the human.

Even in *La Dolce Vita* (1960), which portrays Rome's mundane world in the early 1960s, Fellini's magical realism is conveyed through several scenes in which time seems suspended, hinting at something lingering in the air. Natural phenomena manifest like a pervasive veil, a background radiation impossible to remove. It almost enwraps the superficial hedonism, which, through its effervescence, reveals its narcotic countenance. Multiple symbolisms are juxtaposed throughout the narrative. At the beginning of the film, a statue of Christ with arms wide open is lifted by a helicopter and soaring in the sky. This image finds its counterpart at the end of the film, where a Mediterranean manta is lying ashore, its fins also wide open. The fish symbolizes a chthonic dimension that drowsily draws the attention of the bystanders. Dead for three days, as a fisherman

underlines, the corpse clearly alludes to Christology. The reference to fish aphonia conveys the profound meaning of the final scene, marked by the incommunicability between Marcello and Paola, whose voices are drowned out by the sound of the waves: the epilogue seals the protagonist's impossibility of redemption.

There are numerous references to nature in this film. Each of them marks the beginning of a narrative paragraph and imparts an ecstatic effect on the rhythm of the story, as if we were watching it from above. Let us think, for example, of when Marcello's friend, the intellectual Enrico Steiner, plays the tape with recordings of rain, thunderstorms, and other natural phenomena that fill the room with their sounds. They prelude to what will happen. Yet, their immediate effect is to break away from the noise of both mundanity and aestheticism through an atmosphere of expectation. The wind is a constant presence throughout the film, characterised not by rustling, but by continuous vibrations. The same is true for the rain: it will be pouring down during the live television broadcast, causing the lights to burst. There is a widespread liquid dimension in this film but also a need for retreat. It is exemplified in the episode where, roaming in the alleys of Rome, Sylvia finds a kitten. The episode becomes an opportunity for Fellini to suggest the unreachability of beauty and innocence.

A particularly interesting film showing Fellini's persistent interest in the mechanism of epiphany is undoubtedly *Amarcord* (1973). Here, memories transform into a sequence of mythical events that, by eluding the register of phenomena, acquire metaphorical significance. All characters are theriomorphic, from the tobacconist to the nun who takes Uncle Teo down from the tree. Their caricatured and exaggerated features serve as heralds of something else. As the title suggests, the bittersweet effect of remembrance, stemming from the disruption of

chronological order, becomes even more plausible. Right from the start, the director wants to portray how the world of his childhood is intimately connected with natural events: hence, the so-called "pappi" (poplar fluff) are renamed "manine" (little hands), heralding spring. The rural rituals of the "Segavecchia" will follow, telling us about different ways of dividing the year, whose beginning is sealed by spring rites.

In *Amarcord*, time is marked by natural events signposted by epiphanic animals. They suddenly appear on the scene, leaving the protagonists breathless, stunned by both the suddenness and the wonder of their appearance. Summer is wonderfully described by the freeze frame of Uncle Teo, filmed from below as he descends the carriage to relieve himself, and later, back at the farm, by his gaze admiring the perfection of an egg. Autumn is presented through the fog that envelopes the landscape, highlighting the grandfather's perspective as he gets lost and returns home, while his little grandson Oliva Biondi confidently heads to school. On the way, he suddenly bumps into a huge bovine, which, once again, dominates the entire scene. Then comes winter with the snow, bringing excitement to the whole town. The boys leave the cinema to observe this natural spectacle, finding it much more entertaining. Yet again, an animal enters the scene: It is the count's peacock. After releasing its cry, it lands on a frozen fountain and opens its tail. At this very moment, everyone stops moving as excitement and admiration give way to this unusual wonder.

In the story, animals often serve as counterparts, almost guiding the viewer elsewhere, or tuning the different protagonists to the same emotional channel, regardless of their diverse intentions and social backgrounds. This is evident in the film *E la nave va* [*And the ship sails on*] (1983), where in an ironic and decadent atmosphere, the epilogue of the Belle Époque, a lovesick rhinoceros is one of the protagonists. He attracts the

attention of passengers who occasionally pay visit to him, his condition almost mirroring the nostalgia for a world that is coming to an end. The theme of milk, present in this film via the unusual connection with the rhinoceros, is dear to Fellini. Already evoked in the episodes of *Boccaccio 70* (1962), milk alludes to the hypnotic dimension of infantile nourishment derived from nature. This will be true for the protagonist Orlando, who, caught in-between moral discernment, will acknowledge that drinking rhino milk equates to salvation.

Le notti di Cabiria (Nights of Cabiria) (1957) is one of Federico Fellini's finest films. Supported by the extraordinary soundtrack by Nino Rota, the screenplay unites some of the most important names of Italian post-war cinema: Tullio Pinelli, Ennio Flaiano, and Pier Paolo Pasolini. I have always been touched by its ending, when Giulietta Masina, in the role of the prostitute Cabiria, is betrayed and robbed of all the money she has collected throughout a lifetime of hardships, sacrifices, and suffering. This is undoubtedly a tragic scene in which Fellini conveys the idea of how important it is to be a witness. What follows, however, underlines the extraordinary resilience of the protagonist, transforming her into a sort of benevolent sylph who can see the good even in the abyss of despair. While walking back home with tears in her eyes, Cabiria bumps into a group of festive young people. As she looks at them, she begins to smile again, proving that nothing, not even the most horrific of events, can rid her of her innocence and optimism. And in the brief scene at the house of Alberto Lazzari, interpreted by Amedeo Nazzari, Cabiria reveals the candour of her always-open soul: as she sees many birds in an aviary, the unusual and the wonder they convey carry her away from the dramatic story of her own life.

We can conclude by observing that, for Fellini, nature and animals are indispensable for summoning the hypnotic and

mystical dimension he attaches to cinema. The animal reveals how futile it is to convert human history into anthropocentrism; a history that, in fact, is profoundly intertwined with, and influenced by, nature; a history that, arguably, is spiritually hybridized with the non-human world. The epiphanic animal is a presence that reveals, inspires, startles, and makes memory eternal by enhancing the moment, lifting it out of the banal chronicle, and making the real magical. Yet, the animal is epiphanic also because it mirrors the director himself: It transforms the role of the creator into that of the witness, someone who, even though their presence may be unsettling, does not shy away from their task.

Alfred Hitchcock and the (not so) Ordinary Terror of *The Birds*

Dario Martinelli

Introduction

The filmic representation of non-human animals – *zoomovies*, as I have called them in Martinelli [2014] – is a complex and multilayered issue. It calls into question aspects that are exquisitely cinematographic (aesthetic, narrative, etc.), but it also refers to a whole cosmology of cultural, mythical and anthropological perceptions. To an extent, most (or perhaps all) of these movies are not really about *non-human animals*, but rather about the human-other animal relationship. Even in their simplest and lightest forms (e.g., Disney cartoons), they mainly address the questions of humanity, animality and their interaction, be that dialogue, conflict, cooperation, exploitation, etc. As a matter of fact, such interaction can be depicted in a direct or even indirect way (for instance, a movie featuring an animal advocate character). By consequence, an analysis of zoomovies is intimately embodied in an ethical and social discourse, in the same way as other representations of minorities, discriminated categories, outgroups, and the likes (and that includes gender, ethnic groups, sexual preferences, etc.).

As a cinematographic resource, the non-human animal shows an extraordinary flexibility at all levels. It offers what is possibly the widest array of solutions for filmmakers, neither does it pose limitations in the stylistic sense: zoomovies can be produced within any known genre (pornography included). Then again, family entertainment (of either dramatic or comic type, and particularly within the realm of animation) and the

horror/ thriller area (the current article analyzing a case study within this area) seem to be the most recurrent forms of cinematic exploitation.

Important grey areas within the topic (once again at thematic, narrative and aesthetic levels alike) are imaginary forms of non-human animality and, most of all, what I have called «anthrozoomorphic hybrids» [Martinelli 2014; pp. 203-207], that is, transitional characters, partly human partly not, or first human and then not (or vice versa), which represent an important form of cinematographic characterization of human identity (or its loss/achievement) - such transitions occurring not only, or not necessarily, at physical level (like we may imagine in the case of a lycanthrope), but also psychologically, ethologically and/or physiologically. These characters are possibly the best illustration of the fact that the real focus of zoocinema is the anthrozoological relationship. The anthrozoomorphic hybrid addresses the question in its most existential, morbid, and ambiguous extents. Even in the case study analyzed in this article, the raged birds that attack the people of Bodega Bay, while maintaining a full avian physical appearance, display numerous anthrozoomorphic features in the way they behave and think (the town's inhabitants assign diverse feelings and cognitive abilities to the birds, including a number that are traditionally associated to human beings only: revenge, strategic planning, collective rebellion, etc.).

The above-mentioned question of ethical or ethically-sensitive is certainly one of the most relevant, and to an extent revealing of the *status quo* of the anthrozoological relationship in the whole society. If in recent years significant filmic attempts have been made to address topics like intensive farming, animal testing, and systemic animal abuse in general (in line with a deeper sensibility towards these issues, as, for instance, testified by the ever-increasing amount of ethical vegans and vegetarians),

it must be said that throughout the whole 20th century, *animal ethics* for filmmakers has mostly meant three things: environmentalism (e.g., *Day of the Animals* (1977)), individual freedom of a given non-human animal (e.g., *Free Willy* (1993)) and contempt for hunting activities (e.g., *Bambi* (1942)).

The Birds in general

The Birds was released in 1963. It was loosely based on the short story *The Birds* by Daphne du Maurier. Often inclined to cinematographically adapt literature material, Hitchcock also had the habit of employing not-necessarily-first-rate works (as is the case with du Maurier's story too), ending up pretty much in all cases ennobling them. There can be many explanations for this choice: on the one hand, Hitchcock might have wanted to escape comparisons with great works (fearing to lose them, as so often happens when literature is adapted into film); on the other hand, the nature itself of most of his movies (thrilling atmospheres, surprise endings, tension, foreshadowing and sideshadowing forms like Chekhov's rifles and McGuffins) might have made it more convenient to base his movies on relatively little known plots. Then again, Hitchcock, at heart, and despite the undisputable greatness of his sense of direction, had always been a storyteller, and he might have been simply fascinated by the possibilities of developing stories that are in general short and artistically incomplete (as one can see in such examples as John Houston's adaptation of *Moby Dick* (1956), if one takes a novel of that league, there is not much one can develop, without damaging a masterpiece: if anything, one tries to subtract and summarize).

Famously, the plot tells us about a mysterious series of attacks, from different species of birds, infesting the Californian town of Bodega Bay, and seem to particularly aim at a certain

Mitch Brenner's family and girlfriend. *The Birds* featured the first appearance on screen of Tippi Hedren, another specimen of the typical Hitchcockian "cold blonde" genus, who constantly inhabits his movies. The co-protagonist, in the role of Brenner, was Rod Taylor, another actor who makes his debut in the Hitchcock cinematography (although, unlike Hedren, he had acted in other movies). The regular Hitchcock collaborators Cary Grant and Grace Kelly were originally approached for the leading roles, and it was only after their refusal that the director opted for Hedren and Taylor. To some critics, *The Birds* is the director's last episode of a string of masterpieces from his golden era (between the late 1940s and the early 1960s): the film was nominated for an Oscar in the special effects category, but continuing the tradition of idiosyncrasy between Hitchcock and the Academy, it failed to win this, or any other major recognition.

The Birds has been subject to literally dozens of interpretations (Paglia [1998] being an excellent example), and also from a stylistic point of view, it displays a number of diverse elements that distinguish it from other productions of the same type (that is, the thriller/horror genre). To start with, there is a remarkable lack of catharsis, in the end, almost an anticlimax: nobody dies and there is no real dramatic resolution: the human protagonists silently leave Brenner's house, by now besieged, inside and outside, by the birds, and the latter - sinisterly quiet - let them go, possibly content enough to have conquered the territory. There is therefore a vague perception of "winners" and "losers", but all kinds of continuations are possible. In retrospective, it shall be considered one of the all-time most remarkable movie endings, and most of all a new path for "scary" movies which now so often make uncertainty and discomfort, especially in the end, their central narrative solution (to mention one among many, this is a lesson that David Lynch learned very well). Having

said that, artistic greatness works in mysterious ways, since Hitchcock and his scriptwriter Evan Hunter had actually planned a more explicit finale. In the original project, the protagonists discover that the phenomenon of the birds gone mad is actually not confined to Bodega Bay but has become a wide-spread calamity (when we think of it, during the movie there is not a single indication of what is going on outside the town, so the ground for this *coup de theatre* was indeed being prepared). In this sense the birds' victory is even clearer, and the movie becomes more catastrophic. However, Hitchcock (and all film lovers must thank him for this) eventually decided to establish a certain vagueness to the events. If it is true that, at the time of the movie's premiere, many spectators had ambivalent feelings about the ending (legend has it that some of them thought that the film reel had been interrupted, due to a technical failure), it is equally true (and more significant) that, in the long run, Hitchcock's choice turned out to be much more original and artistically remarkable, making *The Birds* a by-then unique case within the horror-thriller genre.

Talking of horrors and thrillers, and in the specific of cinematic representations of non-human animals, *The Birds* is also a prominent example of a sub-genre known as "ecokill" [Morgan 2016]. It must hardly have escaped moviegoers' attention that, in cinema, human beings tend to be preys of other animals a little too often, compared to the actual biological profile of each species involved. Filmic sharks, to mention the most obvious example, seem to have quite an obsession for human meat, far less than they do in natural conditions. "When animals attack" is actually a label often employed in film guides to describe this specific sub-genre, which became particularly popular between the late 1960's and the 1970's, and of which *The Birds* is therefore also a forerunner. As society became more and more alarmed about pollution, species extinction, and other

human ways of abusing nature, a whole trend of movies, called "ecokill", developed particularly within American cinema, describing various forms of nature's rebellion against human beings (such as natural disasters, deadly viruses and, indeed, animal attacks).

A few cinematic innovations (or nearly so)

The employment (a novelty, back then) of certain cinematographic techniques/strategies is also important, which will later turn out to be very influential. A frequently mentioned example is the zoom-in, in three separate frames, on the dead farmer's eyes, still nowadays a great example of how a very simple idea can have a great emotional impact (see the little girl in *The Ring* (2002)). Also, the choice of renouncing non-diegetic music, at least in the traditional sense, is at once original and courageous. In a horror movie, where so much relies on the impact of music, this may seem like a suicidal strategy, and yet Hitchcock must have felt so confident in the visual power of his movie to actually prefer silence (or of course allowing whatever diegetic sound was needed at any particular moment), creating another model for several future horror films and/or thrillers (*The Day of the Jackal* (1973), *No Country for Old Men* (2007))

Some readers will also remember that in his other great horror, *Psycho* (1960), Hitchcock's original idea was not to use any music either: it took the persuasive skills of one of his few trusted collaborators, composer Bernard Herrmann, to convince him that – for instance – a series of angular violin attacks would perfectly fit the legendary shower sequence.

Herrmann was right, of course, but in the particular case of *The Birds*, Hitchcock must have had the last word, and instead asked Herrmann to focus particularly on sound effects, rather than music *per se* (many of the sounds were created on the

Mixtur-Trautonium, an electronic musical instrument developed by Oskar Sala).

Finally, there is the so-called McGuffin, that is, the very Hitchcockian idea to break the narrative conventions and create the illusion that the movie is going in a certain direction (romantic drama, or even comedy, in *The Birds*' case), until – towards the middle of the runtime – the spectator is "slapped" by an event that turns the plot and the style into a whole different thing (a horror film, here). The British-born director had already flirted with the McGuffin in other occasions, most notably in *Vertigo* (1958), conceptually dividing the latter in two parts: what seems to be a "traditional" detective story in the first part (featuring, that is, a process of investigation of a case by a private detective), and a psychological thriller related to obsession and necrophilia in the second part (mirroring the acrophobic pathology of climbing stairs and then suddenly feeling sick). In *The Birds*, for about 40 minutes nothing really thrilling happens: we seem to witness the development of a love affair between the characters of Melanie Daniels (Tippi Hedren) and Mitch Brenner (Rod Taylor), and all goes in the direction of a romantic movie. Then, when the spectator finally surrenders to this idea, Melanie is attacked by the first bird, inaugurating a long series of terrifying events that in the end qualify this movie as a horror in all respects.

Who, and what, are these birds, then?

The repeated bird attacks in Bodega Bay are generally presented as not rationally explicable. The protagonists themselves, gathered in a local cafeteria, discuss the very topic and cannot reach a reasonable conclusion. To an extent, this sequence is almost an invitation to the spectators to continue the debate among themselves, after the movie is over. An ornithologist

happens to be there too, commenting on the blackbirds and crows that have just attacked the local school, which Melanie has described as intentional: «I hardly think that either species would have sufficient intelligence to launch a massed attack. Their brainpans are not big enough to... Birds are not aggressive creatures, Miss. They bring beauty into the world. It is mankind, rather, who insists upon making it difficult for life to exist upon this planet». This bird expert, of course, represents the position of "science" on the matter: she maintains that Melanie's hypothesis goes against scientific knowledge and rather insists on approaching the matter in a more logical way.

Another customer in the cafeteria voices what we may call the "religious/apocalyptic" stand: the attack is a symptom that the end of the world is approaching. Birds, among other things, are often iconographic and mythical symbols of God's messages: there are no doves, here (the most conventional bird divine messenger), but that may also be because the message is far from peaceful and comforting: this is a divine punishment for humanity's sins, an apocalypse (as we have seen, Hitchcock's original idea for the ending was to extend the plague outside Bodega Bay). The ornithologist remarks that a war against all the birds on the planet would be just humanly impossible, as – it is estimated – there is something like 100 billion of birds in the world. The Earth would turn into total chaos.

The discussion is at this point interrupted by another bird attack. Some of the customers are experiencing the event for the first time, and now they all agree that the phenomenon defies logic. Even the ornithologist is now speechless. One woman then approaches a tearful Melanie, pointing out that the attacks have started right when she arrived in town. This woman is now a voice for superstition and folk belief in witchcraft and the supernatural. She asks Melanie who she is *really*, where she is from, and ultimately suggests that it is her who has caused all

this evil. Maybe, at this point, the accusation is not just superstitious, but may imply a slight ecological message between the lines: the movie opens with Melanie purchasing two caged lovebirds from a big animal shop, which displays an impressive number of birds that, depending on the point of view, are either *imprisoned for no crime committed* or *safely subdued to human beings*. From the point of view of an animal advocate (and, well, from the point of view of birds, too), Melanie is an evil person, and so is Mitch, who happens to be in the same shop. Birds, therefore, may be here reacting against human mistreatment. The attacks start when Melanie brings these lovebirds to Mitch's house, as if to underline that this metaphorical trade of slaves is in the end the actual trespassing of the birds' threshold of tolerance towards human chauvinism. Or: are the birds trying to free the two lovebirds from the cage? In all the chaos that follows Melanie's arrival in Bodega Bay, the lovebirds are always there, in their cage at Mitch's house. Could that be the actual reason why the birds are particularly aiming at Melanie, Mitch, his dear ones, and the house as such? The lovebirds may in this case represent small, innocent children accustomed to "city" life, whom more experienced "countryside" free birds are trying to rescue. That for instance could explain the specific attack on the school: the birds might wish to demonstrate that it is all too easy to abuse "innocent children". Yet, at the end of the movie – as they escape from the house – we see the protagonists taking the caged lovebirds along, instead of giving them freedom: does that mean that humans will never learn the lesson? Does this imply that a possible continuation of the movie is now that the raged birds will follow them until the humans get the point? Or is it a distinction between good birds (the caged ones, whose obedience makes them *deserving* of being with humans) and bad/rebellious ones? Whether or not the message has a specifically ecological accent (as I shall soon discuss, I am not particularly

convinced in this respect), *The Birds*, like many ecokill movies, invites (or rather, forces) spectators to think about the terrifying implications of a violent confrontation between humankind and a Nature turned mad and brutal. Hitchcock chose to create this confrontation in a civilized environment (Bodega Bay may not be a metropolis, but it is clearly an anthropized environment), with the attacks coming straight home, so to speak (and from very common, ordinary birds, as I will specify later). Humans, here, may not be specifically criticized for their cognitive evolution, or whatever brought them into a position of dominance towards other animals, yet they may be warned about the ultimate irrelevance of that evolution, when they end up at the mercy of a furious, revengeful Nature.

Or, in a similar fashion, they may be punished for "exaggerating" that dominance, by, in this case, putting too many birds in cages, hunting too many ducks or eating too many chickens and turkeys. This could be corroborated by the amusing film teaser featuring Hitchcock himself. In it, the director pretends to give an educational lecture about the long, loving relationship between human beings and birds, but in fact what he does is just giving examples of the various forms of human abuse towards birds: hunting, stuffing, caging, eating, etc. As the list goes on and on, he finds himself losing appetite for a roasted turkey he was about to eat, being bit by a caged canary, and finally hearing the same threatening sounds of the attacking birds that we are eventually exposed to in the actual film.

Now, the problem with these "ethical" interpretations is that it is very difficult to picture someone like Hitchcock displaying any particular sensibility towards these topics. His biography does not reveal any hint in that direction, or any other direction of ethical-ideological type, for the matter. Browsing through his filmography, Hitchcock seems to have taken a real stand only in the years of World War II and against Nazi-Fascism in particular,

precisely (in *Lifeboat* (1944)) by warning Americans that the seed of evil can be planted just about anywhere, not only in Germany, and then (in *Rope* (1948)) by literally sentencing to death (as happens to the two protagonists) Nietzsche's superman theories that inspired Hitler. A few years ago, it was also revealed that the director had acted as advisor for the British army in editing their documentary on Nazi extermination camps. Otherwise, it is not Robert Altman or Ken Loach we are talking about here, but rather a quietly conservative citizen, firm supporter of democratic and capitalistic values but also filled with a traditionalist view of society (to mention one, his decidedly-sexist treatment of female characters in his filmography alone should be enough to make the point). While another legendary conservative profile of those days, Walt Disney, had at least displayed a genuine interest in environmental issues (*Bambi* being the chief example), in Hitchcock that part is totally missing. The teaser, too, seems after all more a display of the director's renown dark humor, rather than a real plea for avian rights. In addition, during the filming, the treatment itself of the birds, though monitored by the American Humane Association, had raised more than one controversy. Several birds were in fact mechanical models, but the real ones, which are also needed, of course, were often caught in traps and kept in cages. The general skepticism towards the AHA's "soft" attitude to monitoring films is exactly encouraged by cases like this: in this, as in other circumstances, the association seemed more worried that animals were simply not "killed", rather than – as they advertise emphatically – "harmed".

More interpretations of the film's symbolism have been produced over time. Costanzo [1992], for instance, connects *The Birds* to the Freudian concept of "transfer". Mitch's mother, Lydia, is a particularly possessive woman, and Mitch himself seems to be a bit of what in Italy we call *mammone*. In this sense,

the birds' attacks could actually represent Lydia's hostility towards anyone who dares intruding onto the territory she has marked for herself and her son. Or, in a similar fashion, the birds are the various women who surround Mitch's life and compete for his attention: besides Melanie and Lydia, we have also his sister and his ex-girlfriend, and throughout the film it is very clear that they would all like to be more central in his life. In the latter case, the choice of the film's title, The Birds, could also be a pun from British slang, where "birds" means "women" or "girls" (as in the American equivalent "chicks").

Insisting on the psychoanalytical approach, the illogical nature of the attacks may also refer to Melanie's general emotional crisis, in this adventure. Until her meeting with Mitch, she is (or appears as) a rich, self-sufficient, rational and also spoiled and arrogant woman. As she falls for Mitch, she finds herself losing her emotional safety and doing things she would never have dreamed of doing for anybody (such as chasing a man up to his own town, secretly breaking into his house to present him with lovebirds). In other words, until this point, Melanie has lived in the illusion that everything can be "planned". Now, through a most terrifying shock therapy, she discovers that illogicalness and unpredictability are very frequent occurrences in a person's existence, and they not rarely lead to tragedy. Within this framework, the birds are a metaphor of such unpredictability and instability in life, emotions and events. Our very perception of birds as animals, makes them rather suitable for this role: we see them flying, fluctuating, and we are constantly surprised by their movements, rapid changes of direction and seemingly irregular trajectories. Exactly like life, or - at least - the way life turns out to be for Melanie.

All things considered, this interpretation may be the most coherent with Du Maurier's novel. As Nicholas Haeffner underlines in his excellent study on Hitchcock, Daphne Du

Maurier is a writer «strongly associated with feminine concerns», who often creates situations of «romance in which a suffering heroine endures emotional torture to emerge victorious in love» [Haeffner 2005; p. 21]. This aspect has already emerged in another important Hitchcock production based on Du Maurier, *Rebecca* (1940).

Conclusion

Skipping even more interpretations of the film that have been offered here and there, there seems to be little doubt that *The Birds* makes up for one of the richest allegorical employments of non-human animals in the history of cinema. Similar to the above-mentioned *Moby Dick* by John Houston (which, however, relies much more on the greatness of Melville's literary work), but with different contents and symbolism, *The Birds* displays a rich catalogue of psychological, social and anthropological perceptions and projections associated to non-human animals – and birds in particular, although in one interpretation or two, we may safely say that their role could have been taken by any other species or order (while, in some particular aspects, like the mentioned idea of "unpredictable flight", or also the ancestral threat of the big, crowded flock, birds remain the best symbolic option).

Needless to say, neither Hitchcock nor any of his collaborators did offer an answer to all these questions, so the hermeneutic possibilities remain many and open. It cannot be excluded that each of these aspects were considered, and it is also possible that our morbid wish to dig deeper and deeper into the meaning of this or other works of art, exceed by far the director's thematic goals. However, in the usual struggle between authorial intentionalists and theorists of the intentional fallacy, I

tend to side with the latter, so I do not find the interpretative exercise exclusively dependent on a work's creator.

One last note concerns the film's taxonomical choices. As one more credit to the film's originality, it must be said that Hitchcock successfully resists the cliché to employ traditionally "villain" birds, such as vultures, owls or hawks. Only crows fall into that category, otherwise what we see is seagulls (which are only occasionally depicted as villains, but usually are employed as metaphors of adventure and freedom), and most of all the ultra-innocent sparrows. The common ground, evidently, is not some kind of morality-based allegoric association, but rather the intention to use ordinary birds, those we see almost on a daily basis. There is no alien, exotic terror in *The Birds*: the terror is right there to see, in the immediate neighborhood, embodied by entities we had always taken for granted.

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Nurturing Hope in a Waste Land of Poverty: Exploring Epimelesis in De Sica's *Umberto D.*

Cosetta Veronese

Truth is, they can't fight back.
Weaker people, too, often find themselves
overpowered, devalued.
Carl Safina, *Beyond words*

Il silenzio è il linguaggio di tutte le più
forti emozioni.
Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone*

1. An unbuttered slice of life: *Umberto D.*

«[O]ne of the most revolutionary and courageous films of the last two years»: this is how André Bazin [2004; p.79], one of the fathers of film criticism, lauded Vittorio De Sica's 1952 Umberto D.[1] The movie portrays a retired civil servant, Umberto Domenico Ferrari, sharing his life with his dog companion Flike in a densely urbanised Rome, where concrete and rundown buildings provide the backdrop to the overlooked tragedy of many dispossessed. In this desolate, «decidedly unheroic city» [McHugh 2015; p. 841], Umberto struggles to make ends meet on a meagre pension. He frequents a bustling soup kitchen, where, other than a quarrelsome and obnoxious female attendant, everyone else is too preoccupied with themselves to notice that he slides his dish under the table to share his meal with Flike. His landlady threatens to evict him at the end of the month, while renting out his room to secret lovers in his absence. Desperate to settle his debts, Umberto decides to go to the hospital to cure his tonsillitis leaving the young and naïve housemaid Maria in charge of Flike. Maria is three months pregnant and uncertain about the

paternity of her child, having juggled a relationship with two different soldiers. When returning from hospital, Umberto finds his room upside down: the landlady has arranged renovations due to her forthcoming wedding. Worse than that, Flike has run away. In despair, Umberto rushes to the dog pound where he witnesses the plight of both captured dogs and owners who are unable to afford their release. Fortunately, Flike was among the latest captures, and Umberto can reunite with him. Left with nowhere to go, the old man contemplates suicide. Yet, he needs to leave Flike in good hands first. All his attempts are to no avail, and he finally decides to take his dog with him under the train. As the locomotive approaches, however, the terrified Flike jumps out of his arms and runs away, saving the lives of both.

Along with De Sica's previous films - *Shoeshine* (1946) and *Bicycle thieves* (1948) - *Umberto D.* gathered recognition outside of Italy for its raw depiction of a society where discrimination and self-interests stripped its members of their humanity and dignity, circumstances that had been glossed over by the cinema of Fascist propaganda [Reisz 1953, Crowther 1955, Young 1956]. However, for precisely the same reasons, the film would face disapproval within its country with widespread ostracism that caused its exclusion from the festival of Italian cinema in London regardless of Queen Elizabeth's preference for it [Troncarelli 2018].

In a post-war Italy caught in the straitjacket of international politics, between the rock of the CIA and the hard place of the Church, the social stances brought forward by neorealist cinema were bound to encounter opposition. *Umberto D.*'s portrayal of the rift between the rich and the poor is so crude that the Italian political institutions felt exposed and accountable: it was «a portrait of institutionalised neglect» [Haaland 2012; p. 139]. Moreover, the portrayal of a society where citizens were indifferent, if not hostile, to one another was a blow to Catholic

principles. Rather than underscoring Umberto's humanity as an expression of nurture and care, for example, his love for Flike was seen as the ultimate marker of his poverty and loneliness; it magnified his isolation, eliciting our pity – not so much for the dog, though, as for Umberto's impoverished condition as a human. Flike was merely a sentimental ploy that enhanced the extreme state of solitude and despondency of the protagonist, who had no better than a dog to share his life with.

Significantly, soon after the film's release, on 28 February 1952, the then governmental undersecretary and responsible for entertainment Giulio Andreotti published the article «Piaghe sociali e necessità di redenzione» [Social Plagues and the Necessity of Redemption] in the Christian Democratic newspaper *Libertas* where he severely condemned the film's desolate portrayal of Italian reality «a world where there is a complete lack of any principle, if not of religion, at least of human solidarity.»[2] The sole two positive figures in the film were dismissed as «a country maid and a dog, both being driven solely by a mechanism of good sensations and vegetative reactions»[3].

Admittedly, at the time of the film's release, fewer people might have been able to appreciate Umberto's relationship with Flike. More than ten years before the publication of the Brambell Report [1965] – the first document to recognise basic rights to livestock animals – and about two decades prior to the first significant advancements in the field of animal rights [Singer 1975], makes it anachronistic for a Catholic political leader to appreciate the possibility of a message of hope coming from the relationship between a dog and an old man or from a young, unexperienced, and uneducated future single mother. No surprise then if the former is brushed off in terms that, more than behaviorism, actually echo Descartes' view of the animal as a machine, and, in turn, the animal as a source of benevolent but futile good feelings.

However, De Sica's response to Andreotti's criticism suggests that *Umberto D.* intentionally addressed issues that transcend the strictly social – and socialist – issues of contemporary Italian society. It was a film about human nature:

> I'm sorry that you did not recognize what, at least in intention, was its [the film's] primary characteristic: the "incommunicability" of humans when discomfort presses, the indifference of those who have, albeit little, towards those who have nothing and nothing more to hope for. Problems ***not tied to a time, a society, a regime,*** *but as ancient as humans themselves* [my emphasis] [Troncarelli 2018].[4]

As Holland (s.d.) observes, "incommunicability" is a cliché of culture talk. What De Sica means when he uses this term is much more than people's capacity to talk to each other: it is their capacity to love and care. Incommunicability is the outcome of a cultural education unable to balance out two inherently human motivations: on the one hand, to collect and, on the other, to possess – which may lead to accumulation. In *Umberto D.* humans are not only above non-humans – as illustrated by the scene at the dog pound – but also not all humans are human alike. Some of them stand above others either because they have collected, and hence possess more – money, wealth, power, such as government representatives, Umberto's landlady, the doctor at the hospital – or because they strive to collect and possess, such as the street vendors and the swindlers attending the soup kitchen. Indifference is a universal response to times of discomfort and manifests itself in an ostentatious defence of available resources, no matter how small. Viewed from this perspective, *Umberto D.* serves as a lens to scrutinize some of the workings of human motivations and emotions.

2. A story as old as humans: possessiveness and epimelesis

Umberto D. elicits both sadness and indignation. The movie impacts our emotional spectrum, bringing us to tears or igniting our anger, because it appeals to one of our dispositional components: emotions. As Roberto Marchesini clarifies [2018; pp. 64-73], emotions have a responsive character. They express how our body *feels* about something. They communicate the organismic condition of being a body, a body that elaborates external prompts, i.e., stimuli coming from the world, but also internal information, e.g., metabolic fluxes and endocrine variations.

For centuries, emotions have been equated to drives, i.e., impulses that need to be curbed by reason, an attribute unique to humans - especially male humans - and a trait that distinguished our species from others: the cornerstone of human superiority. Accordingly, emotions were long marginalised from the scientific world, which was considered the domain of rational thinking. They were alleged to express the lower, lesser element of humans -effeminate, animal-like and irrational elements needing to be restrained by male rationality. The scientific snootiness towards emotions survived as long as the early 1960s when, with her findings about the lives of the chimps she had been studying, Jane Goodall stupefied her fellow colleagues at Cambridge laying the grounds for the acknowledgement of animal subjectivity.

The influence that our affective dimension has on presumed rational decisions has been studied and analysed by the neuroscientist Antonio Damasio. Instead of being steered by an ostensibly objective reason divorced from emotions, our actions are largely determined by how we feel about something [Damasio 1994; p. 165-201]. This is because, as in any other species, our emotions are instruments of knowledge no less than

our intellect. Both are the fruit of a biological development in tune with our phylogenetic history. Emotions, just like reason, are embodied, i.e., they reside in, and are expressed through, the body – incarnated evidence against Descartes' body-mind dichotomy.

While emotions are responsive dispositions, motivations, on the other hand, are proactive dispositions. Motivations make us dive into the world and seek opportunities to express ourselves. We could simplify and state that, at our best, we live our lives by following our motivations on the wave of our emotions. One of the reasons for which we enjoy watching movies, for example, is that through empathy (emotion) we project ourselves into the lives of others and begin to care for them (motivation). In *Umberto D.*, for instance, sadness triggers concern, hence the desire to care and help the protagonists in their predicament.

Epimelesis, or care, is a fundamental affective disposition present not only in humans, but also in mammals and birds. As Roberto Marchesini [2021; pp. 391-402] observes, due to their limited number of offspring (compared to fish, for example), the survival of these species relies on prolonged parental care. In other words, with a limited progeny unequipped for survival, birds and mammalian species must tend to their offspring until they become capable of fending for themselves. This nurturing inclination is termed epimelesis. Epimelesis pertains to the reproductive motivational system and is triggered by cues for care (et-epimeletic signals), primarily associated with juvenile and immature traits (neotenic characteristics) [Marchesini 2021, pp. 403-06]. The epimeletic motivation in mammals correlates with the immaturity of their newborns and their prolonged developmental period – humans' developmental period being the longest. A complex hormonal process sustains parental care, with oxytocin, the so-called bonding hormone, playing a central

role. Caring activities trigger positive emotions and are rewarded with feelings of fulfilment and satisfaction.

As a prominent motivation in human behaviour, care was extended to other species, explaining the process of adoption (domestication). Epimelesis is also at the basis of many other human activities, such as teaching, social mentoring, gardening, and museum archiving. Even narcissism may ultimately be viewed as a distorted form of care. Instead of being directed outward it turns inward, towards the self, and may lead to accumulation and possessiveness.

The triumph of possessiveness over epimelesis may be a way to reconsider the "incommunicability" that De Sica described with reference to his film. Embedded within animals' defensive motivational system [Marchesini 2021; pp. 341-53), possessiveness is essential for survival: it means defending the resources necessary for life. One's possessions are an expansion of the individual into the world, a prolongation of the body, a means to assert oneself. They express a profound inherent need in all creatures.

There is nothing bad in the possessive motivation itself; problems arise when it manifests in ways that harm others. Combined with the human inclination to collect (sillegy), for example, the possessive motivation may drive individuals towards accumulation (of objects, money, etc.); combined with the affiliative motivation it may lead to the ostentatious exhibition of possessions in pursuit of public recognition, validation, and approval. In both scenarios, individuals are misled to believe that their needs stem from the lack of the desired objects. To defend these possessions, an individual may threaten, attack, elude, withdraw, or even pretend [Marchesini 2021; p. 348].

Emotions and motivations are interconnected. As soon as *we animals* can express our motivations, we feel satisfied and

fulfilled. But it is a feeling of languor and disquietude, hence an emotion, that prompts our motivations. The interplay and entanglement of motivations and emotions, of fulfilment and languor, is what animal life (including human life) is all about. Indeed, this interplay is what triggers and explains our behaviour.

In *Umberto D.* we witness both epimeletic and possessive behaviours, as well as the emotions associated with them. By focusing on the two central figures of the young mother-to-be Maria, and Umberto's life-long companion Flike, this article will explore epimelesis as a contralateral motivation to possessiveness, proposing a new interpretation of the movie. Adopting a zooanthropological lens will help us discover how the reason for the film's enduring fascination lies deeper than its much-commended social realism. As Reisz [1953] seems to suggest, in the moral victory and affirmation of solidarity implied by the film's closure, we may recognise that, in its array of expressions, caring for otherness is what will eventually keep us alive, like it did the protagonist of the movie.

3. Separation and silence

3.1. Suffering silence

In human life, silence can mean several things: it can signify peace, but also symbolize annihilation and death; it may be the response to overwhelming emotions, but also a way of eluding a response altogether. *Umberto D.* reveals the multiple facets of silence in their rippling complexity. Almost as an oxymoron, «Silence» is the first word pronounced with vehemence in the film. It is intimated by a government official backed by the police to the assembled demonstrators clamouring for a pension rise in front of Parliament. «Silence! You don't have a permit. You must

dissolve» the authority bellows.[5] While police cars patrol the square, dispersing the protesting pensioners, Umberto with Flike in his arms hurriedly hides in the inner courtyard of a building together with two other gentlemen. As the little dog starts barking, one of the two men urges Umberto to silence him («Keep him quiet, for God's sake!»).[6] Within three minutes of the film's start, silence is demanded twice.

A hierarchical perspective sets the tone of the movie from the start: those with more power (political institutions and humans) silence those with less (fragile citizens and non-humans). Silence occurs again when the two fellow pensioners deflect Umberto's admission that a 20% pension rise would suffice to clear his debts: «I don't have any debts» says one; «Actually, neither do I» echoes the other, reinforcing the message by repeating: «I have no debts».[7] As if nothing had happened, they bid farewell, each moving in opposite directions. Here and elsewhere in *Umberto D.*, silence connotes separation [Holland n.d.], including emotional (and physical) detachment.

Separation serves as a strategy to avoid empathizing with others. Through elusiveness and withdrawal, it may also express possessiveness. Turning one's head away from the interlocutor, demeaning and disregarding – hence silencing them – which happens literally and symbolically several times in the movie is yet another form of separation. In *Umberto D.*, for example, the protagonist tries to sell his watch to an acquaintance, but, as they are strolling in the streets of Rome, the gentleman pretends to have reached home and bids him goodbye; again, as Umberto offers to sell two books and collect money for the rent, the bookseller unceremoniously purchases his books for far less money than expected and picks up reading his newspaper again; a vendor sends him packing when he request to break a 1000 lire banknote to pay the taxi; another one reluctantly provides the change by forcing the old man to buy a mug he does not need.

Even in a hospital, the institution of *cure* and *care* by definition, the doctor treats Umberto with dismissive superiority, refusing to visit him. Finally, instead of telling the doctor about a pain in his arm, Umberto internalises this separation and decides to silence himself:

- Excuse me, Doctor. I also have a pain here.
- What kind of pain?
- Nothing.
- If you were young, I'd tell you to have your tonsils taken out. But what's the use, at your age?[8]

Most characters in the film are mean: Umberto's landlady and her bourgeois clique; the soup kitchen manager; a fellow visitor who bargains down the price of his watch, and then starts begging in front of a church. Even the man who helps Umberto prolong his hospital stay and save money is ultimately an experienced hustler («I'll teach you how to get them to let you stay here»),[9] let alone the nun who only aids patients feigning devotion by requesting a rosary.

[Fig. 1. Umberto and another dog owner in front of the veterinarian at the pound]

Olga, Umberto's callous landlady, and her entourage of music and cinema amateurs deserve a word apart. Her character is somewhat reminiscent of the cruel Ingrid in *Roma città aperta*, the Gestapo agent who, by playing on Martina's artistic ambitions, lures her into the corrupted cultural world of Nazi-Fascists and ultimately persuades her to betray her partisan lover, Manfredi, who dies under torture. Posh and elegantly dressed, Olga entertains her guests in a lavishly furnished parlour decorated with paintings, sculptures, luxurious lights, and silky lambrequins. She sings opera accompanied by a gentleman at the piano – behind her, a portrait of Beethoven. Here, the quintessence of classical music (significantly German!) becomes associated with the vertex of moral decay. Her performance distresses Umberto: in the grips of fever in the adjacent room, he is tossing and turning in his bed, vainly attempting to find rest and, indeed, silence – a different kind of silence than the one so far described.

The woman maximises her own profit by secretly renting Umberto's room to well-off lovers, but peevishly dismisses all the man's efforts to settle his debts. While she glosses over the illicit affairs she profits from, she forces Umberto to remain insolvent. Hence, by silencing her old tenant in front of the law, she is legitimised to get rid of him without second thoughts. By pursuing her petty interests, Olga remains totally insensitive to Umberto, Flike, and Maria alike, whom she derogatorily labels "la serva" (the servant). However, as the dramatic scene at the dog pound reveals, there are also other victims being silenced by the social grinder caused by poverty.

3.2. Expressing silence

In a very interesting article about the phenomenology of film viewing, McHugh [2015] analyses the haptic nature of cinema in

relation to *Umberto D*. The scholar underlines how the emotional power of cinematic images depends on the spatial gap between the screen and the spectator, on the distance that separates the observer from the observed. To see something, we need to be distant from it. The interdependence between optic and haptic, distance and proximity have an impact on us: it is what actually stirs us. Film viewing is an experience that primarily engages our senses; it is an emotional rather than verbal experience. Our emotions are stirred; our thoughts come afterwards; we are, as it were, touched from afar. Paradoxically, this is what enables us to grasp the different meanings and nuances of the characters' moments of silence in *Umberto D*.

McHugh analyses two scenes of the film where the protagonists' physical movements enhance the haptic process: Maria touching her pregnant belly in the long sequence of her morning routine, and the scene of Umberto turning down the palm of his hand in an extreme gesture of dignity to conceal begging. I propose that there is a third haptic scene at the dog pound: it is an exchange between the veterinarian and one of the several people who, along with Umberto, is hoping to retrieve his dog. The scene is complexly articulated.

Summoned to the veterinarian's office at the dog pound, Umberto is preceded by an elegantly dressed upper class lady in a hat and sunglasses, and a dejected man with dishevelled moustaches in rustic clothing. All three are there to reclaim their dogs. The woman stands out for her appearance and exaggeratedly affected manners: feathered hat, sunglasses, elegant attire, and a bag. She is attending her white and furry poodle-like pooch, ostentatiously thanking the vet before departing with her pet cradled in her arms. The doctor returns the greeting and starts a laconic exchange with the two men. As the vet addresses Umberto, the latter takes a step forward and unwillingly touches his neighbour's shoulder, so that the two are

haptically united. A powerful snapshot captures the anguish of the two men, one anxious, the other one rather resigned.

The close-up on their faces exudes a chilling intensity. Although the veterinarian addresses Umberto formally upon his entrance, his question sounds abrupt and rude: «And you?». The old man replies without stuttering: «a mutt [*un bastardo*], with intelligent eyes. White, with brown spots».[10] Were it not for the tragic circumstances, Umberto's reply would sound pathetically contradictory. *Bastardo* – literally "bastard" – is an ambiguously derogatory word in Italian. It applies to unpleasant, obnoxious people, but it is also an old-fashioned, standard designation for mixed breeds (as opposed to dogs with a pedigree) – Significantly, in modern Italian the term has been replaced by *meticcio*. Since *bastardo* conveys a different type of dog from the one just retrieved by the bourgeois lady, Umberto unconsciously redeems Flike from the anonymous multitude of «second-rate» dogs condemned to the gas chambers by appealing to his «intelligent eyes», an attribute that should separate him from the countless others facing death. However, Umberto has just gone past the dissecting room, witnessing with horror a man disinfecting the room where dogs are killed. His description of Flike betrays his hope that, to the eyes of the pound managers, his intelligent eyes might save Flike's life.

Umberto reports his dog to have escaped a day or two earlier, prompting the vet to summon a warden and show Umberto the recently captured dogs: «Take this one to see the dogs we caught yesterday and the day before».[11] The use of «This one [Questo]» instead of «this gentleman [questo signore]», which should have been expected in this context, is not merely unsympathetic and detached but rude and disrespectful, subjecting both the dog and the owner to the logic of anonymity and compassionless indifference that informs the pound as a

metaphor of the world of the movie. They are people and animals who are not worthy of being addressed.

The man standing next to Umberto indeed climaxes the unfolding tragedy. With a leash in his hand, his appearance tells of a low social status. Unsurprisingly, he is addressed with the informal *tu* rather than the polite *Lei*.

> Vet: So, what are we going to do? Are you going to retrieve this dog or not?"
> Man: What if I don't?
> V: If you don't, we'll kill him.
> M: You'll kill him?
> V: So, what are you going to do?
> M: Then, you'll kill him?
> V: We'll euthanize him. What else can we do?
> M: 450 lire?
> V: Who's next?[12]

The veterinarian's dry response – «who's next?» – is consistent with his overall demeanor. In its cutting brevity, this exchange is disarming and bone-chilling. Certain social categories – the poor, the elderly, the uneducated – mirror the destiny of stray and unreclaimed or unreclaimable dogs: they have neither identity nor voice; they are anonymous and disposable, unrecyclable leftovers of a consumeristic society. As individuals, they are a burden; as pets, they are no longer needed; and as animals, they are inferior to humans. In all three cases, they lie at the bottom of the consumeristic chain. Having outlived their usefulness, they remain cumbersome presences ripe for disposal.

The pound reverberates with the sound of barking dogs. The opposite of silence. Yet, to some humans these sounds are not voices because they make no sense; they are meaningless and disturbing noise. Somehow, we could argue that the dogs are

speaking silence, not unlike the shouting pensioners at the beginning of the movie. This silence is twofold: first, their voices cannot be heard because they cannot be distinguished, and second, their voices remain unheard because they are silenced, either verbally, like the pensioners, or physically, be being killed. As the demonstrators are dispersed by the authorities because they lack authorization, the barking dogs in the pounds are eliminated because they have no owners to legitimize their existence. «What can we do?», asks the veterinarian curtly. In both cases, the right for a voice is a top-down decision.

3.3 Silent screams

The scene at the dog pound brought to my mind an association with two very different works which I am now going to briefly discuss in passing. The two works are Shelley's bewildering poem, *Mont Blanc* and Roberto Benigni's multiple Oscar-winning movie *La vita è bella* (1998). A vindication of nature's right to exist with or without humans, the final lines of Shelley's poem [Shelley 1997; p. 93, ll, 139-144] imply that no human words are necessary to confer meaning to nature, nature's voice being so prepotent and loud that it can speak for itself.[13] The majesty of Mont Blanc becomes a metaphor for the overwhelmingly powerful voice of nature that no human creation can compare with. And yet, over the course of history, humans have strived to deny nature a voice [Manes 1992, Bloom 2022] because of the anthropocentric presumption that, as the sole rational creatures on earth, i.e., the repositories of *logos*, humans are the only ones who can claim to have a voice. Conversely, nature is silent and does not speak.

The dog pound in *Umberto D.* reverberates with the speaking voices of dogs. They can already be heard from the court outside the pound. Like the overlapping shouts of the pensioners

protesting in front of Parliament at the beginning of the movie, these voices cannot be decoded. Moreover, they do not even articulate words. In this perspective, they remain silent. They do, however, convey emotions: fear, anger, resentment. Protesting for freedom, company, space, the right to exist, even without humans legitimising – through money – their right to live, these dogs want to be listened to and elicit a response. Without someone to pay for their release, however, they face the grim fate of the gas chambers – not unlike in the eternal Treblinka of livestock and industrial farming, where non-humans are bred to be killed for humans [Patterson 2002].

In De Sica's film, the veterinarian adopts the technically and emotionally neutral verb "to euthanize" to refer to the killing of dogs. By neutralizing the term and stripping away the negative emotional connotations of *kill* and *murder*, he transforms slaughter into a necessary operation: as methodical, controlled and rationally devised as the *Final solution* in Nazi Germany – a euphemism for extermination.

It is here that the parallel between the dog pound and the concentration camp of Benigni's masterpiece *La vita è bella* becomes relevant. Three poignant details of the movie evoke a connection with the dog pound in De Sica's film: when Guido and Giosué stumble across a shop with the door sign: «No Jews or dogs allowed»; when Guido shows to his son the number tattooed on his arm; and when Giosuè cries to his father: «They make us into buttons and soap».[14] The cages where dogs are transported and imprisoned; the choke collars that force them out of the lorries; the gas chambers where they meet their end; even the anonymising number 15 assigned to Umberto when he is queuing in front of the office are somehow reminiscent of the treatment of Jews in the concentration camps. Jewish discrimination during the period of Nazi-Fascism epitomized the anthropological machine [Agamben 2004], the hierarchical and

segregation model at the core of ideological anthropocentrism [Marchesini 2024; p. 29]. The anthropological machine is a strategy that serves to separate humans from certain categories deemed abject or repugnant. Not unlike the scapegoat paradigm to which it is linked [Girard 1986], this mechanism has operated across history to segregate females, black people, disabled, and animals. Equating Jews to dogs during Nazi-Fascism legitimised their exploitation and extermination, reducing them to mere commodities for the making of buttons and soap, like animals in industrial farming are commodities for meat production. Ideological anthropo-centrism underpins the assumption that humans hold a special (rather than specialized) position in the chain of beings, that they exist out of this chain altogether standing above the rest of the living, separated from all (other) animals. Since humans began to consider the earth a resource to subjugate [Blom 2022], this attitude has become engrained to the point of justifying manifold discriminations: from male chauvinism to nationalism, from racism to speciesism.

4. Songs of innocence, songs of ignorance

Umberto is not always disarmingly self-effaced - he can stand up to his landlady, blame Maria for Flike's escape, and even shout at the taxi driver. Several small details in the movie hint at his middle-class background (he served as a loyal civil servant for thirty years): he shows solicitude for the two male nurses who take him to the hospital; he combs his hair before the doctor's visit; and he takes off his hat upon entering the office at the dog pound - all cliché behaviours reflecting his concern for dignity and decorum. They somehow pave the way to the famous scene of the attempted begging: he holds out his arm to beg, but as a passerby approaches him to drop a coin, he turns his palm down and pretends to be just checking for raindrops.

Umberto is ultimately an educated man, a conscientious worker, and an honest citizen whose sole fault is being old and poor. Yet, he is determined to defend his dignity to the end. The underpinning message of the movie is that despite his kindness, life does not treat him kindly. Differently from other characters, however, Umberto also has an important resource to nurture the kindness in him: Flike. This kindness, which we have also termed the epimeletic motivation, is expressed through love and care for others, a resource shared by another character in the movie: Maria. If Umberto lives for Flike, Maria lives to care for her forthcoming baby.

Maria and Umberto have been described as complementary figures: «[n]eglected youth and discarded old age» [Young 1956; p. 595]. While Umberto is penalized for poverty and elderliness, Maria is penalized for poverty and lack of education. The old man reprimands her for not doing her homework implying that ignorance caused her to become pregnant: «Certain things can happen because you don't know your grammar. Everybody takes advantage of the ignorant».[15] The elderly, the poor, and the illiterate ultimately share a common destiny with the dogs in the pound: They remain unacknowledged and unnamed; they are silenced because the institutions that should take responsibility for them either remain silent or keep them silent. As previously observed, silence can also be a form of institutional and self-annihilation, a form of human erasure.

Maria expects to be sacked as soon as the landlady finds out about her pregnancy. With neither a job nor the support of the Neapolitan soldier who is presumably the father of her child, the maiden girl, like Umberto, seems to have nowhere to turn, her family of origin not being an option, as the father would likely beat her if he discovers that she is pregnant out of wedlock. Despite her looming predicament and unlike the other characters in the movie, however, Maria can smile. Like Flike,

Maria remains a beacon of hope in the movie, her illiteracy almost a resource, an attachment to bare life. Femininity and youth save her, transforming her into a liminal figure that straddles innocence and experience.

Maria's status is twice significant: she is a servant maid and she is pregnant. The verb *servire*, in Italian means both "to serve" and "to be useful to others", to fulfil someone's desires through a *disinterested* act of courtesy, to help achieve a good result. Albeit introduced by the crude realism of the scene where she is plucking a chicken and burning the ants that are infesting the kitchen, Maria, a mother-to-be, is a figure of care. She cares for the house (she cooks, she cleans), she cares for Umberto and Flike (e.g., she attends to him when he is ill; she looks after his dog), and she cares for both her soldier suitors. Maria goes beyond herself; she takes responsibility for the other. She may lack education and, consequently, fail to reflect upon the long-term consequences of her actions, but this shows precisely that she lets herself be driven by emotions rather than calculation. She feels more, because she rationalises less; in many ways she remains innocent, closer to nature than any of the urbanized humans among whom she is living.

But Maria is also caring because she is pregnant. She is the sole figure in the film who shows sympathy and dispenses compassion: When Umberto returns after the demonstration, she fills a bowl with water for Flike to drink from; she visits Umberto at the hospital and brings Flike with her so that he can see his beloved pooch; and when she reads the sadness on the face of the old man, she brings him a slice of cake to try to cheer him up. Rather than only as a tragic figure, we can read Maria as a dispenser of hope. When Umberto leaves for good, she asks him with a smile: «Shall we meet sometime, Mr. Umberto?».[16]

Her bleak social conditions do not have the better on her desire to live and love; she can smile; she can find solace in

small, petty, childish things such as eavesdropping and peeking at Olga's guests or waving hello from behind the blinds of Umberto's bedroom window to her two soldier-lovers, even though neither of them may be willing to marry her. Regardless of her naivety, which got her into trouble, Maria is the only figure in the movie who is genuinely in love or, at least, genuinely believes in the possibility of love.

In an interesting article analysing the archetypal significance of cats in literary works, Monk [2001, p. 314] observes that in many legends, folklores and myths about metamorphoses and transformations involving cats and humans, women or young girls feature predominantly. Her analysis draws on the Jungian definition of archetypes in works such as *Aion* and *Archetypes and the collective unconscious*, where cats symbolize the feminine self and the developmental process of self-knowledge [Monk 2001; p. 315–316].

Maria is the protagonist of the single long and silent sequence in the movie that has drawn critical attention as an exemplary expression of cinematic realism: she gets up, lights the stove, prepares the kettle, and grinds coffee. The sequence, however, is cut by two shots of roaming cats: a black kitten crosses the skylight while Maria is still lying in bed; a white cat is strolling across the roofs when Maria glimpses out of the kitchen windows. Maria is a young, in many ways still innocent woman. Yet, she is also about to become a mother. Considering the symbolic value of cats as lunar, feminine, and wild it is difficult to consider these two shots as dramatically irrelevant details.

In Jungian terms, Maria evokes the Kore archetype in its dual aspect of maiden and unmarried mother [Jung 1995; p. 201]. As Jung observes, cats are the privileged representatives of this female archetype in the animal world; they accompany the kore into the animal world, where, due to her innocence, she becomes exposed to dangers, including the risk of being

devoured or killed. In light of these considerations, the two cats Maria sees during her silent morning choirs might symbolize both her innocence and future motherhood, a condition that, as Park [2015; p. 45] observes, verges into the ambiguous, split between «the caring, growing and creating abundance and negative aspects of dark abyss, swallowing, and killing». Indeed, Maria is what we could call a "fragile subject". Because of her youth, lack of education, and pregnancy, she runs the risk of being marginalized, condemned, and further abused by both society and her own family. Perhaps unsurprisingly, one cat is black and the other white, evoking the symbols of death and innocence, respectively.

Indeed, as a bearer of life, Maria also represents the possibility of a better future. In fact, her character opens up a wide fan of symbolic nuances. She could even be regarded as a counterfigure to Jesus' mother, of whom she bears the name. As the story goes, Mary of Nazareth was another young and innocent girl who did not only have to bear the load of an illegitimate pregnancy, but unwillingly embraced a destiny that extended far beyond anything she could have ever imagined, including witnessing the tragic death of her son. Yet, for the Catholic religion, she was the beacon of a better future, showing resilience in the face of hardship. So does Maria in *Umberto D.* She must hold on.

5. Negotiating love as property

From the outset of the movie, Umberto's fate seems to be intertwined with that of his "bastard" dog: both anonymous and unexceptional, their lives are as worthless dead as they are alive. Nobody wants them. Thus, Umberto contemplates blending them to a tragic conclusion. However, the living force in Flike is stronger than the power of despair in Umberto. We could argue

that the dog's expressive longing propels his human companion back into life from the brink of death. Contrary to what happened in the pound, at the end of the movie, it is the dog who rescues his human. Their destinies are complementary. However uncertain and open the ending of the film may remain, the force of life in Flike wins over Umberto's determination to die.

Significantly, the movie's conclusion presents a radical shift in setting: the landscape replaces the cityscape. Outside of Rome, the dense and oppressive old grey buildings with decaying roofs give way to vibrant colours: the green of trees, the blue of the sky. A glimmer of life rekindles just as Umberto is about to pursue his gloomy determination. In the garden, the children are playing. Umberto seeks to entrust Flike to a little girl, Daniela, but her governess intervenes, extinguishing his faint hope. The pattern of epimelesis *vs.* possessiveness resurfaces, exposing "the indifference of those who *have*, albeit little" and the suffering of those who care in silence. Love and care are gratuitous. But gratuity seems to have no room in a world dominated by the logic of possession (in opposition to donation) and utility (in opposition to gratuity). This is what the last dialogic sequence in the film suggests:

> Umberto: Daniela, do you really love Flike? Really and truly?
> Daniela: Yes, I do.
> U.: Then you can have him.
> [...]
> D.: Miss, the dog is mine.
> Governess: What do you mean, "yours"?!?
> [...]
> U.: I'd be very happy, if the little girl would take him.
> G.: But who will clean up after him? Dogs dirty around.
> Guess what? [addressing her partner, who giggles]. I will end up with doing the work.

D.: *I* will clean.
G.: [ironically] Sure, *she* will clean. [to Umberto] Listen. No. The lady doesn't want dogs either. Come on.
Let's go [dragging the girl away].
U.: Listen: it's a dog that is no trouble. He obeys like a child. She'll be happy.
G.: Sure, it's a bargain.
U.: But I'm giving him to her for nothing. A dog like him for nothing.
G.: Sure. But at least you're getting rid of him.[17]

Unlike Maria, the upper-class governess speaks the language of possession, emphasising ownership and money («it's a bargain») and projecting her self-interest («who will clean up after him?» «I'll end up with doing the work») onto Umberto («But at least you're getting rid of him»). In this exchange, Umberto himself seems to objectify («you can have him»), and commodify Flike («I'm giving him to her for nothing. A dog like him for nothing»). In a materialistic world, even affections are commodified – as evidenced by the money Olga earns by lodging illicit lovers in Umberto's room. A closer analysis, however, reveals a significant difference between how Umberto addresses the girl compared to how he speaks to her conceited maid.

When Umberto tells Daniela that she can have Flike as a gift, he speaks the language of love. Surely love for the girl, but above all, for the dog whose life he is desperately trying to save. He does not give Flike away unconditionally, but tests even the innocence of childhood by asking emphatically: «Daniela, do you really love Flike? Really and truly?». When Umberto tells the governess that he does not want any money for the dog («I'm giving him to her *for nothing*. A dog like him *for nothing*») he adapts to the woman's monetized language («a bargain»). In fact, Umberto's words are vague enough to be interpreted in two opposite ways: as a suggestion that Flike will enrich the girl's life

with his presence («She'll be happy»), or as an economic gain for the maid and the family she works for – a "bargain" («You'll be happy»). Since her governess lacks sympathy, she projects onto Umberto her own attitude by assuming that his intention is to rid himself of his dog («But at least you'll get rid of him»).

Umberto sees similarities between dogs and children: both innocent, both affective, both fragile. In fact, like children, dogs possess an important resource: playfulness. Significantly, after fleeing for his life and thwarting the old man suicide plan, Flike compels him to do something in order to regain his trust: Umberto must retrieve part of his lost innocence and forget, perhaps just briefly, his destiny of sorrow. By immersing himself in the present moment, in the here and now of the game, the old man momentarily regains the innocence of a child playing with his dog. Whether the human determination to kill (himself and others – humans and non-humans) may prevail in the end is another question.

6. Conclusion: affecting affections

Umberto D. is as much about incommunicability as it is about epimelesis, about love and care, as antidotes to egoism and possessiveness. The contrast between the park's vibrant nature and the city of Rome's monochrome grey is underscored by laughing children playing in the open air *vs.* stern, humourless adults confined within the grey backdrop of a decaying metropolis. This is what we flavour at the end of the film. *Umberto D.* is about emotions, not only because it is moving to the point of tears [Klavans 2012, Cunliffe 2022], but because it discloses human fragility in both its negative and positive sides – despair and self-destructiveness, but also self-preservation, the drive to move on, the possibility of restoring our relational as opposed to solipsistic identity. Umberto *must* learn to play again

if he wants to regain Flike's trust; he must reconnect with himself, with the vital force of the non-human world, dogs, animals, and nature as a source of survival that ignores the boundaries of authoritarian logocentrism.

Umberto must continue to care for the other in order to regain a sense of care for himself. What saves him is his love for Flike; what saves Maria is her love for her baby; what saves Flike is an unconditional, spontaneous, and natural surrender to the force and flow of life. André Bazin's [2004; p. 47] reference to the neorealist cinema of De Sica as «a tragedy of current events» holds true seventy years after the film release, with a connotation that extends beyond social denunciation. The moral and psychological drama unfolding in the story of *Umberto D.* derives from a sentimental diseducation whose roots are not merely possessiveness. They lie in our difficulty to acknowledge our relational ontology, the fact that we are interconnected not simply with our fellow humans, but with the world altogether. This social, historical but, crucially, ontological amnesia feeds back on the quality of our lives, the lives of those who are worse off but, ultimately, also of those who delude themselves of being better off than others – this applies to both humans as individuals and social groups and humans as a species. De Sica's philosophical focus on incommunicability underlines our negligence, self-centredness, and lack of interconnectedness, resonating even more today than when the film was made.

Umberto D. is a cinema classic because its ethical and emotional appeal extends beyond the time of its production. If some progress has been made in the domain of social sciences such as philosophy and anthropology, it is because some of the strongholds of anthropocentrism have collapsed. Discrimination has partly been expounded in its diverse forms both within and outside our species. The scene in the dog pound probably stirs more horror today than at the time of the film's release, because

social concerns have begun to exceed species boundaries, encompassing humans and non-humans alike. The evolving vocabulary related to animals – from "bastard" to "mixed breed", from "dog pound" to "shelter", for example – reflects a growing awareness of our responsibility for, and dependence on, other living creatures.

The sign *Parva domus sed apta mihi* – small house but suitable for me – at the entrance of Olga's flat at the beginning of the movie might serve as an appropriate and ironic warning for humanity: if only we would acknowledge our smallness, we would refrain from taking the space of others – both at the intra- and inter-species level – because the Earth is neither the home of the few who can make political changes nor of humans. The earth is an ecosystem in which we are just one of the living organisms. We can help the system dispose of us by dragging into extinction millions of others, but we cannot do without the system. We would better care for it before it is too late.

Notes

[1] The film, subtitled in English, is freely accessible at: https://archive.org/details/umberto-d-1952-colorized-movie-720p-hd.

[2] "un mondo in cui manca completamente un qualunque principio se non di religione, almeno di solidarietà umana".

[3] "una servette di paese ed un cane, l'uno e l'altra però egualmente mossi in un solo meccanismo di sensazioni buone e reazioni vegetative".

[4] "Ma mi spiace Ella non abbia riconosciuto quello che, almeno nelle intenzioni, ne era la caratteristica prima: la 'incomunicabilità' degli uomini allorché il disagio preme, l'indifferenza di chi ha, anche se poco, verso chi non ha nulla e più nulla a sperare. Problemi non legati a un tempo, a una società, a un regime, ma antichi come l'uomo medesimo". I have translated "uomini" as "humans" instead of "men" to be consistent with the posthumanist and antispeciecist approach adopted in this paper even though the implications of this choice were alien to De Sica.

[5] "Silenzio! Non avete il permesso. Dovete sciogliervi!".
[6] "Lo faccia tacere, per Dio!".
[7] "Io debiti non ne ho"; "Per la verità neanche io. Io non ho debiti".
[8] U: "Scusi dottore, ho anche un dolore qui?"/D: "Che dolore?"/U: "Niente."/D: "Se tu fossi più giovane, ti direi di toglierti le tonsille, ma che cosa vuoi toglierti alla tua età?".
[9] "Glielo insegno io el modo de sta' quaddentro".
[10] "E lei [cosa vuole]?" / "*Un bastardo* con gli occhi intelligenti. Bianco, pezzato."
[11] "Accompagna questo a vedere i cani che abbiamo catturato ieri e ieri l'altro."
[12] V: "E allora che facciamo? Questo cane lo ritiri o non lo ritiri?" / M: "E se non lo ritiro?" / V: "Se non lo ritiri lo ammazziamo." / M: "Lo ammazzate?" / V: "Beh, che fai?" / M: "E allora? Lo ammazzate?" / V: "Lo sopprimiamo. Cosa vuoi fare?" / M: "450 lire?" / V: "Avanti un altro."
[13] P. B. Shelley, *Mont Blanc: Lines Written in the Vale of Chamouni:* "And what were thou, and earth, and stars, and sea, / If to the human mind's imaginings / Silence and solitude were vacancy?" (V, ll. 16-18).
[14] "Vietato l'ingresso agli ebrei e ai cani"; "con noi ci fanno i bottoni e il sapone".
[15] "Certe cose avvengono perché non si sa la grammatica. Tutti ne aprofittano degli ignoranti".
[16] "Ci possiamo vedere qualche volta, Signor Umberto?".
[17] Umberto: Daniela tu gli vuoi proprio bene a Flike? Proprio?
Daniela: Sì.
U.: Allora te lo regalo.
[...]
D.: Signorina il cane è mio.
Governess: Come?!? Daniela!
U.: Lo do alla bambina tanto volentieri.
G.: Ma chi lo deve pulire? I cani sporcano. Ma guarda un po'. Ci vado di mezzo io ora.
D.: Lo pulisco io.
G.: Sì, lo pulisce lei. Senta, no, no. Ascolti: nemmeno la signora vuole cani. Sù, andiamo.
U.: Senta: è un cane che non da disturbo a nessuno. *Ubbidisce come un bambino. Vedrà che sarà contenta.*
G.: Si si *è un affare.*
U.: Ma io *glielo do per niente. Un cane così per niente.*
G.: Già. *Intanto se ne libera.*

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