

**TALKING APES: THE PROBLEM OF ANTHROPOMORPHOUS ANIMALS**

by

Nina Britt Varsava

B.A., The University of Alberta, 2007

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(English)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

July 2011

© Nina Britt Varsava, 2011

## Abstract

This thesis examines the human/animal binary in the Western tradition. I analyze in particular the dominant configuration of the human as *the* speaking, thinking being against the animal as mute and dumb. This configuration informs cultural conceptions of humans and animals in the West, and determines the accordant distribution of ethical worth. To this extent, my project is an ethico-political one: it seeks to disrupt the production of the human/animal binary in order to make space for a posthumanist ethics, which would at its best conceive both intra- and inter-species difference nonhierarchically.

My work is situated theoretically in the field of animal studies, with posthumanist, poststructuralist, and materialist leanings. I build upon the work of Jacques Derrida, Giorgio Agamben, and Cary Wolfe, among others. The literary-critical portion of my thesis focuses mainly on three recent American ape novels—Laurence Gonzales’ *Lucy* (2010), Benjamin Hale’s *Evolution of Bruno Littlemore* (2011), and Sara Gruen’s *Ape House* (2010). Each of these texts features apes who are capable of both language and rationality, and who, to this extent, are provocatively “humanlike”; such representation is political insofar as it raises questions concerning the legitimacy and viability of the human/animal binary. Alongside the literature, I discuss representations of apes in Western primatology, and the parallel debates around anthropomorphism that unfold there.

I seek here to unpack the politics of both anthropomorphism and “anthropodenial” (the rejection of anthropomorphism) in order to reveal the speciesism and speciousness of the human/animal binary, which both anthropomorphism and its denial ultimately depend upon and reinscribe. Although I engage discussions around anthropomorphism, I ultimately take

apart the term itself in an effort to unearth the assumptions underlying it: this move is necessary if we wish to expose the “human” as an ungrounded concept, and the “moral” code that revolves around it as in turn dubious.

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Table of Contents.....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>1. Introduction: The Human/Animal Binary and the Case of the Ape.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Overview .....	6
<b>2. <i>Homo Sapiens</i> = <i>Homo Loquens</i>.....</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1 Emergent Moral Properties.....	11
2.2 Genetics, When it Comes to Ethics.....	14
<b>3. Politics of Anthropomorphism .....</b>	<b>17</b>
3.1 Serious Anthropomorphism.....	20
3.2 The Human in <i>Lucy</i> .....	21
3.3 The Human Tongue in <i>Bruno Littlemore</i> .....	28
3.4 Animals Contained in <i>Ape House</i> .....	32
3.5 An Organic Insufficiency .....	39
3.6 A Politics of Anthro-Insistence.....	45
3.7 A Politics of Anthropodenial .....	48
3.8 The Profanity of Anthropomorphism.....	54
<b>4. Rethinking Anthropomorphous Apes .....</b>	<b>58</b>
4.1 The Human as Anthropomorphous Animal.....	65
<b>5. Conclusion: Towards a Posthumanism .....</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Notes .....</b>	<b>74</b>

**Bibliography..... 78**

## Acknowledgements

Endless thanks to my supervisory committee: To Dr. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young for thinking clearly about my ideas even when they were unclear to me, and for pushing me to think beyond the theorists I adore. To Dr. Lorraine Weir for her passionate guidance and unwavering support, which gave me the academic courage to take this project where I wanted it to go. And especially to my supervisor, Dr. Larissa Lai, for her sustained and heartfelt interest in my project, for encouraging ethical thought and political work, and for introducing me to Derrida's cat.

Thanks also to Dr. Ursula Heise, who supervised my term as a Visiting Researcher at Stanford, for generously sharing her time, knowledge, and enthusiasm with me, and for encouraging me to pursue the study of literary apes.

My gratitude to the East Van Theory Group for hearing out my inchoate ideas, and for pushing my thought in productive and interesting directions. Special thanks to Rachel Baumann for the cyber animal solidarity. My thanks goes out also to Kiran Sunar, for persistently reminding me that a good thesis is a finished one. And to Kasper Podgorski, for addressing my neuroscience questions with patience, wit, and acuity.

Thank you to Tim Peppin for reading, thinking, and feeling with me. For your intricate knowledge, your brave curiosity, and your intellectual and emotional patience—I am forever and inexpressibly grateful.

To my parents for believing in my project from its embryonic moments, and for listening to and engaging with my ideas with perceptivity and loving care: your unfailing and multiform support enabled me not only to successfully complete this thesis, but to genuinely enjoy the process.

My interminable gratitude to Spunky, who taught me what love and respect across difference feels like, and compelled me in the first place to take animals seriously. This is for you.

I want to acknowledge the financial support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and also Alberta Scholarship Programs, which in large part funded my graduate education at UBC.

## 1. Introduction: The Human/Animal Binary and the Case of the Ape

*It is perhaps time to call into question the prestige that language has enjoyed and continues to enjoy in our culture, as a tool of incomparable potency, efficacy, and beauty. And yet, considered in itself it is not more beautiful than birdsong, no more efficacious than the signals insects exchange, no more powerful than the roar with which the lion asserts his dominion.*

– Giorgio Agamben, *The Sacrament of Language*

My concern here is to disrupt the production of the “human” against the “animal” in the Western tradition. This matters because the binary production has horrific and still largely overlooked consequences for real animals—millions of them, every day. I focus on anthropomorphous animals because they dance around the boundary line, making for generative material in a deconstructive project. The Western human/animal binary is maintained through the discursive and material division of life into categories of differential worth. On one side are beings called “human,” who are granted inherent worth and equal moral consideration. On the other side are those called “animal,” who are denied inherent worth, and accordingly may be exploited for “human” good.<sup>i</sup> The Western “human” and “animal” are mutually constituting concepts: the superiority and entitlement of the first depends upon the inferiority and subordination of the second.<sup>ii</sup> To put it in another way, the Western *subject* is built upon the animal *object*.

The Western humanist tradition is based upon the belief that there is a coherent and universal “human nature” that unites all human beings, and separates them from all other animals, in the most ethically significant ways. I focus here on the capacity for language—construed as the outward manifestation of rationality—as a key distinguishing factor between the human and the animal in the West: of course, humans have it and animals do not. Other Western conceptions of the human—the idea that only human beings have souls, for

example, or the Romantic notion that feeling and sensibility are more important to what it means to be human than reason and logic (Klages 25)—do not carry the same weight in contemporary Western discourse. I set these conceptions aside here and concentrate instead on the prevailing belief in the human as exclusive speaking and reasoning being, which is the conception that most significantly informs contemporary representations of humans and animals in the West.

As Raymond Corbey writes in *The Metaphysics of Apes*, the belief that “[s]peech betrayed reason, and reason humanness” constitutes a “pivotal nexus in the traditional European view of humans”: “speech is the outward appearance of mind” (54 – 55). The figure of the human “mind,” inchoate as it is, is tied up with the faculties of speech and reason; indeed the mind, sacred in a secular kind of way, is what produces or makes possible these faculties. The intangible aspects of “human nature” that endure in the West—not the soul, but freedom, dignity, autonomy, etc.—hinge on, or circulate around, the more demonstrable aspects of language and rationality. Even though the claim that these traits distinguish the human from the animal is a dubious one, it continues to underwrite the dominant ethical system in the West, which sanctions the mass exploitation of nonhuman animals.

My aim with this thesis is not to demonstrate that nonhuman animals *are* capable of language—or to prove that animals certainly can reason, regardless of their linguistic capabilities. These points have already been made by thinkers more qualified on the subjects than me.<sup>iii</sup> There is also the issue of whether human beings even *have* language in the traditional sense of the claim. Jacques Derrida pushes us to question whether “what calls itself human has the right rigorously to attribute to man, which means therefore to attribute to



himself, what he refuses the animal” (*The Animal That Therefore I Am* 135). I leave aside that issue here. At this point, I think, it is more pressing to interrogate how the traditional Western configuration of the human being as *the* speaking, thinking being continues to affect cultural conceptions of humans and animals, and the accordant distribution of ethical considerability.

This thesis—building on the work of Derrida, Giorgio Agamben, and Cary Wolfe, among others—seeks to unseat the dominant ethical framework in the West in order to open a space for something better, something more *ethical*. Since Western ethics is grounded in the division of the human from the animal—with moral considerability granted to the former at the expense of the latter—an interrogation of this division is in order here. To this effect, I turn to anthropomorphous animals—i.e., animals conceived, from of course a human perspective, as human-like or human-shaped. Anthropomorphous animals pose a problem for the human/animal categorical divide and its attendant ethical code; they do not fit neatly into one category or the other, and they therefore raise questions concerning just what it is that makes one human as opposed to animal. Virginia Richter remarks that the ape—the prototypical anthropomorphous animal—has become “the central image for the general dissolution of boundaries, both in scientific debates and in literature” (14 – 15). At the same time, though, the ape is a central image for the *delineation* of boundaries: the instability introduced to the human/animal divide by this prototypically anthropomorphous animal is mitigated by *anthropomorphism* on the one hand, and *anthropodenial* on the other. While anthropomorphism configures animals as formally and/or substantively human, anthropodenial resists such configuration, insisting on an inviolable gulf between all animals and all humans.<sup>iv</sup>

Here I examine the discursive production of apes-as-human in literary, scientific, and philosophical texts. More specifically, I'm interested in what I will call *serious* anthropomorphism, which draws out *ethically significant* similarities between humans and animals, with a view to increasing ethical considerability for the animals in question. Insofar as “we” imagine our humanity to be predicated on our capacity to think and abstract, “our” representation of those we perceive as “other” is an ethical act. I focus mainly on three very recent American novels—Laurence Gonzales’ *Lucy* (2010), Benjamin Hale’s *Evolution of Bruno Littlemore* (2011), and Sara Gruen’s *Ape House* (2010)—alongside representations of apes in Western primatology. The representations I look at are “anthropomorphic” in that they emphasize or bring out the *humanness* of nonhuman apes: in particular, and most importantly, these representations depict nonhuman apes as creatures capable of language and rationality—and as therefore admissible into the human sphere of ethical considerability.

The anthropomorphism of apes more so than other animals is difficult to dismiss as mere narrative effect, and is particularly threatening to the integrity of the “human.” Anthropomorphized apes, then, are highly political productions: they raise questions concerning the legitimacy and viability of the human/animal binary in the West. These representations are accordingly met with strategies of containment that work to (re)secure the dividing line between the human and the animal. Here I want to unpack the politics of both anthropomorphism and anthropodenial, in order to reveal the speciesism and speciousness of the human/animal binary, which both anthropomorphism and its denial ultimately depend upon and reinscribe. An intelligible examination of the political work that anthropomorphism does and the resistance that it incites depends upon taking *anthropomorphism* at its word, so to speak; ultimately, however, I take apart the term itself in an effort to unearth the

assumptions underlying it: this move is necessary if we wish to expose the “human” as an ungrounded concept, and the “moral” code that revolves around it as accordingly corrupt.

There is a longstanding tendency in Western literary studies to read animals as *other* others. As Wolfe puts it, speaking specifically of Hemingway criticism although the point is much more widely applicable, “[w]hat this situation has meant . . . is that the discourse of species, and with it the ethical problematics of our relations to nonhuman others, continues to be treated largely as if species is always a counter for some other discourse”—whether gender, race, or class (*Animal Rites* 124). The problems of race, class, gender, species, and so on, are undeniably to some extent parallel: different forms of oppression share strategies and feed off one another, and oppressed groups share an exclusion from a privileged subject position, which is imagined as the fully human; this makes oppressed groups “the same in their formal isomorphism as ‘outsides’ vis-à-vis the humanist symbolic” (159). However, as Wolfe reminds us, the discourses of, for example, “‘child,’ ‘animal,’ and ‘woman’ bear differentially distributed effects of that formal exclusion in social and material terms” (159). If we wish to gain an understanding of the particular effects on animals of this exclusion, and of the particular ways in which these effects are administered, mapping the problem of the animal onto another problem will not do. While allegorical or metaphorical readings of animals are not unproductive—indeed they point to the ways in which racism, sexism, classism, and so on often make use of the more acceptable discourse of speciesism in order to enact their oppressions—they elide what is literally depicted, and so the problem of the animal. As Geoffrey Winthrop-Young has put it, “the text disappears under what it is supposed to represent.” Because my concern here lies precisely with animals, I resist taking

the literary animals I read as metaphors for something else. This is not to say that the representation of animals in my primary texts is not also about something else; the authors in fact continually push metaphorical readings: their apes are written into race, age, and disability discourses, which clothe them as *human* others and efface their difference as *nonhuman*. But insofar as the novels feature animals—nonhuman apes are, after all, main characters in each of them—these texts are also, and importantly, about animals themselves; it is this signification that I pursue here.

As a deconstructive project, the purpose of this thesis is to unravel critical problems in the dominant system of Western ethics. I do not offer definitive answers as to what ethical response ought to look like beyond this system. I do hope, however, to contribute to developing a space for a posthumanist ethics where difference amongst animals, human and non, is configured neither metaphorically nor hierarchically, but is attended to openly, generously, sincerely, and inevitably with endless difficulty.

## **1.1 Overview**

My thesis begins with a rundown of the involved production of the “human” as speaking and reasoning being in the Western tradition. I show how the “human” and the “animal” designate discrepant ethical worth and not stable biological difference: in other words, why deconstructing the “human” *matters*. I then move into a sustained examination of the politics anthropomorphism in Western culture, and in particular in recent American ape fiction. Here I suggest that serious anthropomorphism poses a real, if anthropocentric and therefore limited, threat to the human/animal binary. Finally, I show that the human, too, is an

anthropomorphous animal—and that the concept of anthropomorphism is itself problematic, since it assumes an already-given human. I jostle this assumption—not to suggest that the human is fundamentally protean, but rather to show that the Western human, as an ethical concept, is *ethically* untenable.

## ***2. Homo Sapiens = Homo Loquens***

*That's what separated human from animal: speech.*

– Congo (*the film*)

“If custom is our second nature, nature is our first custom,” announced the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins in a talk he gave at the University of British Columbia in March 2011. He meant that the very idea of human nature is a product of culture. His conclusion—“the only human nature is culture”—was as glib and elusive as his title—“Only Apes Have ‘Human Nature.’” Sahlins has been making this point since the 70s: the human is defined precisely by its lack of nature, its freedom from biology. “[While] the human world depends on . . . the whole panoply of organic characteristics supplied by biological evolution,” wrote Sahlins in 1976, “its freedom from biology consists in just the capacity to give these their own sense” (qtd. in Corbey 135). According to Sahlins, humans achieved their control over nature through “the symbolic event,” which introduced “a radical discontinuity between culture and nature” (135).<sup>v</sup> Sahlins is one voice in an indefatigable Western tradition that makes the capacity for language central to what it means to be human as opposed to animal. Language, in this tradition, both evidences and makes possible rational thought with it correlates: dignity, subjectivity, morality, “freedom,” and so on—all those qualities deemed ethically significant above and beyond whatever ethically significant traits animals might also have—the capacity to suffer, for example.

In a devastatingly influential proof, Descartes appealed to the human ability to speak in attempt to show that humans are the only beings who think. Descartes was not, however, the first to reason that man’s exemption from the category of animal hinged on language.

Aristotle, for one, maintained in *The History of Animals* that the “power [of language] is peculiar to man.” But Descartes marks the beginning of an ongoing philosophical tradition that defines the human as the speaking and thinking being against the animal as deprived of both speech and thought. In *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, Derrida delineates what several major figures in the Western philosophical tradition have said about the animal in relation to the human: “Kant, Heidegger, Levinas, and Lacan share, vis-à-vis ‘the animal,’” writes Derrida,

a considerable number of axioms, prejudices, presumptions, or presuppositions. . . . they, like Descartes, think that in contrast to us humans—a difference that is determined by this fact—the animal neither speaks nor responds, that its capacity to produce signs is foreign to language and limited or fixed by a program. (89)<sup>vi</sup>

The idea that language is the distinguishing factor of the human is not unique to philosophy—and is taken up with particular rigor in the human and social sciences from the nineteenth century onward. We might attribute this increase, at least in part, to the rise of evolutionary theory, which advanced a materialist conception of the human. Confronted with its material existence, as well as the possibility of a universe without God, the human clings desperately to language and rational thought as means of separating itself from the beasts. The nineteenth-century biologist Ernst Haeckel maintained that all nonhuman animals lacked “the most important human characteristics: articulate speech and the formation of higher concepts connected therewith” (qtd. in Corbey, 65). The German philologist Max Müller, Haeckel’s contemporary, likewise held that “language and reason formed an impassable barrier between humans and all other animals” (Radick 22). Thomas Huxley—despite or precisely *because of* his insistence on the evolutionary proximity of humans and apes—

maintained, “with Cuvier, that the possession of articulate speech is the grand distinctive character of man” (Huxley 122).

A human exceptionalism grounded in language has more or less persisted across the disciplines. In the 1990s, the taxonomist Phillip Tobias maintained that language was “the cardinal factor in the evolution of the human brain, intellect and spirit” (qtd. in Corbey 102). The anthropologist Ian Tattersall argued at length in *Becoming Human* (1997) that you cannot have thought without language and vice versa, and that the pair of super-traits is exclusively human. Foucault said as much in *The Order of Things* (1966): “It is the man-made sign that draws the dividing-line between man and animals; that transforms imagination into voluntary memory, spontaneous attention into reflection, and instinct into rational knowledge” (62). In the Western tradition broadly construed, “*Homo sapiens* is *homo loquens*” (Corbey 55). As Judith Kiriazis and Con N. Slobodchikoff summarize,

The assumption that language is a necessary condition of thought, and that both are exclusive properties of the human species, was a prevalent view among philosophers such as Hobbes, Herder, Wilhelm von Humboldt, and Hegel . . . . Linguists, biologists, and philosophers assume that language is what distinguishes the human species from other animals. . . . Of all capabilities, language remains *the* difference separating human beings from other creatures. (365 – 6)

I want to emphasize here that this is a Western, and at root European, tradition. Other cultures—situated both in the West and the East—conceive humans and animals differently. As John Sorenson notes in *Ape* (2009), “[i]n cultures where humans could routinely observe apes, some very different world views emerged” (43). For example, in the Malaysian Dyak



tradition, the orangutan is a kind of person; “the term ‘orang-utan’ in Malay has been variously translated as ‘reasonable being of the woods’ or ‘old person of the forest’ (43). Pamela Asquith indicates that, in contrast to the Euro-Western definition of the human or person as thinking being, “the possibility of entering into social relations is central to the concept of personhood among the Ojibwa Indians of North America, and one can do this with ‘nonhuman persons’” (28). Also in contrast to the Western tradition, Japanese culture views “emotionality rather than rationality . . . as central to the human/animal distinction” (28). Furthermore, Corbey has pointed out that the Eastern traditions of Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Shintoism do not assume “the sharp boundary between humans and other primates present in Western traditions” (32). I am not suggesting here that a solution to the problem of the Western human/animal binary is to be found in other cultures that do not make such a division, or that configure it differently. In *Primate Visions*, Haraway warns us against the kind of Orientalist grasping that locates the solution to oppressive and unenlightened Western binaries in foreign places. Moving beyond the human/animal binary in the West will require a rigorous dissection of that tradition, rather than its easy supplantation by an apparently more promising one. My aim here, then, is not to offer alternatives to the Western configuration of the human against the animal, but rather to put the binary on the operating table and begin to take it apart from there.

## **2.1 Emergent Moral Properties**

The subordination of animals to human interests in the West depends upon a categorical, but of course also morally pertinent, distinction between human beings on the one hand, and all animals on the other. It makes sense, then, that it is not language *per se*, for any of these

thinkers, which divides humans and animals. Rather, language is taken as evidence of, and/or necessary for, some factor or group of factors more elusive but at the same time more important than language itself. For Kant, with language comes understanding, and consequently autonomy, dignity, and liberty—more specifically, language enables human beings to participate in justice. Tattersall paradoxically implies that the human capacity for language—which he configures as “natural” insofar as it is an evolutionary product that defines the human as a species—essentially frees humans from the strictures of nature. “Other species may exploit the outside world with great efficiency, as we saw in the case of the chimpanzees,” writes Tattersall, “but they still remain in essence passive subjects [objects, in other words] and observers of that world. Even the Neanderthals, remarkable as they may have been, were in all likelihood hardly more liberated from this condition” (177). Human beings express and exercise their unique freedom through language; freedom, though, is not reducible to language itself, but is rather something ineffable—and to this extent irrefutable as a basis for the purported superiority of the human. As Tattersall remarks, “it’s self-evident that no observation on nonhuman primates will ever document a sufficient cause of human intelligence. . . . Humans are still humans, after all, and chimpanzees still chimpanzees” (48). The circle of logic that has come to define the human in the West is so very tight and obtuse that one barely finds a way in.

The belief that only human beings have language, and that therefore human beings are categorically superior to all other life is, as Derrida has it, “first of all a thesis regarding the animal, the animal deprived of logos” (27). The Western humanist tradition is concerned with language precisely as a means of separating human beings from all other animals: it only really *matters* that humans have language because animals do not. “[L]anguage is so

necessary and natural for the human being,” writes Agamben, “that without it man can neither truly exist nor be thought of as existing. Either man has language, or he simply is not”” (*The Open: Man and Animal* 35). Conversely, given that the human is defined against the animal—as the being that has what the animal lacks—if the animal were to be given language, then the human would be in serious difficulty. The “very nature” of the human, Agamben remarks, is “at stake in language” (*The Sacrament of Language* 69).

“Language,” as Haraway explains, “is not innocent in our primate order. Indeed, it is said that language is the tool of human self-construction, that which cuts us off from the garden of mute and dumb animals and leads us to name things, to force meanings, to create oppositions, and so craft human culture” (*Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* 81). Language marks the ascendancy of the human over the animal. In the popular story of *Tarzan* by Edgar Rice Burroughs, originally published in 1912 and retold innumerable times and in various forms since, it is Tarzan’s essentially human mind—evidenced in his deployment of both tools and language—that grants him dominion over the animals and earns him the title “Lord of the Apes.” As Eric Cheyfitz has aptly noted, “Tarzan’s search for identity . . . is a linguistic search, in which he is literally translated from ape into man” (351): in other words, from a passive part of “nature” to an active, self-determining subject—who can declare himself “Lord of the Apes,” and enact that role. It is language that gets us out of “nature” and into “culture,” and secures for the human a place within the sphere of ethics.

If one takes seriously developments in the zoological sciences, and in particular primatology, it is actually difficult *not* to accede language to nonhuman animals. Ape language acquisition research (ALR)—which seeks to teach human language to nonhuman apes—has been ongoing in the U.S. since the mid-twentieth century, and has shown these

animals to be capable of at least rudimentary symbolic language, and even basic syntax.<sup>vii</sup>

Several thinkers, most notably those associated with The Great Ape Project, have argued that a handful of animals—namely the great apes—should be included within the human sphere of moral considerability, by virtue of their demonstrable linguistic capacity and related cognitive depth.<sup>viii</sup> The appearance of talking apes calls into question the belief that language is exclusively human, unsettling the whole human superiority complex based on that belief. The solution posed by the Great Ape Project, however—to include the great apes in the ethical sphere of humanity—covers over the fundamental problems with the Western “human,” which simply expanding its purview will not resolve. I think, instead, that we should work to develop the deconstructive force of nonhuman language research subjects—which might mean, to begin with, putting forth the animals as testimony to the deficiency of the human/animal binary. I develop this idea further in my study of the chimpanzees Nim and Washoe in Chapter 4 below.

## 2.2 Genetics, When it Comes to Ethics

*With a tenacious prejudice perhaps connected to their profession, scientists have always considered anthropogenesis to be a problem of an exclusively cognitive order, as if the becoming human of man were solely a question of intelligence and brain size and not also one of ethos, as if intelligence and language did not also and above all pose problems of an ethical and political order.*

– Agamben, *The Sacrament of Language*

The deconstruction of the Western human and animal would not be a worthwhile project if these concepts did not have serious ethical consequences. Nor would the deconstruction be worthwhile if it were impossible—i.e., if the concepts were actually essential or otherwise immutable. The *human* and the *animal*, however, are ethically loaded and biologically

un(der)determined. In other words, *humans* and *animals* in the West are cultural productions and not biological necessities. As taxonomist Matt Cartmill puts it, ““the human-animal boundary . . . divides the moral universe into subjects and objects, separating responsible agents with rights and duties from mere things that we can use for our own purposes”” (qtd. in Corbey 169). The Western human/animal divide is not empirically grounded, but rather produced through material and discursive practices that actively and continuously construct the human and the animal as categorically distinct, *in spite of* the biological contiguity and indeed overlap of the life forms parsed in this divide: which is why arguments for the rights of nonhuman primates that appeal to the genetic proximity of these animals to their human relatives inevitably fall flat.

In his contribution to The Great Ape Project’s inaugural essay collection, Jared Diamond focuses on the genetic similarity of human beings and the other great apes. He indicates that “humans differ from both common chimps and pygmy chimps in about 1.6 per cent of their (our) DNA, and share 98.4%” (95); he then asks: “Do the new results about our genetic distance from chimps have any broader implications, besides technical questions of taxonomic names?” Promptly answering his own question, Diamond avers that “[p]robably the most important implications concern how we think about the place of humans and apes in the universe” (99). Sorenson summarizes recent scientific debates over the genetic proximity of human and nonhuman apes:

Geneticists have estimated that our similarity with chimpanzees and bonobos is over 98 per cent, meaning that we are closer to these animals than either is to gorillas or orangutans. However, Roy Britten at the California Institute of Technology challenges this, arguing that measurements of indels (insertions or

deletions of DNA sections) result in similarities of only about 95 per cent. Based on 2003 studies, Morris Goodman of Wayne State University found humans and chimpanzees were 99.4 per cent identical in functionally important DNA. (13)

From the point of view of Western ethics, though, it makes no significant difference whether we share 95% or 99.9% of our DNA with the other great apes. I'm relatively confident that, even if abnormalities were to be found in my genetic code upon investigation, and even if these abnormalities made me closer genetically to chimpanzees than humans, I would not be cast out from the human community, and put in a zoo or a biomedical facility. Determining the genetic discrepancy between human beings and other apes is, I am sure, a worthwhile endeavor in the field of genetics. I doubt, however, whether the percentage will, or *should* for that matter, affect the degree of moral consideration that human beings accord nonhuman apes. As H. Peter Steeves has it,

the anthropological/genetic definition of "human" is lacking because it fails to reflect what we typically mean when we say "human." Defining "human" by means of . . . genetic tests capable of being run only by a few experts in our society is just as unfulfilling as defining "human" as a creature with a chin. There may be nothing inherently wrong with such a definition, but there is a strong sense that it fails to convey the essence of what (we think) we mean by "human."

(238)

Insofar as the human is an ethical concept, the possession of a particular sequence of DNA is an inadequate justification for inclusion in the category. The distribution of life into the categories of human and animal is based on ethical decisions rather than biological findings, which is why, as we will see, anthropomorphism is an ethico-political issue.

### 3. Politics of Anthropomorphism

*[O]ur discussions about anthropomorphism in fact are discussions about our perceived place in nature.*

– Pamela Asquith, “Why Anthropomorphism Is Not Metaphor”

Bacon’s *Novum Organum* contains a famous and influential treatise against anthropomorphism; he suggests that the tendency to anthropomorphize is a symptom of narrowmindedness or parochialism, which inhibits us from seeing the world as it really is. “[T]he human understanding is like a false mirror,” he writes, “which, receiving rays irregularly, distorts and discolours the nature of things by mingling its own nature with it.” He goes on to suggest that the error of seeing elements of the human in the nonhuman has “strangely defiled philosophy.” Despite Bacon’s arguments, anthropomorphic animals did not become much of a concern in the West until much later, when the question of whether or not nonhuman animals were capable of language inspired impassioned debate in the nineteenth century. In *The Simian Tongue*, Gregory Radick shows that the major doctrines generated in the Victorian language debates remain widely accepted and generally unquestioned today: “These doctrines are that language arises through the coordinated activity of several parts of the human brain, and that anthropomorphic interpretations of animal behavior—attributing to animal minds the ideas that would cause humans to behave thus—are unscientific” (50). The late-nineteenth-century psychologist Lloyd Morgan advanced a monumentally influential principle for strict parsimony in the interpretation of animal behavior; according to Morgan’s brand of parsimony, we must never attribute a higher (or more human) faculty than necessary to animals. Explanations of animal behavior ought to appeal, rather, to the “lowest” or least complex faculty that could possibly have produced the behavior under study. “In practice,” Radick explains, Morgan’s principle

has meant supposing that animals do not reason about means and ends, but adapt themselves to their worlds through blind trial and error; or, in the case of animal vocalizations, that they serve not as symbols, representing ideas, but as involuntary accompaniments of emotion. (5)

Radick traces the longstanding success of Morgan's canon, suggesting that his prescriptions have become general and largely unquestioned practice in the Western sciences: "it now takes some effort to see [the canon] as anything other than the crystallization of scientific good sense" (52). In *The New Anthropomorphism* (1992), the ethologist J.S. Kennedy presents what might be viewed as an updated version of Morgan's canon. Kennedy holds that "our penchant for anthropomorphic interpretations of animal behavior is a drag on the scientific study of the causal mechanisms of it" (5). In Kennedy's account, anthropomorphism is indicative of sloppy thinking and leads to fallacious conclusions. He argues for a return to a more Cartesian view of animals. "If the study of animal behavior is to mature as a science," insists Kennedy, "the process of liberation from the delusions of anthropomorphism must go on" (5). Kennedy's work attests to the "widespread taboo" against anthropomorphism, which continues to pervade Western science (Griffen xiii).

In *Thinking With Animals*, Elliot Sober suggests that the injunction of parsimony voiced by Morgan and many after him is misplaced: the idea that "we should prefer attributing 'less sophisticated' abilities to nonhuman organisms over 'more sophisticated' abilities when both would suffice to explain the behavior we observe" neglects the evolutionary case for homology, i.e., shared ancestry: "If two derived behaviors are homologous," explains Sober, "then the hypothesis that they are produced by the same



proximate mechanism is more parsimonious than the hypothesis that they are produced by different proximate mechanisms” (106). This nuanced version of parsimony sanctions anthropomorphism as a reasonable interpretive method—at least when it comes to the behaviour of animals who are evolutionarily proximal to human beings. As de Waal maintains, “anthropomorphism assumes similar experiences in humans and animals, which is exactly what one would expect in case of shared underlying processes” (*Primates and Philosophers* 66). de Waal interrogates the logic behind the censure of anthropomorphism; he claims that anthropomorphism does not so much threaten good science as it threatens the boundary between humans and other animals, which human exceptionalism depends upon (67). As Christine Korsgaard points out,

it is important to remember that human beings have a vested interest in what de Waal calls ‘anthropodenial.’ We eat nonhuman animals, wear them, perform painful experiments on them, hold them captive for purposes of our own—sometimes in unhealthy conditions—we make them work, and we kill them at will. (103)

de Waal concedes that “[a]nthropomorphism is a possibility among many,” but insists that it is “one to be taken seriously given that it applies intuitions about ourselves to creatures very much like us” (67). His approach to anthropomorphism—which I will call *anthropo-insistence*—ultimately comes with strong ethical implications. “In the end,” he writes, “we must ask: What kind of risk are we willing to take, the risk of underestimating animal mental life or the risk of overestimating it?” (67) In other words, when it comes to the delegation of traits that affect how animals are seen and treated in Western society, isn’t generosity to be preferred over conservatism?

### 3.1 Serious Anthropomorphism

There is a significant difference between the kind of anthropomorphism that I am interested in here, i.e., *serious* anthropomorphism, and the unserious anthropomorphism found, for example, in Disney films. Michael Bavidge and Ian Ground call this latter mode of anthropomorphism “naïve,” and suggest that it does not enter the academic debates around anthropomorphism because it is not meant to be taken seriously. “More than one artistic genre exploits the guileless promiscuity of the imagination,” they explain (93). “Children’s literature is full of rabbits that wear waistcoats and pigs that build houses. . . . One would have to be in a very puritanical frame of mind to object, in principle, to such genres” (93). Naïve anthropomorphism is not *about* nonhuman beings; rather, it expropriates these beings in order to make points about humanity. This kind of anthropomorphism is allegorical and unrealistic; the animals, trains, what have you, that are given human characteristics are mere media for the reflection of human intentions, interests, and/or values. Disney’s menagerie of anthropomorphized animals is not meant to convince us that animals actually think or speak. As John Andrew Fisher contends in “The Myth of Anthropomorphism,”

I don’t have to believe that frogs are persons in order to understand the character of Kermit the frog any more than I have to *believe* that trains are persons in order to understand the Little Engine that could. We can say that fictions are anthropomorphic when they represent animals as more like humans than in fact they are. But spectators are often not taken in by such representations, nor are they influenced by them. Even children know that raisins aren’t really like the California Raisins, and that trains are not alive. (107)

People are generally not troubled by naïve anthropomorphism because it poses no real threat to the categories of the human and the animal as established in Western culture.

Serious anthropomorphism, on the other hand, *does* threaten these categories, with the suggestion that nonhuman animals really are like human beings in important, ethically relevant ways. Each of the three recent novels I take up below—*Lucy*, *The Evolution of Bruno Littlemore*, and *Ape House*—is seriously anthropomorphic in its representation of nonhuman apes; consequently, each novel compels a consideration of the ethically important similarities between human and nonhuman apes, and a reexamination of our relationship to these animals.

### 3.2 The Human in *Lucy*

*In the most important ways . . . Lucy is just like you and me.*  
— Gonzales, *Lucy*

In Laurence Gonzales' novel *Lucy*, the eponymous character is a genetic hybrid: she is part bonobo, part human. The narrative turns on the question of whether she should be called an animal or a human—whether she should be granted human rights, or “rights” under the Animal Welfare Act. It's clear from the beginning, however, that Lucy is indeed human. When the anthropologist Jenny Lowe discovers her in the Congo jungle, Lucy already speaks several languages and is well-versed in English literature. We find out that Lucy is the daughter of the highly-cultured primatologist Donald Stone, who is based near Jenny in the jungle. When civil war forces Jenny out of her research site, she runs to Stones' home base, where she finds the orphaned child; both of Lucy's parents—her human father and her bonobo mother—have been shot and killed. Books are “splayed open” all over the place:

“Shakespeare. Blake. Milton. Mary Shelley. Melville”—evidence of the girl’s erudition (6). On the plane out of the Congo, Lucy tells stories and quotes literary classics, exhibiting her refined humanity, and assuring Jenny that taking her out of the Congo was the right thing to do. As Jenny says to the Englishman David Meece, who questions her decision: “Reciting Shakespeare and Kipling? What am I supposed to do? Abandon her?” (17).

Lucy’s humanity hinges on language and the rationality that comes with it. Growing up amongst the bonobos in the jungle, she learns very early on that she “was alone, apart in some essential way” (206). In her autobiography, Lucy traces her acquisition of language and rationality, and the accompanying realization that she was not an animal:

Soon the man put an instrument in my hand, and I began to draw. It was no more than scribbling at first, and some of my brothers and sisters did it, too. But then something happened. The man taught me letters, and the other children could never make letters, only scribbles. Then the letters became words, and it was clear to me that the other children would never be like me. I was no longer like them, either. . . . At last the words became thoughts, and a great gulf had opened between me and my siblings that could never be crossed again. . . . I remember one day when I was sitting in the sun writing. . . . I looked out across the clearing where our little hut was and saw several of the bonobos sunning and playing. . . . Then I looked down at my own hand with the pencil in it, and the words on the page. And for the first time that I can remember I had this thought: I’m human. (206 – 7)

Lucy identifies language and rationality as the essential dividing factors between the world of the human and the world of the animal. Once in the U.S., where she faces a trial that would decide whether or not she is human, the hybrid reasons that she could secure her place in

humanity by writing her autobiography. “To write a book seemed so essentially human,” she reflects. “If she could write a book, a real book, then no one could ever say that she wasn’t human enough” (158).

Jenny learns about Lucy’s genetic heritage from Stone’s detailed notebooks, which trace his daughter’s development from inception. Jenny is terrified by the thought that Lucy is not technically—that is, genetically—human, and agonizes over the legal implications that this might have for the girl, who in every meaningful sense of the word is obviously *human*. As Stone indicates in his notebooks, ““Lucy has become a whole and genuine person”” (49). We certainly do not need to be convinced. But American society, in Gonzales’ vision, apparently does. Lucy’s “real” identity becomes public knowledge only when she is infected by a virus that *Homo sapiens* cannot contract. A trial is subsequently held to establish whether Lucy is a human or an animal. The Democrat Senator Martin Cochrain, who is on the “good” side fighting for Lucy’s rights as a human being, alleges that Lucy ““is fully endowed with human qualities and is a delightful, intelligent girl”” (188). He subsequently introduces Lucy as the first witness, explaining how he wants “to make sure that everyone . . . sees firsthand what a remarkable young lady she is” (188). Lucy’s “human qualities” become clear during her testimony—which culminates in a dramatic appeal to her possession of language and culture, and specifically her literary knowledge. After reciting, verbatim and “without hesitation,” a passage from *The Merchant of Venice*, she points to the unbridgeable gap between the categories of human and animal—and claims a place for herself in the former: ““if you put all the bonobos in the world into a room for all the ages of history,”” she concludes, ““[a]nd if you gave them all the training you could give. They would still never quote Shakespeare to you. I can. I will. I do”” (191). As Lucy explains later, the *Merchant of*

*Venice* quote “‘just came out’” (192): culture really is second nature for Lucy. Which is why her difficulty and ultimate failure to secure human rights in America is so preposterous. It makes a joke of conservatives, who apparently cannot see beyond the genetic code. “[T]he term ‘human,’” as Corbey remarks, “carries much more weight than membership in the biological genus *Homo*” (102). I would venture to say that this is the case regardless of one’s political affiliation, and regardless of where one stands on other social issues. (In the novel those against Lucy’s rights as a human are also racist and homophobic.)

The Republican Senator Steven Rhodes introduces a bill that defines “a human being as having the genetic profile that was decoded from the human genome by the National Institutes of Health in 2003” (170). It is called “‘the Lucy Bill, because if it passes, she’ll officially be a nonhuman animal and won’t have human rights’” (170). The bill does pass; “‘Lucy is officially not a human,’” and can legally be treated as an animal (249). This event consolidates the horror of an intolerant American society—a society that refuses to dole out human rights liberally because it fails to conceive of difference positively. This is the easy liberal humanist message that, I think, we are meant to derive from the story.<sup>ix</sup> Once the Lucy Bill is passed, Lucy flees American society. In the forest outside of Chicago, she finds herself once again amongst animals, but she reassures herself of her fundamental difference from them, which amounts to a categorical superiority: “Her advantage was that she could think. I’m human, she told herself. I have logic and reason” (213). Despite her ability to think, however, Lucy is captured by government agents; they shoot her with a dart, rendering her unconscious, and transport her to the Alamogordo Military Base, where research is conducted on nonhuman primates for military purposes.<sup>x</sup> Lucy wakes up “wet and shivering on a concrete floor” (223). When a man comes by to hose down Lucy’s cage, she demands to

know what happened to her clothes, and why she is in a cage. “[Y]ou’re in a cage because you’re a monkey,” he explains. ““They seen your genes. They seen ’em. They know what’s what. They’re scientists”” (226). Gonzales shows here just how woefully inadequate a genetic definition of the human is; at the same time, he implicitly sanctions violence against *animals*. The novel suggests that what is happening to Lucy is ethically reprehensible precisely and only because she is *human* and not *animal*.

Gonzales makes a parallel point earlier in the novel when Lucy is refused admittance on a plane because of her interspecific hybridity. “[W]e can’t let her through,” asserts an airport security guard. ““All animals have to be caged and put in the luggage compartment. . . . You’ll have to . . . make proper arrangements for transporting animals”” (159). An anonymous woman watching the scene steps up and makes a call for human justice: ““You moron,”” she asserts. ““This girl is more human than you are. Let her through this minute”” (159). Implicit here is an ironic condemnation of the animal as less sophisticated, less tolerant, less ethical even, than the human; Gonzales suggests that it is the animal in the man which leads him to deny the hybrid’s humanity. It turns out that the woman is a lawyer, the suggestion here being perhaps that she is qualified to make judgments on who gets to be called human and who does not. It would, without doubt, be morally wrong to ship Lucy in the luggage compartment; that isn’t a question the novel raises. After all, it is only the religious nut—““You’re an abomination before Christ,”” he whispers to Lucy. ““You should be put to sleep”” (159)—with a history of racial profiling, who denies Lucy a human place on the plane. Gonzales establishes from the beginning of the novel that Lucy is a human being, which means that she is not an animal—regardless of what her genes indicate—and that is why it would be inhumane to do with *her* what we do with animals all the time.

The coalition of anthropodeniers in *Lucy* is comprised of evangelicals, racists, neo-Nazis, Republicans, and otherwise irrational (in the logic of the novel inhuman or *animalistic*) people. At Lucy's trial, Senator Rhodes appeals to the fear of bestiality and interspecific breeding to make an argument for Lucy's exclusion from human society (190). Some people suspect that Jenny herself is guilty of bestiality, and that she invented the story of discovering the girl in the jungle. Jenny receives an anonymous letter in the mail to this effect, which dubs her an "Evil Whore" (172). "I don't believe there ever was a Dr. Stone," it reads:

May you burn in hell for the sin of bestiality. You not only lay with a monkey, you allowed that demon child, spawn of Satan, to fester in your womb and then to enter our sacred nation when you could have left it to die in the jungle where you both belong. (172)

An anthropologist with the University of Chicago, Jenny is asked to take a leave of absence from her academic post until her role in the production of Lucy has been determined. As the department chair explains,

"there are ethical issues here about the provenance of this . . . well, about where exactly Lucy came from and who is responsible for the fact of her existence. . . . We're talking about the issue of whether you were involved in Lucy's creation, or whether you simply stumbled upon the work of your colleague, Dr. Stone, as you claim." (179)

The Provost clarifies: "'The creation of a human-animal hybrid is a serious breach of ethics and probably illegal as well. . . . we have to determine whether or not you actually gave birth to Lucy'" (179). Lucy was planning to attend the University of Chicago herself, and had



already been accepted; but once her genetic identity is revealed, her acceptance is suspended. One preacher refers to Lucy as “the demon seed in the form of a cross between a human and an ape” (219). He argues that “the only way to save humanity is to sacrifice Lucy” (220). In a sense, the preacher here is correct. The production of a human/animal hybrid compromises the integrity of humanity by breaching the abyssal divide, maintained in the West both discursively and materially, between the human and the animal. Lucy’s presence in human society constitutes a radical sort of terrorism where every individual’s very humanity is under constant threat.

Gonzales’ novel is clearly critical of those who deny Lucy admittance into the society of humanity. At the same time, though, Gonzales exhibits a more subtle level of unquestioned anthropodenial, which prohibits his novel from seriously shaking the grounds of the human/animal binary. Throughout the narrative, it is taken for granted that the creation of a human/animal hybrid is, in the first place, morally reprehensible. The novel maintains, however, that in the same way a child conceived in an act of rape should not be punished for the crime, the hybrid—considering anyway that she has turned out to be “a perfectly lovely young lady” (165)—should not be punished for the heinous act of her creator. As Lucy pleads, “[s]omeone made me without my consent” (157). In other words, she shouldn’t be made to carry the blame for her father’s atrocity. As the Stanford evolutionary biologist in the novel attests, “[Lucy’s] father did something reprehensible, but that in no way detracts from her value as a human being” (186).

Furthermore, despite Jenny’s acceptance of Lucy as a surrogate daughter (or precisely because of this acceptance), Jenny resists perceiving Lucy as a hybrid. When she first encounters Stone’s notebooks, and there the truth about Lucy’s heritage, Jenny’s “whole

body revolt[s] at the idea” (48). While she is fascinated by Stone’s project as a scientific experiment, she observes that “there was something twisted and indecent in what he had done” (50). Jenny diminishes the hybrid’s difference, rejecting Lucy’s own suggestion that she is not human but rather something “completely new” (53). ““You are human. You’re as human as I am. . . . There are all kinds of people. You’re human,”” Jenny insists (52). Jenny’s resistance to thinking of Lucy as a hybrid creature, as something other than human, goes beyond the fight for Lucy’s human rights. For Jenny, the truth of the girl’s parentage is outright “unthinkable” (62). To the extent that Lucy’s humanity is taken for granted in the novel, the attribution of anthropomorphism to the representation of the hybrid might be seen as misplaced. Arguably, the representation of Lucy can only be considered anthropomorphic if we assume that she is not a human being in the first place. The novel’s insistence that she *is* amounts to an insidious form of anthropodenial, which rejects the idea that someone *nonhuman* might warrant ethical consideration alongside *humans*.

### 3.3 The Human Tongue in *Bruno Littlemore*

*It was a word! It was—it was my own name!*  
— Bruno Littlemore

Hale’s *Evolution of Bruno Littlemore* tells the fantastical story of a chimpanzee named Bruno who possesses exceptional language abilities, which accordingly exempt him from the degradation and monotony both of the zoo and the research lab. As Bruno himself attests (the novel constitutes his autobiography), “[t]he miracle of my fate is that I was offered my release from just such a miserable life by the salvation of language” (26). Bruno is identified as an unusually bright—i.e., unusually *human*—chimp at a young age. He is consequently

relocated from the zoo where he was born to an animal behaviour lab at the University of Chicago to undergo extensive language acquisition studies. Initially, Bruno is left alone in the lab overnight, locked in a cage; his remarkable progress, however, earns him a place in his trainer Lydia Littlemore's home, and eventually in her bed. Bruno's linguistic skills, which culminate in his mastery of English, effectively enable him to negotiate society as a human being—and to avert life in a cage, zoo, or lab.

Hale's chimpanzee narrator is a language research subject who outgrows the role. His progress with human language goes far beyond the skills demonstrated by any ape involved in language acquisition research in the West. The danger he poses to human society is consequently more severe. Lydia ultimately loses her academic position at the University of Chicago as a result of her response to the talking chimpanzee. Her relationship with Bruno undermines the construction of apes as research subjects, and instead puts them, if, that is, we read Bruno metonymically, on level with the researchers themselves: such a move threatens Western science, dependent as it is upon the use of animals as research subjects.

Once it becomes public knowledge that a human female and a male chimpanzee are cohabiting in the heart of Chicago and, moreover, that they are involved in a sexual relationship and, moreover still, that the human female is pregnant, a vicious protest mounts against them. "For a long and obnoxious time," narrates Bruno, "Lydia and I could not leave our apartment without having to push our way through a slobbering throng. . . . Sometimes . . . early in the morning, there would be hundreds of them" (332). The novel is clearly haunted by U.S. anti-miscegenation sentiment, and pushes here for an allegorical reading of Bruno and Lydia's relationship. The Reverend Milton Jebediah Hartley III, who "was always, *always* there," leads the anthropodeniers in their vitriolic assault on Lydia and Bruno (334).

The Reverend carries a megaphone into which he recites asininities from the Bible:

“NEITHER SHALT THOU LIE WITH ANY BEAST TO DEFILE THYSELF THEREWITH! . . . NEITHER SHALL ANY WOMAN STAND BEFORE A BEAST TO LIE DOWN THERETO: IT IS CONFUSION! DEFILE NOT YE YOURSELVES IN ANY OF THESE THINGS!” and so on (335). Lydia and Bruno’s relationship degrades the human/animal distinction. The protest against this corruption culminates, appropriately, in a brutal assault on Lydia: a man breaks into her bedroom, tears the hybrid fetus out of her, and, as if the message were not clear enough, writes a passage from Leviticus on the wall: “AND IF A WOMAN LIES WITH ANY ANIMAL, YOU SHALL KILL BOTH THE WOMAN AND THE ANIMAL. THEY MUST BE PUT TO DEATH. THEIR BLOOD SHALL BE UPON THEM” (366). Hale’s representation of the fundamentalist Christian anthropodeniers amounts to something of a caricature, which nonetheless points to a real fear of transgression and corruption of the human/animal boundary in Western society.

At the same time, however, it is Bruno’s humanity, marked by his linguistic—i.e., human—mind that makes his relationship with Lydia possible. Even as an infant, Bruno is set apart from his fellow chimpanzees, and fashioned as ontologically more human than animal. Recalling how scientists would sometimes visit the zoo to conduct language experiments on his mother, Bruno compares his own inexplicable cognizance of events with his mother’s dumb incomprehension. “They’re speaking to my mother,” he says:

She isn’t even curious about what they’re saying. But I am. I remember my urgent curiosity, I remember listening to the burbling waves of vocalization streaming from the mouths of the humans. . . . I remember even beginning to feel at home with the sinuous ribbonlike rhythms of human conversation fluttering in and out of my ears,

trickling like cool water over the smooth stone of my brain, carving designs into my infantile and infinitely malleable consciousness. (38-40)

His mother, on the other hand, he describes as “a creature of . . . intellectual poverty”; an abyssal fissure divides her own limited cognition from the sophisticated mind of the human. Bruno postulates that, in his mother’s perception, the computer used in the language experiments “must have simply been some glowing totemic god-in-a-box that chose to distribute peanut M&Ms at times according only to the dictate of its unknowable whimsy” (39). “I’m sure,” he asserts, “she was doing little else besides randomly punching the screen and praying for her chocolate-covered peanuts” (39). Furthermore, Bruno maintains that he has never been interested sexually in his own species; he is, on the contrary, physically revolted by the young chimp, Celeste, with whom the zoo intended him to mate (41). “My erotic desires lay elsewhere,” he narrates, “yes, even then” (41):

So, as my father was loping around the habitat indiscriminately screwing any moist sluice he could find . . . I had always been secretly pining for humans, longing to someday get to slither between the legs of those dazzling sapiens sapiennes I saw clip-clocking past me all day. (42 – 3)

“And why *should* I have been, why should I ever have been sexually attracted to other chimps?” he asks (41). In other words, because it is so obvious that Bruno is *human*—and has been all along—it should come as no surprise that from the beginning he is drawn to humans and not chimps.

Bruno’s inexplicable but somehow innate humanity precedes his relationship with Lydia, rather than his relationship with Lydia producing his humanity (although the relationship certainly cultivates it). As Bruno attests, “I never felt—even very early on—I

never felt like I quite belonged to the same species as my mother or Celeste” (41). It is only if we cling to a biological definition of the human and the chimpanzee that Bruno’s relationship with Lydia amounts to bestiality. Bruno himself eschews the accusation (193). In his depiction of the anthropodeniers as intolerant lunatics, Hale is not suggesting that U.S. society should accept sexual relationships, and even the creation of offspring, between humans and chimpanzees; what he does suggest, however, is that the Western conception of the *human*, grounded as it is in language, should logically admit talking apes. Hale makes it clear that his eponymous chimpanzee deserves ethical consideration alongside human beings *regardless of* his biological species, and *because of* his linguistic capacity and related characteristics.

### 3.4 Animals Contained in *Ape House*

*He was surprised by how distinct, how differentiated, how almost human, they were.*

– Sara Gruen, *Ape House*

Sara Gruen’s *Ape House* depicts a group of bonobos competent in a variety of forms of language: they use American Sign Language, understand spoken English, and “speak” using a system of lexigrams. (Nonhuman apes do not have the vocal apparatus necessary to enunciate human language.) This system entails a set of arbitrary symbols presented on a computer screen; each symbol stands for a word in English, and when a symbol is tapped, the computer voices the corresponding word. Gruen’s talking animals are modeled after the increasingly famous (they have been featured recently on Oprah, CNN, and TED Talks) bonobos at the Great Ape Trust in Iowa (GAT), who communicate with each other and their human trainers using the same system of lexigrams that Gruen illustrates in *Ape House*. In

the novel, the journalist John Thigpen, involved in a series of articles on language acquisition in nonhuman apes, explains to his wife how “[t]he ape series [is] groundbreaking on so many levels—language, comprehension, culture. Evolution, a fundamental redefinition of the way we view other animals” (104). He reflects on the discomfort of experiencing real talking animals (104)—a discomfort undoubtedly derived from the discrepancy of ethical consideration accorded to *animals* and *humans* in Western society, and the violence against all animals as a group that our moral code permits. John reflects on the experience “of making eye contact with members of another species and the startling and discomfiting realization that there was something damned close to human in there. Of knowing not only that they understood every word you said but if moved to answer would do so” (215).

Gruen’s apes are configured as human with limitations, and the moral of the story is that they should be treated as such. The experiments done with the apes at the language lab in *Ape House*, like those at the GAT, are allegedly consensual. As Isabel attests, all of the research is conducted ““in a collaborative setting. There [are] no negative repercussions . . . no cages, no coercion”” (120). “The entire premise of the project,” notes John, “was that the apes were communicating because they wanted to” (62). When the apes are stolen from the lab for use in the entertainment industry, Isabel grieves as if she had lost her own children. As she explains to her fiancé, who is also the scientist ultimately in charge of the research project, starting over with new apes is not an option: ““they’re not hamsters!,”” she exclaims. ““We’re talking about Lola, Sam, Mbongo, Bonzi . . . they’re family! . . . Makena is pregnant—pregnant!”” (90). As Isabel avows, her team is ““committed to . . . provid[ing] great apes with dignity, autonomy, and the quality of life they so obviously deserve”” (295). Gruen’s apes are not animals. But they are not quite human either. They are still, after all,

research subjects locked inside a lab of sorts. They are not paid. They do not have the option of a different life, and they did not choose this one. No matter how well the apes are treated, these factors differentiate them from humans in the West.

The *Ape House* enclosure, modeled after that of the GAT, resembles a day-care or pre-school for rich kids more than a lab for animal research subjects. The bonobos enjoy a generous selection of toys within their enclosure, including computer games, dress-up clothes, and blow-up balls. The journalist John Thigpen arrives at the language lab with “a backpack for each [bonobo],” which he has “stuffed with . . . bouncy balls, fleece blankets, xylophones, Mr. Potato Heads, snacks, and anything else he thought *they might find amusing*” (5; my emphasis). After the visit, he reflects on their reaction, recalling how “the bonobos plucked ‘surprises’ from their backpacks, as eager as children emptying Christmas stockings” (33). In the Author’s Note at the end of the novel, Gruen talks about her first visit to the Great Ape Trust: “Like John,” she says, “I tried to stack my odds by getting backpacks and filling them with everything I thought an ape might find fun or tasty” (301). It’s not all fun and games at the Lab, though; discipline is necessary to maintain the apes in good health and good manners. They get the specialty coffee that they demand, but decaf and with skim milk. Moreover, the human researchers shelter the apes from inappropriate language. Isabel reprimands her young assistant, Celia, for using “colourful language” in front of them (16 – 7). They are also toilet-trained. It sounds a lot like bringing up children, although this is the perpetual state of things for the bonobos; they are never meant to grow-up.

In their downtime, Gruen’s bonobos enjoy watching television, and are particularly fond of the latest *Tarzan* film (12). The name “Tarzan” in Burroughs’ original novel denotes “white skin,” which in the narrative signifies humanness itself. The human Tarzan is adopted



as a baby and raised by a nonhuman ape; as he grows up, he proves his superior intelligence—not only over the apes, but over indigenous black people as well—and he ultimately becomes ruler of the ape troop. “White skin: lord of the apes”—a disconcertingly fitting tale for these displaced bonobos: African-American animals in the hands of white scientists. The political strategy at work here is a common one, both in popular ape fiction, and in nonfictional representations of apes. In the documentary film *Koko: A Talking Gorilla* (1978), for example, which illustrates the gorilla Koko’s linguistic and cognitive development as a young ape, we see Koko examining a depiction of a zoo in a picture book; several different animals, including a lion, a monkey, and an elephant, are labeled as such and positioned behind bars, while human children and adults walk freely on the other side of the cages. The normative speciesist discourse here, as in *Ape House*, serves to reaffirm the mastery of the human over the animal, mitigating the threat of talking apes.

Gruen’s bonobos are in many ways reminiscent of Koko, who was taught American Sign Language by the primatologist Francine Patterson at Stanford University in the 1980s. In the documentary, as Koko pages through her picture books, she forms the corresponding signs for the images she sees and points to. In *Ape House*, Gruen presents a female bonobo reading a beauty magazine; she signs to herself as she flips through the pages: “SHOE, SHIRT, LIPSTICK, KITTEN, SHOE. . . . SHIRT, FLOWER, SHOE” (179). The language use of Gruen’s apes is similar to that of Koko, as well as other ape research subjects in the U.S., including the bonobos at the Great Ape Trust. Haraway points out that the signs Koko emits “are transcribed into the syntax of babies and ‘primitives’ in racist discourse” (146). In other words, through the representation of their languaging abilities, the apes are coded as both infantile and primitive; and, I would add, as developmentally disabled. The coding of

apes in language acquisition research, both in primatology and in literary accounts, is demonstrative of the intersections of infantilizing, primitivizing, and disabling discourses—and works to dilute the threat of talking apes in the West. Animal difference here is transposed onto human difference, which is already, and conveniently, hierarchized.

In the *Koko* documentary, Patterson asserts that the ape “should have the same rights as a young child. Maybe she would be more compared to a child with learning disabilities,” she says, “a retarded child, an autistic child. But nevertheless, these children do have rights.” Current language acquisition studies come to similar conclusions as to how nonhuman apes should be perceived and treated, even if they articulate these conclusions in more politically correct ways. Deliberate comparisons of nonhuman apes and both children and disabled people are recurring in The Great Ape Project’s essay collection. H. Lyn Miles writes that “[e]thically speaking [i.e., *in terms of “linguistic and mental ability”*], enculturated apes are analogous to children. This analogy is particularly significant,” she notes, “since the law protects children who show less linguistic and mental ability than Chantek [her languaging orangutan]” (54; my emphasis). In another essay from the collection, aptly titled “Profoundly Intellectually Disabled Humans and the Great Apes: A Comparison,” Christoph Anstötz argues that severely disabled people and great apes are comparable in terms of cognitive abilities. He draws on the language skills of several ALR apes in order to show that some nonhuman apes even exceed profoundly disabled people in terms of linguistic ability—which, according to Anstötz, is demonstrative of intelligence. He concludes that nonhuman apes should be “granted certain fundamental rights” (159).<sup>xi</sup> The rhetoric of the Great Ape Project, which is also evident in language studies on apes, and illustrated in Gruen’s novel, makes out nonhuman apes as human with limitations. This rhetoric serves both to keep other,

non-ape, animals outside of the circle of moral consideration, and to keep nonhuman apes in a subhuman category, even while allowing them inside. Gruen's apes are the most realistic of those depicted in the three novels I focus on here, in that they most closely resemble the apes involved in language studies in the U.S. The moral of Gruen's story reflects the ethical intimations of current language research on apes and the logic behind the Great Ape Project's push to secure better treatment for all great apes: if nonhuman apes can speak, then they must be enough like us, and enough unlike other animals, to deserve some version of human rights.<sup>xii</sup>

I don't know what it means to be a nonhuman ape, but I think that we can accept this not knowing without closing the door to ethical interspecific relation. It is a narrow-minded and hierarchical ethics indeed that configures animals only according to their difference from the human, and configures this difference as inferiority to a human standard. Here I'm pointing instead to a radically generous and difficult ethics, following Derrida, but not only him, which would refuse to rely upon formulas and precedents, but would rather meet animals, human and non, as much as possible on their own terms, without presuming to grasp exactly what those terms look like.

With the exception of bonobos and humans, *Ape House* does not take animals seriously. Gruen ridicules "ecofeminists," who extol their opinions about the interconnection of patriarchy and speciesism in public. John observes a group of these ideologues at a hotel bar:

At a table nearby, three women made a point of identifying themselves to the waitress as eco-feminists. . . . They were vegan—militantly so—and made sure everyone knew it. Was this ever on the same surface as any animal product? They

asked. Are you absolutely sure this was made with vegetable oil? Yes, it matters very much, they said to the server, who had begun throwing desperate glances since she was being summoned by other customers. (190)

When John orders “a Reuben sandwich and another beer,” he hears “further mutterings about murder and factory farming from the table beside him” (191). Gruen portrays the vegan feminists as unreasonable, impolite, and inconvenient. She makes no attempt to examine how “[t]he oppression of women and animals *has* been historically interconnected,” but rather makes out the claim as deranged and attention-seeking, and uses it as an opportunity for humour in her novel (190; my emphasis).<sup>xiii</sup> Isabel’s vegetarianism is configured more positively, in that it is hardly configured at all; we find out that she doesn’t eat meat in an offhand comment made by her assistant, and it is never mentioned again (107). Gruen suggests that it is okay to be a vegetarian as long as you keep it to yourself and it doesn’t interfere with the lives of humans. The strategies of containment employed in *Ape House* diminish, if not eliminate, the threat of its anthropomorphic apes, making the novel palatable for a contemporary Western audience.

Each of these three recent ape novels takes advantage of the cognitive and genetic proximity of human and nonhuman apes to challenge the way in which we lump all animals together in an infrahuman category of nominal ethical worth. To this extent, the texts do appreciable work for animals, ape and non-ape alike; they force us to reconsider the legitimacy of the line we draw between the *human* and the *animal*. At the same time though, each of the novels rests on an anthropocentrism that values nonhuman animals only insofar as they are like humans—which does little or nothing to increase consideration for those

animals with whom we have less in common—and in effect reinscribes the human/animal dichotomy, which would continue to sanction the subordination of (other) nonhuman others. This logic, as Wolfe puts it, falls back on “the very humanism that seems to be the problem in the first place. . . . Now it’s not humans versus great apes, it’s humans and great apes—the ‘like us’ crowd—versus everyone else” (192).

### 3.5 An Organic Insufficiency

*We therefore move from one ethical disavowal to another.*  
– Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I Am*

In each of these novels, the human condition is configured as in some sense a tragic one: the human, through the acquisition of language, has lost touch with the *real* in a way that the animal has not. The price of language, then, is animal immanence. This is a Lacanian notion, a backward humanist gesture that conceives the human by a loss, rather than a gain.

Language, for Lacan, as for the Western tradition in general, is the cornerstone of culture (he writes, in fact, that culture “could well be reduced to language”), and is what “essentially distinguishes human societies from natural societies” (“The Agency of the Letter” 164). The “captation of the subject,” inaugurated by the human infant’s identification with its reflection—what Lacan calls “the mirror stage”—is, for Lacan, a metonym for what language more generally does to/for the human (“The Mirror Stage” 8). Language constitutes “an organic insufficiency in [the human’s] natural reality,” and makes lying and other bad things possible (4). Language implements an ineffaceable abyss between those who have it—who are confined to a “locus of signifying convention” at an eternal remove from the real—and those who do not, who are at one with the real. Agamben seems to fall into the same logic

when he designates language as “perhaps the most ancient of apparatuses—one in which thousands and thousands of years ago a primate inadvertently let himself be captured, probably without realizing the consequences that he was about to face (“What is an Apparatus?” 14). As Derrida points out, in Lacan’s vision, the animal lacks that which constitutes the human’s lack—i.e., language; but language in Lacan’s theory is still the key to responsibility and subjectivity, even if these are construed negatively—and so the superiority of the human over the animal is preserved. What the animal lacks, explains Derrida,

is precisely the lack by virtue of which the human becomes subject of the signifier, subject subjected to the signifier. But to be subject of the signifier is also to be a subjecting subject, a subject as master, an active and deciding subject of the signifier .

. . . This mastery is the superiority of man over the *animot*, even if it gains its assurance from the privilege constituted by a defect . . . a lack . . . or a fault . . .

(130)

Derrida employs the term *animot* in part to foreground the linguistic constructedness of the category “animal,” to call out the “animal” as “precisely only a word” (Mallet x). The mastery of the human over the animal, then, is not constitutive of any objective human superiority, but is rather a product of a language game that necessarily whitewashes the profound differences amongst nonhuman animals. Derrida’s *animot* not only speaks to the wordiness of the animal, but also gestures towards animals in the plural and in all their illimitable diversity (*animot* sounds like *animaux*) (Mallet x). If we can resist the comfort and convenience of the language that holds the human/animal binary in place, we might begin to appreciate difference across species and nonhierarchically.

In *Ape House*, the bonobos use human language to name what is not present in order to make it present; in other words, to express need. The artificial environment in which the bonobos are situated is marked by deprivation; despite the willingness of the researchers to meet their demands, the bonobos are always aware of something that they do not presently have access to. They cannot acquire food or even amusement for themselves; rather, when they want something, they have to ask for it: “WANT CANDY COFFEE. ISABEL GO. HURRY GIMME” (17), demands an impatient Bonzi. Neither can the bonobos express affection or gratitude to those on the other side of the enclosure without the mediation of symbolic language. In an effort to ease the tension that she observes between Isabel and Celia, who are on the other side of the enclosure’s glass walls, Bonzi signs “SMILE HUG,” and “KISS KISS” (17). Later in the novel, Bonzi approaches the glass separating her from John, who has sent her a birthday cake, and signs “BONZI LOVE VISITOR. BUILD VISITOR NEST. KISS KISS” (300). Language acquisition research produces in its subjects a symbolic need, which amounts to human deficiency in the Lacanian sense.

In both *The Evolution of Bruno Littlemore* and *Lucy*, the break between the human and the animal, marked by the symbolic, is more dramatic. According to Bruno, “everything is immediate [to the animal], everything happens all at once, everything is new and nothing is explainable” (184). “In a way,” he explains, “language is an inner death of that sense of perpetual amazement at the ever-renewed world. . . . We gain language and lose amazement” (276). Language institutes an eternal barrier between the human and the animal, and cuts the human off from direct access to the real. “Every word is a category, a tool of abstraction, a criminal approximation,” says Bruno. “Every word removes the thing it is supposed to represent from the real world. Thus, every word is a lie. . . . Just when you want most to

“speak the truth, the ineffable nature of your subject matter clogs your mouth with lies” (207). Once he has made “the great hop from prelinguistic to linguistic,” Bruno can no longer communicate with chimpanzees: “These animals were now so alien to my consciousness,” he says, “that I could no longer fathom what was going on inside their minds. Their behavior, the mental processes of these animals, had become as opaque to me as lead” (536). Bruno has lost “the wordless vocabulary of [his] animal innocence” (12); having acquired symbolic language, he can no longer enter the prelinguistic space of animality. “[N]ow I am one of you. I am one of you, and I cannot ever go back!” yells Bruno to his amanuensis. “Go tell your God what I would give to unlearn your language! To go back to being an animal! No, I can never go back! I can never go back again. I cannot unlearn my humanity” (575).

In many ways, Bruno’s story is reminiscent of Kafka’s ape tale, “A Report for an Academy,” where the chimpanzee Red Peter manages to circumvent the fate of the animal in human society through his acquisition of language. Red Peter has been invited to give a report “concerning his previous life as an ape” to an unnamed academy. As he explains, however, he “cannot comply with [the] request”; his very humanity, his very position before the academy as a speaking being, makes it impossible for him to return, even in imagination, to his animal past. Nevertheless, he relates the story of his capture and his transition into the human community. As Paulo Medeiros articulates in “Simian Narratives at the Intersection of Science and Literature,”

literary authors . . . frequently use speech as a main issue when writing simian narratives. The acquisition of speech, in most cases, marks the ascendancy of the ape to human status and its loss, consequently, a return to animality. This is the case, for example, in Kafka’s “A Report to an Academy” . . . . In Kafka’s text the ape Red Peter



tells the academy that it was with his shout of “‘Hallo,’” prompted by the emptying of a bottle of schnapps, that he became part of humanity: “because I could not help it, because my senses were reeling, [I] called a brief and unmistakable ‘Hallo!’ breaking into human speech, and with this outburst broke into the human community.” (60)

In neither Bruno’s nor Red Peter’s case, however, is entry into the human world characterized as passage into a world of freedom. Rather, becoming human is presented as a more desirable alternative to remaining an animal *amongst* humans—that is, an encaged and enslaved animal. Bruno explains that “whereas [he] was born in captivity, [and] became free because [he] learned language . . . [his] father . . . had—however briefly—experienced life the way it was meant to be lived” (19). Bruno’s father is named “Rotpeter,” after Kafka’s chimpanzee and, like the earlier Red Peter, was born in the wild where he lived for a period of time free from human interference. Bruno, on the other hand, only knows animal life within human society: what he describes as a “miserable [existence] of debasement and perpetual captivity” (69). He observes, from the human side of the zoo enclosures, how “shabby and dejected” the animals looked, “their souls broken, resigned to quiet lives of captivity and humiliation (524-5). “If it isn’t one kind of captivity,” however, “it’s another,” Bruno asserts. “There’s no way out, no way out” (563). The “real” world of the animal in “nature” has been severed from the captive animal—human and nonhuman alike. As Peter Stine writes of Kafka’s Red Peter,

he experiences only one feeling—“no way out . . . I had to find a way out or die”—and is faced with only one solution: “Well, then, I had to stop being an ape” . . . . To do this, he must renounce the heaven of his former freedom for its laughable equivalent in the human world: “self-controlled movement” or “acting.” (71)

Both Bruno and Red Peter escape animal captivity only to enter another sort of captivity—that of the human, of language: of reports before academies and publishable autobiographies—conceived here in the Lacanian sense of a defect or deficiency. “[I]f ‘human knowledge has greater autonomy than animal knowledge in relation to the field of force of desire,’” writes Derrida on Lacan, “and if ‘the human order is distinguished from nature,’ it is, paradoxically, because of an imperfection, because of an originary lack or defect . . . in man, who has, in sum, received speech and technics only inasmuch as he lacks something” (122).

Gonzales too represents the acquisition of human language as a loss of tragic proportions. Lucy appeals nostalgically to her pre-linguistic childhood as “a sort of paradise” characterized by “sheer physical joy,” a space devoid of shame and guilt, pretense and falsity (206). Lucy’s early acquisition of human language had set her apart from the animal world, opening “a great gulf . . . that could never be crossed again” (206). “[Her] gift,” so the story goes, “came with a terrible cost, for it closed [her] off from the ones [she] loved” (206). Human language in *Lucy* is counterpoised against a universal animal language—affective, fluid, and unsystematic—which Gonzales calls “The Stream.” It is “the way all animals communicate”—a “positive flood of information, an eternal stream,” where nonhuman life teems perpetually in pure communicative glory (51, 9). As Lucy explains in her autobiography, “language let[s] humans forget The Stream” (207). She recalls being “struck by both the magic and the sadness of that mysterious process [of forgetting]” (207). “[T]he price of [the] gift [of language],” she writes, “was that I was cast out of Eden, out of the deep communion of my family” (207). The price of humanity is, in other words and quite simply, animality.

“What [the animal] lacks” here, in Derrida’s words, “is precisely the lack by virtue of which the human becomes subject of the signifier” (130). Both Hale and Gonzales subscribe to what Derrida describes as “the old . . . theme of the animal’s innocence, its being incapable of the ‘signifier,’ . . . [and its existence] anterior to the difference between good and evil” (130). As Richter maintains, “[t]he ape, as texts from Lacan’s ‘Mirror Stage’ to Burroughs’ *Tarzan* suggest, is by contrast [to the human] at one with itself and with nature. This oneness, however, is bound up with the ape’s lack of language” (109). Regardless of the critical impressions of humanity offered by all three of the ape novels I focus on here, the human/animal divide—with agency and responsibility on the side of the human, and passivity and reaction on the side of the animal—is firmly (re)produced; accordingly, human (read, of course, metaphysically and not biologically) superiority is assiduously and insidiously preserved.

### 3.6 A Politics of Anthro-Insistence

*If we should respect Humanity in ourselves and others we should, by the same token, respect the other creatures that reflect that Form in however tarnished a mirror.*

— Stephen L.R. Clark, *The Great Ape Project*

Both Gonzales and Gruen employ extensive paratext on the plight of real great apes, in particular the bonobos, and thereby mark their novels with explicit political agendas. With *Lucy* and his commentary on it, Gonzales suggests that bonobos are closer to human beings than we think—so close that the prospect of a human/bonobo hybrid is not out of the question: in a National Public Radio interview, which is featured on the *Lucy* website, Gonzales claims that the creation of a human/animal hybrid is within the realm of scientific

possibility, pointing to new legislation in the U.S. that prohibits such creation (“Human-Animal Hybrids in ‘Lucy’”). The *Lucy* site includes a link—“Save Bonobos”—which leads to a page featuring organizations involved in the protection of bonobos. Sara Gruen’s video trailer for *Ape House* is shot at the Lola Ya Bonobo sanctuary in the Congo, even though no part of the book actually takes place there; furthermore, linked to Gruen’s main website is a page, “Critters in Need,” devoted to informing her audience how it can help support both African bonobos and language research on (African-)American bonobos. Gonzales’ and Gruen’s injunctions to their audiences to invest in bonobos are grounded in the proposition, advanced in their novels and affirmed in the materials circulating around them, that these animals are like humans in ethically significant ways.

Hale’s *Evolution of Bruno Littlemore* ends with a section of acknowledgements where the author expresses his gratitude to the GAT, and in particular to its scientific director, William Fields—“for his generous help” with the research involved in the *Bruno* project (578). Hale also thanks Sue Savage-Rumbaugh and Duane Rumbaugh “for continuing the fascinating and important pursuit of ape language research” (578). Although Bruno is an unrealistic character, even with regard to the extraordinary animals that ape language research has produced, Hale’s novel is heavily influenced by this research, and alludes to several real ape language studies. Hale clearly takes seriously and supports the study of linguistic potential in nonhuman animals. At the end of the acknowledgements, he notes that the great apes “are in serious danger,” and makes a plea for their protection (578). Each species of great ape (barring *Homo sapiens* of course) faces imminent extinction in the wild. Hale links the successful language research at the GAT with the need to protect the great apes, and implies that his novel stands as a testament to the importance of these animals. He

suggests that great apes really are substantially similar to human beings and that, for this reason, they deserve special consideration above other animals.

Hale adds another dimension, however, to the basic argument that apes are enough like humans to warrant serious ethical consideration. He suggests that we need to save the apes because *they illuminate the human condition*, and not only that, but *they are irreplaceable in this capacity*: “It will be an unforgivable shame on our species,” he writes, “if we allow this vital window into understanding ourselves to close forever” (578). It is not, after all, that apes are worth saving in and of themselves, but rather that they are worth saving because of what they can do for humanity. The same philosophy runs deep in ALR. The GAT, for example, announces that its state-of-the-art facility enables “completely new means of investigating *our own origins*” (my emphasis). Koko’s primatologist suggests that ALR has shown that “right here on earth . . . are creatures against which we can compare ourselves on our own terms”—it is for this reason that the work, and of course the animals it requires, are invaluable. Charles Siebert exhibits the same humanist hubris—which depends upon serious anthropomorphism—in *The Wachula Woods Accord: Towards a New Understanding of Animals* (2009). Here he documents the lives of captive chimpanzees in the U.S. Siebert spends the most time with Roger—formerly a Ringling Bros. performer and currently in retirement at a great ape sanctuary. He configures the chimp as a relic of himself; and concedes that “[i]t is all, in the end, a form of spying, part of an ongoing attempt on our part to catch in the eyes of the sentient non-us glimpses of who or what we seem to remember ourselves being” (101). This sentiment resurfaces in Siebert’s grand call for the protection of great apes, which rhetorically amounts to a kind of warning, not unlike Hale’s:

The question that we, the keepers, are facing is whether we'd mind a future without them, among the more mindful creatures on Earth and, in many ways, the more devoted; whether we'd be bothered by an Earth with no living vestiges of our own differently shaped selves. (150)

### 3.7 A Politics of Anthropodenial

*[I]f there is a terra incognita which excludes all positive knowledge, it is the mind of animals. We may imagine anything we please about the inner life, the motives, the foresight, the feelings and aspirations of animals—we can know absolutely nothing.*  
– Max Müller, “Lectures on Mr. Darwin’s Philosophy of Language” (1873)

A key assumption in charges against anthropomorphism is that seeing animals as human would lead to granting animals human value, which would compromise the value of the *human*. Of course, in so far as human value depends upon consuming animals and otherwise subordinating them to human interests, the assumption is correct. However, unwilling to concede such a crude definition of human good, humanist thinkers instead make vague and ultimately vacuous arguments as to why we ought to preserve the integrity of the *human* as distinct from the *animal* at all costs. Donald Griffen points out that the “political or quasi-religious sort of claim that narrowing the perceived gulf between human and animal mentality would threaten fundamental human values” stands as an “impediment to scientific investigation of animal mentality” (xvi). The potency of anthropodenial, its moral inertia, prevents scientists, but also society more broadly, from facing animals openly and honestly. In other words, politically prescribed anthropocentric and anthro-protective beliefs determine what we do and do not see when we attend to animals. In 1967, M.J. Adler “argued at length that if people were persuaded that animals differ from men only in degree and not radically in

kind, this would destroy our moral basis for holding that all men deserve equal treatment in matters of ethics and law” (xvi):

If in the future we should discover that man differs from other animals only in degree, the line that divides the realm of persons from the realm of things would be rubbed out, and with its disappearance would go the basis in fact for a principled policy of treating men differently from the way in which we now treat other animals and machines. (Adler qtd. in Griffin xvi)

By this logic, it is better to assume that man differs from animals in kind than to leave open the possibility that he does not; in other words, when knowledge might threaten humanist ethics, it is best to ensure that the knowledge is not produced.

In *Our Posthuman Future*, Francis Fukuyama attempts to safeguard the Western concept of the human against threats primarily from biotechnology, but also from animal ethics.<sup>xiv</sup> Fukuyama worries that developments in biotechnology might critically alter the human in ways that compromise humanity’s claim to dignity, and accordingly to superiority over all things nonhuman. (He neglects to consider that biotechnology poses a far more serious and imminent risk to animals than it does to humans. Guinea pigs are animals after all. But I will leave aside that issue here.) “Factor X” is the name Fukuyama gives to whatever it is that distinguishes humans from all other animals: “Today, for believers in liberal equality,” he writes,

Factor X etches a bright red line around the whole of the human race and requires equality of respect for all of those on the inside, but attributes a lower level of dignity to those outside the boundary. Factor X is the human essence, the most basic meaning of what it is to be human. (150)

Fukuyama warns that “[d]enial . . . of the idea that there is something unique about the human race that entitles every member of the species to a higher moral status than the rest of the natural world—leads us down a very perilous path” (160). He believes that the dissolution of the boundary between the human and the animal would lead to a more hierarchical and inegalitarian society. But Fukuyama here draws a false duality—as if the only alternative to human exceptionalism were a world without justice, a sort of free-for-all where might makes right. Furthermore, he is unable to come up with any good reasons for the preferential treatment of humans over nonhumans, a consideration that would seem to be detrimental to his conclusions, and that he all but admits:

We have argued that in the evolutionary process that leads from prehuman ancestor to human beings, there was a qualitative leap that transformed the prehuman precursors of language, reason, and emotion into a human whole that cannot be explained as a simple sum of its parts, and that remains an essentially mysterious process. (176)

In a final stroke of humanist genius, Fukuyama maintains that, given the difficulty of pinning down Factor X, it is “appropriate to approach the question of who qualifies for rights with some liberality” (175)—that is, just the amount of liberality necessary to include all those we already call human. Fukuyama has already made it clear that animals do not qualify.

Insofar as he specifically states his desire to preserve the privileged status of the human over the nonhuman world, Fukuyama’s brand of anthropodenial is explicitly moral and political—whereas anthropodenial in the natural and human sciences is typically only implicitly so. In *Becoming Human*, for example, Tattersall holds that language is “[u]niversal among modern humans,” and “is the most evident of all our uniquenesses: the one in the



absence of which it is least possible for us to conceive of humanness as we experience it” (58). He goes on to deny language to nonhuman apes, suggesting that ape calls are inherently emotional, which makes them categorically nonlinguistic: “Not only do chimpanzees not have language,” he declares; “they don’t even have an incipient form of it” (61). Tattersall’s allegation echoes the dominant attitude of the sciences in the nineteenth century—in the following passage exemplified by Müller, who, according to Radick, was in the late-nineteenth century the “public spokesman for the science of language in the English-speaking world” (43):

Where, then, is the difference between brute and man? What is it that man can do, and of which we find no signs, no rudiments, in the whole brute world? I answer without hesitation: the one great barrier between brute and man is Language. Man speaks, and no brute has ever uttered a word. Language is our Rubicon, and no brute will dare to cross it. (qtd. in Radick 16)

Tattersall’s denial of language to nonhuman animals, not unlike Müller’s, ultimately constitutes a value judgment. The judgment hinges on his definition of language as “the production and interpretation of sounds in isolation from the emotional states of the speaker and hearer” (61), a definition that enables him to exclude nonhuman animals from the group of languaging beings. What we have here is an example of “the fallacy of ‘assuming that the human form of a particular characteristic is the defining feature of that characteristic’” (Corbey 167). A more sensible definition of language might appeal to what makes language so very important, or what its primary function is, which seem to amount to the same thing—i.e., *communication*, or semiosis more broadly.<sup>xv</sup> But Tattersall’s conception of the human as abysally apart from, and superior to, all other animals requires a particularly narrow

definition of language. His reasoning promotes a view of animals as nonlinguaging and unthinking creatures, supports the categorical distinction between humans and all other animals on these grounds, and accordingly defends the supremacy of the human, which is based on that distinction.

The “yawning cognitive gulf” that Tattersall posits “between modern *Homo sapiens* and the rest of nature” permits him to make diametrical claims against the possibility of human empathy towards animals: “Adept as you may be at reading the minds of members of your own species,” he writes, “you simply cannot imagine the dog’s actual state of consciousness” (173, 67). Furthermore, he locates the deficiency in the nonhuman rather than the human animal: “They [referring here specifically to apes] can’t explain to us what they are feeling or what is going on in their heads because they do not have language” (225). Nonhuman apes, however, even those who have not acquired human language, are fairly effective at communicating across species boundaries. Think, for example, of the many apes who have escaped their zoo enclosures, or bitten fingers off their trainers, or spit water and thrown feces at zoo-goers.<sup>xvi</sup> It is disingenuous to say that we can have no idea what is going on cognitively and affectively with these animals.<sup>xvii</sup> But the politics of anthropodenial in operation here depends upon the unwarranted premise that, no matter how similar to us nonhuman animals *appear*, no matter how well we might *think* we know what they are thinking and feeling, we simply cannot know anything of the sort—because they do not have the language to tell us.

Tattersall’s attitude (which is not, unfortunately, a rare one across the natural and social sciences) constitutes the most ethically pernicious variety of anthropodenial, because it absolves humans from the responsibility of even *trying* to gain an appreciation for how other

animals feel and experience the world, thus leaving little if any grounds for doing animal ethics—that is, for addressing questions concerning how humans ought to relate to other animals. I don't mean to suggest here that it is within the realm of human ability to comprehend the perspectives of all other animals if we only try hard enough; what I do want to suggest is that there is no trying hard *enough*. Our failures to understand other animals should be taken as opportunities to remain open to radical difference and to sit, however uncomfortably, with incomprehension, rather than as excuses to turn our backs on them. The production of a cognitive abyss, with all humans on one side and all animals on the other, precludes an ethics that would take other animals seriously, which is convenient for a humanism that ultimately cares about only one animal.

We should keep in mind here that anthropodenial, like the human/animal binary it wishes to maintain, is a Western e/affect. In nonwestern science, anthropomorphism does not incite the reaction it does in a Western context: Fisher notes that “Japanese primatologists are singularly unconcerned about issues of anthropomorphism in their studies of primates” (97). The affront that anthropomorphism inflicts in the West has everything to do with “our perceived place in nature,” and very little to do with empirical grounds (Asquith 34). Resistance to anthropomorphism is driven by a deeply ingrained need to keep the human and animal separate, and to do so in terms of cognition (34). This need is not a universal one.

### 3.8 The Profanity of Anthropomorphism

*For the figure of 'the animal' in the West . . . is part of a cultural and literary history stretching back at least to Plato and the Old Testament, reminding us that the animal has always been especially, frightfully nearby, always lying in wait at the very heart of the constitutive disavowals and self-constructing narratives enacted by that fantasy figure called 'the human.'*

– Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites*

I have shown here how serious anthropomorphism might compel the kind of ethical consideration for (at least some) animals that, in the West, is typically reserved for humans only. In “Experimenting at the Threshold: Sacrifice, Anthropomorphism, and the Aims of (Critical) Animal Studies,” Kimberly W. Benston suggests that anthropomorphism is employed in laboratory biomedical research to just the opposite effect. According to his argument, animals are produced, through anthropomorphism, as physiological analogues for human beings; at the same time, their status as *animal*, and so subordinate to the human, is systemically maintained. Benston suggests that this form of anthropomorphism clears the path to *sacrifice*—whereby animal research subjects are killed for the good of humanity (551). I think it is important to add that animal anthropomorphism and sacrifice are compatible *only if* the anthropomorphism works on factors that are perceived as ethically insignificant. This is precisely the case in biomedical research, where the similarities drawn out between humans and animals are physiological rather than cognitive.

The form of anthropomorphism (arguably) present in biomedical research is not mitigated by anthropodenial, because it poses no real threat to the human/animal divide, which constitutes an ethical rather than empirical distinction. For the same reason, no one gets upset over dolls or stuffed animals that physically resemble human beings: there is no question as to whether these objects have language, think, or are conscious in any sense of

the word—and so their anthropomorphism does not challenge our ethical system. The sacrifice of animals in biomedical research, as Benston maintains, depends upon the “presupposed ontological distinctions [that] justify the consignment of nonhuman animals to treatment considered improper for human subjects” (551). “Conventionally,” he notes, “those distinctions have centered on a cluster of intellectual capabilities—reasoning, speaking, intending, remembering” (551). The serious anthropomorphic mode that I have examined at length above, and which would not likely fly in biomedical research, attributes precisely these capabilities to nonhuman animals, and accordingly calls into question the “presupposed ontological distinctions” between the human and the animal. At its most productive, this form of anthropomorphism blocks the path to animal sacrifice.

In *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, Derrida delineates the critical role that the sacrifice of animals has played in the upkeep, and indeed the genesis, of the *human* in the Western tradition. The sacrificial economy that appears in the Bible as the slaughter of a few lambs and rams today materializes in the exhaustive exploitation of animals under the animal-industrial complex. This economy runs on “a noncriminal putting to death”—which is what animal sacrifice amounts to (“Eating Well” 112): “Such are the executions of ingestion, incorporation, or introjection of the [animal] corpse,” writes Derrida (112). The sacrifice of animal to human life in the contemporary West entails “taming and domestication, dressage, neutering, and acculturation . . . medico-industrial exploitation, overwhelming interventions upon animal milieus and reproduction, genetic transplants, cloning, etc.” (*The Animal That Therefore I Am* 80): each is part of a scopious apparatus which works to uphold the notion of a transcendental human subject over and against a passive and finite animal object. As Wolfe articulates, the “institution of speciesism” is “fundamental . . . to the formation of Western

subjectivity and sociality as such, an institution that relies on the tacit agreement that the full transcendence of the ‘human’ requires the sacrifice of the ‘animal’ and the animalistic” (*Animal Rites* 6).

The sacrificial economy that I have outlined above depends upon an absolute and intraversable separation of the human and the animal. Serious anthropomorphism holds the potential to undermine such separation and accordingly to upset the sacrificial order, creating a critical disturbance in the human/animal institution—and accordingly inciting heated reactions against anthropomorphic acts. In “What is an Apparatus?” Agamben defines religion as “that which removes things, places, animals or people from common use and transports them to a separate sphere” (18). We might regard the modern animal-industrial complex as an extension of the Judeo-Christian tradition that designates animals—as opposed to humans—appropriate objects of sacrifice. According to Agamben, “every separation contains or conserves in itself a genuinely religious nucleus” (18). Furthermore, he suggests that “capitalism and other modern forms of power seem to generalize and push to the extreme the processes of separation that define religion” (19). Although Agamben does not point to the mass exploitation of animals in the contemporary Western world—which is appropriately accompanied by a passionate (even if ineffective) concern for the exploitation of humans globally—animal exploitation precisely “push[es] to the extreme” the process of separating the human from the animal in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Profanity, for Agamben, constitutes the undoing of sacrificial separation—the restoration of the sacrifice to “common use” or, in other words, the passage of something from the divine sphere (back to) the human sphere (18 – 19). The notion of “common use” seems misplaced here, considering that sacrificial expenditure and common use collapse over

time; this is true, at least, in an increasingly secular Western context, and has certainly been the case for animals. Nevertheless, Agamben's idea that the profane is produced through the erasure of the separation necessary to sacrifice holds. His conception of profanity is helpful here because it illuminates the resistance to serious anthropomorphism in the West. Serious anthropomorphism produces profanities by introducing animals to the sphere of humanity. Both Hale and Gonzales emphasize, in their depictions of rabid anthropodenial, the revulsion that anthropomorphic apes incite—and the terror inspired by the suggestion that animals belong, ethically, amongst human beings rather than in zoos, slaughter houses, or biomedical facilities. The analogous anthropodenial running through the natural and social sciences—as well as the more subtle anthropodenial exercised by both Hale and Gonzales themselves—is motivated primarily, I would argue, by the same fear and disgust. Anthropomorphic animals are profane because they disrupt the human exceptionalism that underwrites the dominant ethical paradigm in the West.

#### 4. Rethinking Anthropomorphous Apes

*Homo sapiens, then, is neither a clearly defined species nor a substance.*  
– Agamben, *The Open*

The ascription of anthropomorphism to any particular representation assumes that we know what it means to be human in the first place—which we do not: a point well demonstrated by Fukuyama and many others in their determined but flailing and ultimately failed attempts to specify human nature. An exemplary historical failure to define the human is located in the work of Carl Linnaeus, the father of biological taxonomy. As Agamben points out, Linnaeus openly struggled with the task of identifying “the specific difference between the anthropoid apes and man from the point of view of natural science” (*The Open* 25). The taxonomist challenged his critics “to show [him] a generic difference between ape and man which is consistent with the principles of natural history” (27). In the famous *Systema naturae*, Linnaeus “does not record—as he does with the other species—any specific identifying characteristic next to *Homo* [the genus reserved for the human]”; rather, he appeals to a teasing imperative, “the old philosophical adage: “*nosce te ipsum* {know yourself}” (25). Agamben maintains that “[a]n analysis of the *Introitus* that opens the *Systema* leaves no doubts about the sense Linnaeus attributed to his maxim: man has no specific identity other than the *ability* to recognize himself” (26 – 7). In *Lucy*, Gonzales’ protagonist appeals to this very ability in the moving testament to her humanity that she broadcasts on *YouTube*: ““Whatever my genetic material looks like,”” she pleads, ““I’m just me”” (148). Here Lucy exhibits the perfect circular logic that circumscribes the *human* in the Western tradition.



Although not all ape language acquisition studies in the U.S. have been successful, many have produced apes able to communicate using human symbolic language; and some of these apes have in turn taught this language to conspecifics.<sup>xviii</sup> The ongoing project with bonobos and lexigrams at the GAT is perhaps the most successful of all recorded ape language experiments; the GAT bonobos have vocabularies of several thousand words, and a functional grasp of syntax (“2011 Bonobo Research Program”). Ape language acquisition research has been subjected to sustained criticism, both within the sciences and without. One critical approach targets the research on technical grounds—I’m thinking here in particular of the Chomskian school, which holds that only humans possess the “wiring” necessary for universal grammar, which is the defining feature of human language<sup>xix</sup>—while another approach voices explicitly moral criticism.<sup>xx</sup> (This is not to say, of course, that the technical criticism does not have a moralistic underbelly.) A preeminent concern in moral objections to ALR is that ape research subjects are (mis)led to believe that they are humans rather than animals. The fear is that languaging apes will get ahead of themselves and forget their animal, and so subhuman, identities. As Koko’s primatologist explains, “[t]hey’re worried that Koko will not appreciate her own kind, will think of herself as a person . . . and will think of gorillas as something beneath her” (*Koko: A Talking Gorilla*). Patterson reassures her audience that Koko does in fact appreciate her own species identity as distinct from the human: “We have every reason to believe that she knows she is a gorilla . . . she has said so on many occasions and identified with pictures.” Patterson’s contribution to the Great Ape Project’s essay collection includes an anecdote to this effect: “Asked to categorise herself, Koko declared ‘FINE ANIMAL GORILLA’” (76). For Patterson and her critics alike, the research subject’s appreciation of the border between the human and the animal is critical to

the ethical legitimacy of teaching language to apes. It's not surprising that one of the first questions that the journalist in *Ape House* asks about the bonobos is whether or not they understand that they are apes and not humans (10). "They know they're bonobos and they know we're human," the primatologist Isabel assures him (10).<sup>xxi</sup>

The demand on languaging animals to recognize that they are not human makes them complicit in the feverish line-drawing that secures the dominance of the human subject in the Western tradition.<sup>xxii</sup> With talking apes on the scene, it is not anymore enough for humans to "know themselves": it is now necessary for animals to know what they are not. This way, *even if* we accede some modicum of language to nonhuman animals (an accession many are still unwilling to make), the border is reinstated through the now mutual imperative of the human *and* the animal to know their respective places in nature. Two of the most discussed nonhuman apes in Western history are the chimpanzees Nim Chimpsky and Washoe. Both refused to identify as animals. Nim and Washoe were raised in human families and subjected to extensive language acquisition training from infancy. In an experiment where Nim was asked to sort photographs of humans and chimpanzees into two groups, he infamously placed a photograph of himself in the human pile, otherwise accurately sorting the photographs at the human/animal line. Washoe indicated her sense of human identity when she encountered her first conspecifics at the primate institute where she was relocated at the age of five. Once there, "her human friend asked in sign language what the chimpanzees were. [Washoe] called them 'BLACK CATS' and 'BLACK BUGS'. They were not like her," explain Roger and Deborah Fouts, "and if she felt about them the way she felt about cats and bugs they were not well liked" (29). These apes were taught, just like humans in the West are taught, that the

world is divided into two mutually exclusive groups—human and non—and that you are a lot better off in the first than the second.

The language studies on both Nim and Washoe, along with other ALR studies on apes, suffered and continue to suffer intensive criticism. Herbert S. Terrace, the psychologist who led the language acquisition project with Nim at Chicago University, ultimately renounced his own work, averring that language is, after all, exclusively human. The cases of Nim and Washoe, who were amongst the first apes to be taught human language in the West, point to the ways in which the categories of *human* and *animal* are constructed and maintained. These animals, as well as their (“)talking(”) ape peers and descendants, accordingly agitate what Agamben calls the anthropogenic or anthropological machine—the apparatus which works indefatigably to keep separate the human and the animal, and to keep up the fiction of the division as concrete and essential rather than permeable and manufactured—and incite debates that revolve around the question: which side of the line?

J.M. Coetzee makes reference to Nim’s photograph sorting experiment in *The Lives of Animals*, where he develops an ethical argument against the exploitation of animals through a fictional scenario.<sup>xxiii</sup> In Coetzee’s narrative, the psychology professor Ruth Orkin relates a version of the Nim experiment, following with comments on how the results might be interpreted: “One is so tempted to give the story a straightforward reading,” she says, “namely, that [the chimpanzee] wanted to be thought of as one of us. Yet as a scientist one has to be cautious” (39). Orkin here seems to be warning against an unwarranted attribution of intention to the animal. Coetzee’s protagonist, the fiction writer and animal advocate Elizabeth Costello, responds to Orkin facetiously:

“Oh, I agree. . . . In [the chimp’s] mind the two piles could have a less obvious meaning. Those who are free to come and go versus those who have to stay locked up, for instance. She [in Coetzee’s retelling the chimp is female] may have been saying that she preferred to be among the free.” (39)

In a distilled take of what it means to be human in the West, Costello here registers human and animal as ethical constructs rather than biological givens. Nim’s declaration of his humanity speaks to the human/animal divide as discursive and material production. The incessant division of the human from the animal is embedded both in our language—in the denotations and connotations of the very terms *human/person* versus *animal*—and in our material culture, where those named human, as Costello puts it, “are free to come and go,” and those named animal “have to stay locked up,” in cages, pens, labs, and so on.

The uptake of Washoe’s and Nim’s identity confusions in popular English literature, and the debates about them that unfold there, indicate the West’s paired fascination and fear over human/animal boundary violations.<sup>xxiv</sup> Both *The Evolution of Bruno Littlemore* and *Ape House* contain brief allusions to Nim, which I won’t go into here. But I do want to examine Michael Crichton’s more extended references to both Nim and Washoe in *Congo*. At the beginning the novel, the primatologist Peter Elliot faces a possible custody suit over his signing gorilla, Amy. Elliot’s lawyer, John Morton, assures him that his rights to Amy are legally protected, given that he treats her humanely and serves as her primary caretaker. Morton cites the analogous case of a humanized chimpanzee named Arthur—who “referred to [other chimps] as ‘black things,’” and when “asked to sort photographs of people and photographs of chimps, . . . put his own picture in the stack with the people” (64). Clearly a

composite of Nim and Washoe, Arthur here stands in for the ape who thinks he is human; by aligning Arthur and Amy, Crichton suggests that Amy might not identify as an animal—thus opening a space for thinking about the human/animal boundary as contingent and negotiable. Elliot notes that Amy called the zoo gorillas “‘stupid gorillas,’ once she found out that when she signed to them they didn’t reply” (93). Later in the novel, Amy’s reaction to the gorillas she encounters in the Congo echoes Washoe’s (and Arthur’s) responses to their conspecifics. As Wolfe points out, Amy “refers to normal forest gorillas as ‘dumb’ because they ‘no talk’ (230), and in this, she is like the languaging chimpanzee [Arthur] referred to earlier in the book” (175).

Despite her fluency in American Sign Language, and her manifest superiority complex towards “natural” gorillas, ultimately Amy *is* determined by her biological species. If the novel began by breaching species boundaries, it ends by reinstating them. Crichton’s epilogue tells us that, because “‘Amy’s increasing maturity and size [made] further laboratory research difficult,’ . . . Project Amy was formally disbanded”; however, “most of the staff accompanied Elliot and Amy to the Institut d’Etudes Ethnologiques at Bukama Zaire,” where “Amy’s interaction with wild gorillas continues to be studied in the field” (437). As Wolfe writes, “[i]n the end [Amy] must return to the jungle whence she came, because blood is thicker than culture” (173). The film version of *Congo*, which came out in 1994, adjusts the story’s ending to secure the human/animal boundary even more forcefully. In the film, Amy never returns to the U.S. from the jungle. She *decides* to stay amongst the forest gorillas there. In a scene that tries very hard to be poignant, she trundles away, gorilla after all, from the American scientists and into the African forest. “I see,” says Elliot: “She’s home.” Amy’s human identity cannot finally be maintained under the weight of her animal

nature, which ultimately bursts forth in the Congo jungle. The message here is clear: this is where Amy really belongs—and she knows it.

The implication of Linnaeus' (non)description of the genus *Homo* continues to dominate Western humanist discourse: we ought simply to *know* who is human and what is not; as long as we do, then it does not really matter that we continually fail to arrive at a substantiated explication of what it means to be human. History shows, however, that who gets to be *human* and who does not are political decisions; it also shows that whoever is in power gets to call the shots—which explains why women and children, as well as racialized and disabled people, are often associated or conflated with animals in the Western tradition.<sup>xxv</sup> In the conclusion to Gonzales' novel, Lucy is happily installed on a *Native reservation*; here she is able to express her humanity while remaining in touch with her animal self. When she arrives on the reservation, "Grandmother White Feather" immediately takes Lucy under her wing, establishing an affinity with the hybrid by pointing to her own mixed human/animal heritage. (White Feather's great-grandfather was part wolf [304].) Moreover, White Feather is

delighted that [Lucy is] able to talk to the animals. She talk[s] to them, too. And when she [sees] how [Lucy can] call the birds down from the trees and bring a rabbit to [her] hand, she [tells her] that [she] ought to meet Stan Brings Plenty, who [can] talk a deer into coming right to him. (304)

Gonzales here aligns animality and indigeneity, and draws a harmonious and untroubled relationship between the two. This narrative move constitutes a strategy of containment, whereby both animal and aboriginal are excluded from the dominant, privileged sphere of humanity, which exists on the other side of the reservation's borders.<sup>xxvi</sup>

#### 4.1 The Human as Anthropomorphous Animal

Agamben points out that “*Homo* is a constitutively ‘anthropomorphous’ animal (that is, ‘resembling man,’ according to the term that Linnaeus constantly uses until the tenth edition of the *Systema*)” (27). Today, human beings are classified taxonomically under the super family hominoidea (hominoids), alongside gibbons, chimpanzees, gorillas, bonobos, and orangutans. The term *hominoidea* or *hominoid* is made up of two parts, the first denoting *man*, and the second *like*. As given in the *OED*, the word *hominoid* means “Of human form; man-like” (*adj.*); or, “An animal resembling man” (*n.*). The human remains the animal that resembles itself. We do not know what the anthropos *is*, only that human and nonhuman apes alike *resemble* it. In other words, both human and nonhuman apes are anthropomorphic, and “[t]he human form . . . as unknown to us as the nonhuman” (Latour, *Aramis* 27).

Bruno Latour has shown that morphisms are ubiquitous in our descriptive language, and that *anthropomorphism* is no more misleading or inaccurate than any other morphism. In *Aramis, or, The Love of Technology* (1996) he holds that there is no “real behavior” to be uncovered beneath the morphic perspectives that configure it (227). “[W]hat can be said” Latour asks,

of the following projection: “The chips are bugged”? Here is a zoomorphism—bugs—projected onto a technology. Or this one: “The gorilla is obeying a simple stimulus-response”? Here a technobiologism—the creation of neurologists—is reprojected on to an animal (226).

The term “*anthropomorphism*” is unique, Latour points out, in that it “always implies that such a projection remains inappropriate” (225 – 6). But who gets “to decide if a

representation is anthropomorphic anyway?” he asks elsewhere—“decide the real and final shape (morphos) of humans (anthropos)? To trace with confidence the boundary between what is a ‘real’ delegation and what is a ‘mere’ projection?” (“Where Are the Missing Masses?” 160). The accusation of anthropomorphism assumes a solid apprehension of the human where there is none.

Anthropodenial, then, works to produce the *human* by extricating from the nonhuman particular capabilities (as we have seen, most often language and rational thought) and declaring them exclusively human. As Emanuela Cenami Spada has pointed out, “[t]he detection of an anthropomorphic mistake is linked with the dominant paradigm, the unquestioned assumptions that are considered valid at the time of the research and that belong to our conceptual scheme” (45). Underlying anthropodenial in the West is a desperate humanism that seeks to (re)draw the boundaries around humanity by securing the capabilities deemed most ethically significant within these boundaries. In this sense, then, anthropo-insistence and anthropodenial alike, by indicating what is human in the nonhuman—a necessary indication: *because we do not know already*—are equally involved in the upkeep of the concept of the human. “Anthropomorphism purports,” in the first place, “to establish a list of the capabilities that define humans and that it can then project . . . onto other beings” (Latour, *Aramis* 225); anthropodenial establishes the same kind of list, but extricates these capabilities from, rather than projects them onto, nonhuman beings. To this effect, both sides of the anthropomorphism debate provision the anthropogenic machine, which produces the human in relation to the animal.

Latour reminds us that “anthropos and morphos together mean either that which has human shape or that which gives shape to humans” (“Where Are the Missing Masses?” 160).



If we can reconceive anthropomorphism as what *gives shape* to the human, rather than what *is given* human shape (by the human), then anthropodenial is turned back on itself in a peculiar inversion where the very act of anthropodenial becomes itself anthropomorphism. For anthropodenial, too, gives shape to the human: it points out what is anthropomorphic, and thereby indicates what the human is *like*. The human, then, is produced, although never finalized, through anthropomorphism and its denial: the continuous circulation of anthropomorphic representations preserves the human/animal categorical divide and its attendant ethical code—which, as we have seen, serves the interests of humans at the expense of all other animals. “[A]nthropogenesis,” Agamben suggests, “is not in fact an event that can be considered completed once and for all; it is always under way, because *Homo sapiens* never stops becoming man, has perhaps not yet finished entering language and swearing to his nature as a speaking being” (*The Sacrament of Language* 11).

Only if we can resist seeing the anthropomorphic as that which contains already and definitively *human* characteristics, can the work of “anthropomorphism” effectively unsettle the Western humanist, speciesist, paradigm. As Latour writes, “the capabilities to be distributed form an open and potentially infinite list” (*Aramis* 27): if we can get away from assuming to begin with that a selection of these will be *human* and therefore ethically relevant, or ethically relevant and therefore human, then we can begin the work of opening up the Western human/animal assemblage. I am not trying to advance here a definition of the human as essentially open or polymorphous, and therefore special. What I think is necessary is pretty much the opposite: to show that the human is a corrupt concept—that there are no factors which justify the moral weight it is given. And this is where I diverge from Latour, who ultimately does not mean to dissolve, but rather to refigure and renew the Western

human. In *We Have Never Been Modern*, he maintains that “[t]he expression ‘anthropomorphic’ considerably underestimates our humanity,” and argues that the many forms of morphism that humans employ “are what define the *anthropos*” (137). “A weaver of morphisms,” he states: “isn’t that enough of a definition?”—in other words: a world shaper (137). “The closer the *anthropos* comes to this distribution [of morphisms], the more human it is. . . . By seeking to isolate its form from those it churns together, one does not defend humanism, one loses it” (137). I hope it is clear by now that I am not searching for a better humanism, but rather for a posthumanism—which as I see it would require a deconstruction without salvation of the Western concept of the human. As Agamben puts it so nicely,

To render inoperative the machine that governs our conception of man will therefore mean no longer to seek new—more effective or more authentic—articulations, but rather to show the central emptiness, the hiatus that—within man—separates man and animal, and to risk ourselves in this emptiness . . . . (92)

In the Western tradition, as we have seen, the *human* is predicated on the *animal*, and human dominance on animal subordination. The emptiness that Agamben gestures toward would mark the end of the binary and hierarchical logic that holds these categories in place. Insofar as “we” are *human* and “they” are *animal*, this space, which would necessarily be posthuman(ist), is uninhabitable; insofar, though, as there are animals, human and nonhuman, who comprise a multiplicity of life forms with varying degrees of similarity and difference, this space is radically viable, even if at this point it is not definitively imaginable.

## 5. Conclusion: Towards a Posthumanism

*there are / still songs to sing beyond / humankind.*  
– Paul Celan, “Threadsun” (“Fadensonnen”)

What if we were to embrace a biological, empirical definition of the human: humans share a genetic code and constitute a reproductively inclusive group, just like all other species?

Unlike humanist definitions of the human, the biological definition is not circular and it does not prescribe moral exclusivity. This notion of “human nature” does not begin from the unjustified and unjustifiable premise that humans are categorically better and more important than all other animals. I’m not suggesting here that ethics can or should be reduced to biology, or that ethics can or should become scientific; what I’m suggesting, rather, is that we get rid of the human *as ethical concept* in order to make possible an expansion of ethical considerability across species boundaries. Angela Creager and William Jordan point out that “[i]ncreasingly, we now appeal to genetics . . . for a concrete source of measurable differences between our species and others. But,” they ask, “what sort of ethics will this understanding of the ‘human’ produce?” (xv). I suspect that this understanding of the human would upset our comfort and complacency regarding the mass oppression of other animals in the West. Deconstructing the human as an ethical concept would, of course, make ethics more difficult and more complicated, since the human/animal divide would lose its significance. We would have to attend seriously to the wellbeing of animals whose interests might conflict with our own. I do not think that this would make ethics impossible. I think that this is where ethics would begin.

The faculty of human language in this refiguration would become what in a materialist sense it always was: an evolutionarily adaptive trait that has contributed to the

success of the species *Homo sapiens* in its environment. Such a shift would de-center the human, opening a posthumanist space, and allowing us, as Wolfe puts it,

to pay proper attention . . . to the material, embodied, and evolutionary nature of intelligence and cognition, in which language, for example, is no longer seen (as it is in philosophical humanism) as a well-nigh-magical property that ontologically separates *Homo sapiens* from every other living creature. (120)

Posthumanism, in this rendering, would expose the deep anthropocentrism and arrogance inherent in the tradition of language studies on apes in the West. ALR necessarily produces its animal subjects as deficient or defective, as limited in cognitive capacities: these results are written into the research design itself, since the language in question is by definition *human*. If we take man as the measure of all things, then nonhuman apes, not to mention other animals, will inevitably fall short. Moreover, characteristics, capabilities, and affects that are relevant and important to nonhuman animals, if not to humans, will be diminished or elided. From a Western anthropocentric worldview, it is important that nonhuman apes can ask for things in English, read magazines, play basic computer games, and use toilets. These measures, however, systematically produce nonhuman apes as limited (human) beings, without attending to the animals on their own terms.

Latour argues in “A Well-Articulated Primatology” that animals are as interesting as we allow them to be. It all depends on the questions we ask them, and the ways in which we listen. The question of whether or not apes are capable of human language is not a particularly interesting one, and at the least should be dissociated from discussions about ethics. Tattersall uses the case of the GAT bonobo Kanzi to demonstrate that humans are better than animals; “Kanzi,” he asserts, “has made considerably slower progress [with

language] than any human would have done” (65). Of course this is the case. Kanzi has been taught the *human* version of a particular trait, by beings outside of his own species, and in an environment that his species has not evolved to negotiate effectively. As Steven Pinker has argued,

[w]hatever is special about the human mind cannot be just more, or better, or more flexible animal intelligence, because there is no such thing as generic animal intelligence. Each animal has evolved information-processing machinery to solve its problems, and we evolved machinery to solve ours. (182)

It is more interesting—not to mention more just, more respectful—to investigate how nonhuman animals solve the particular problems that they encounter in their own habitats than to test how effective they are at solving *human* problems.

A widespread assumption in ALR is that teaching apes human language enables the animals to tell us about themselves. As primatologist H. Lyn Miles maintains, “[n]ow we do not have to wonder about what might be in the mind of apes, or what emotions they might feel. If we keep our expectations realistic and use human children as our model, we can just ask them” (46). Cavalieri and Singer, founders of the Great Ape Project, hold that “[t]he appearance of apes who can communicate in a human language marks a turning-point in human/animal relationships. . . . [they] can convey to us, in more detail than any nonhuman animals have ever done before, a nonhuman viewpoint on the world” (309). Roger and Deborah Fouts go so far as to call ALR a *humble* enterprise: “It was only when a few humans were humble enough to ask the chimpanzee what their [sic] nature was that these discoveries [about what it is like to be a chimp] were made” (31). This arrogant sense of access accompanying ALR is questionable in terms of both accuracy *and* ethicality. The idea is that

we give apes human symbolic language in order that they can tell us what they think and feel. But why should we assume that this language is able to accommodate their perspectives, when it evolved expressly to communicate the perspectives of *Homo sapiens*?

A perceptive animal attendant, Montaigne wrote that even in animals who “have no voice at all, by the reciprocall kindnesse which we see in them, we easily inferre there is some other meane of entercommunication: their jestures treat, and their motions discourse” (58). The important question, at this point, is not whether animals can *speak*, but whether we are able to move beyond the anthropocentric vantage of Western humanism—and listen.

A problem that remains, of course, is how we might represent animals ethically—which, this thesis suggests, would mean nonanthropocentrically and nonhierarchically. If hierarchy is written into our language—in the terms *human* and *animal* certainly, but also *worm*, *fish*, *cat*, *dolphin*, and so on—how do we talk about animals without reinscribing hierarchical order? In conclusion, but really as an opening for a project that might build upon and come after this one, I want to suggest that, in order to address this question, we turn away from the kind of literary renderings that I have examined here—which are ultimately safe, politically conservative—and towards more challenging, experimental or speculative literature. I’m thinking, for example, of Will Self’s *Great Apes* (1997), which is narrated predominantly through the perspective of chimpanzees, and shows an appreciation for the group dynamics of these nonhuman apes, as well as a sensitivity to their politics and ethics; in other words, the novel takes seriously, often to shocking effect for a human reader, what matters to chimpanzees. We might also consider the ant trilogy comprised of the novels *Les Fourmis* (1993), *Le Jour Des Fourmis* (1995), and *La Révolution des Fourmis* (1998), by

scientific journalist Bernard Werber, which takes up ant phenomenology and carefully attends to the life strategies of these insects. Virginia Woolf's *Flush* (1933), a biography of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's eponymous Cocker Spaniel, also de-centers the human, exploring the canine perception world, and so focusing on smell and touch over sight: "[Flush] slept in this hot patch of sun—how sun made the stone reek!" writes Woolf (131). "He sought that tunnel of shade—how acid shade made the stone smell! . . . In short, he knew Florence as no human being has ever known it" (131 – 2). I read each of these novels as in some sense posthumanist, insofar as each compels the reader to confront nonhuman animals with attentive difficulty, inspiring nonanthropocentric respect and consideration for nonhuman subjectivities. The narratives preserve interspecific difference without hierarchizing or metaphorizing, and resist the anthropocentric grasping evidenced in the three ape novels that I have examined in this thesis, as well as in the greater part of extant animal-literature. In a future study of posthumanist literature, I would also want to turn to animal poetry, which might lend itself better than fiction to the kind of interspecific attention, respect, and wonder that I am searching for here.

I do not want to suggest that the experimental animal literature I have touched on above somehow gets animals "right" in a way that more conventional and accessible animal literature, exemplified by the three novels I focused on in this thesis, does not. However, representation that attends to other animal phenomenologies sincerely, as much as possible on their own terms, does jostle anthropocentric assumptions, effectively guiding human attention and consideration to the songs beyond humankind. In such representation lies literature's promise for a posthumanist ethics.

## Notes

---

<sup>i</sup> The green squiggly line that appears on my screen under the “who” I write next to “animal” here is one small cog in the elaborate apparatus that produces the animal as passive object and the human as active subject in the West.

<sup>ii</sup> After this point, for the sake of economy, I don’t insert scare quotes around *human* and *animal*, although I ask that the terms be read throughout this thesis as if scare-quoted.

<sup>iii</sup> On the former point see, for example, *Apes, Language, and the Human Mind* (1998) by Sue Savage-Rumbaugh, Stuart G. Shanker, and Talbot J. Taylor; and on the latter, John Searle’s “Animal Minds” (1994).

<sup>iv</sup> The primatologist Frans de Waal coins the term *anthropodenial* in *Primates and Philosophers: How Morality Evolved* (2006).

<sup>v</sup> I do not subscribe to the division between “nature” and “culture” that Sahlins and other theorists whom I discuss here insist upon. I employ the terms only for the pragmatic purpose of engaging with ideas that belong to the dominant Western paradigm, which is deeply invested in the mutual exclusivity of “nature” and “culture.” For a sustained critique of the nature/culture binary, which follows the work of both Donna Haraway and Bruno Latour, taking up their respective concepts of “nature-culture” and “natures-cultures,” see my “Beyond the Window: Scenic Views and the Order of Nature-Culture in Vancouver” (2011).

<sup>vi</sup> Derrida presented this extended lecture on the animal at the 1997 Cerisy conference, “The Autobiographical Animal” (“L’animal autobiographique”). The lecture was subsequently published as a book under the title *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (*L’animal que donc je suis*).

<sup>vii</sup> See, for example, the video “Kanzi and Novel Sentences” on the Great Ape Trust website.

<sup>viii</sup> The Great Ape Project is an international movement for great ape rights, initiated by Peter Singer and Paola Cavalieri in 1994.

<sup>ix</sup> Gonzales pushes for an allegorical reading where Lucy is racialized other. Lucy’s best friend Amanda draws out the analogy between Lucy and racially oppressed groups, implicit throughout the novel. Amanda advises Lucy to do what black people in the U.S. did in their fight for human rights: “Remember in African American history class?,” asks Amanda. “After centuries of oppression the black people took control of their own heritage. James Brown? I’m black and I’m proud? That’s what you need to do. Don’t let them be the ones to tell on you. Don’t let them define you” (142).

<sup>x</sup> Gonzales here alludes to the Alamogordo Primate Facility (APF), which is located on the Holloman Air Force Base in New Mexico. The APF currently houses around two hundred chimps. Invasive research is no longer done at Holloman; however, the chimps are available for biomedical labs to order for use in invasive research. Many of the chimps have been infected with Hepatitis C or HIV.

<sup>xi</sup> Anstötz appeals to the human status of severely disabled people, makes a call for logical consistency, and shows how the exclusion of nonhuman apes from the sphere of human rights is unjustified. His compelling argument, however, neglects the profound differences between disabled people and nonhuman apes. Apes in the West are products of the zoo and entertainment industries, as well as science and technology; they have been systematically produced as the defenseless, dependent animals that we see, for example, in demonstrations of their language acquisition progress: apes who cannot safely leave the laboratory without being put on a leash, who only ever see the jungle on television, whose whole lives revolve around learning a set of human symbols, and whose most highly praised accomplishment is stringing a few of them together. *Human* linguistic skills, the primary factor that Anstötz appeals to in his argument, are not necessarily the best measure of the depth of intelligence and emotion in *nonhuman* animals.

<sup>xii</sup> As both Derrida (in *The Animal that Therefore I Am*) and Wolfe (in *Animal Rites*) suggest, the allocation of rights to animals is problematic, since the very notion of rights comes from a humanist discourse and is predicated on a coherent human nature as distinct from and superior to all animals; in other words, human rights depend upon a morally inconsiderable category of beings called animal. The idea of animal rights, then, though compelling, is not a viable solution to speciesism.

<sup>xiii</sup> Gruen here superficially discredits the work of Carol J. Adams, who has argued effectively in several books, most notably *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*, that meat-eating and the



---

oppression of women are inextricably connected—and that, therefore, an effective feminist politics is also a vegan politics and vice versa.

<sup>xiv</sup> If human beings are actually better than all other species, argues Fukuyama, then there's nothing wrong with speciesism. Further, he implies that humans *are* the best species, but that we just haven't been able to show yet why that is:

What an animal rights proponent like Peter Singer calls speciesism is thus not necessarily an ignorant and self-serving prejudice on the part of human beings, but a belief about human dignity that can be defended on the basis of an empirically grounded view of human specificity. . . . But if we are to find a source of that superior human moral status that raises us all above the rest of animal creation and yet makes us equals of one another qua human beings, we need to know more about that subset of characteristics of human nature that are not just typical of our species but unique to human beings. Only then will we know what needs the greatest safeguarding against developments in biotechnology. (147).

Animal ethics discourse is scary for Fukuyama because it can easily make his argument look very weak; moreover, it stands to threaten the very humanist human that Fukuyama is trying so hard to hang on to.

<sup>xv</sup> If we take language as the transmission of signs, then *human* language becomes just one (particularly complex, I concede) variation of a characteristic that humans share with other animals certainly, but not only with them. Here I am heeding Derrida's call in the interview "Eating Well": "if one reinscribes language in a network of possibilities that do not merely encompass it but mark it irreducibly from the inside," he writes, everything changes. I am thinking in particular of the mark in general, of the trace, of iterability, of *différance*. These possibilities or necessities, without which there would be no language, are themselves not only human. It is not a question of covering up ruptures and heterogeneities. I would simply contest that they give rise to a single, linear, indivisible, oppositional limit, to a binary opposition between the human and infra-human. And what I am proposing here should allow us to take into account scientific knowledge about the complexity of 'animal languages,' genetic coding, all forms of marking within which so-called human language, as original as it might be, does not allow us to 'cut' once and for all where we would in general like to cut. (116 – 17)

If we are interested in language—which I think we should be, as it is a very interesting phenomenon—then we should be interested in what is most interesting about it—which is not, I would argue, it's specifically human instantiation, but rather the innumerable and inordinately variable ways that language manifests across species and even, arguably, beyond what we know as the "living." Lyotard is promising in this regard:

"*Whoops* are phrases. A wink, a shrugging of the shoulder, a taping [*sic*] of the foot, a fleeting blush, or an attack of tachycardia can be phrases.—And the wagging of a dog's tail, the perked ears of a cat?—And a tiny speck to the West rising upon the horizon of the sea?—A silence? . . . —Silence as a phrase. The expectant wait of the *Is it happening?* as silence. Feelings as a phrase for what cannot now be phrased." (qtd. in Wolfe, *Animal Rites* 56)

Wolfe's "In the Shadow of Wittgenstein's Lion" rethinks "the relation between language, ethics, and species," through an examination of the "'inhuman' nature . . . of communication," of "language conceived in its exteriority and materiality" (10, 11). A redistribution of language across species lines puts the Western humanist subject in difficulty. Thomas Sebeok's concept of "zoosemiotics"—which takes up "'signaling behavior in and across animal species'"—envisages such a redistribution, and has a critical place in the deconstruction of "Homo loquens" (I do not have the space, however, to further develop this potential here) (142).

---

<sup>xvi</sup> Lyn H. Miles maintains that apes “are the escape artists of zoos because of their ability to cleverly manipulate bolts and wires to get out of their enclosures,” and attests to her familiarity with this faculty (45). Bernard Rollin offers a compelling example of an ape communicating effectively with a human (himself) without symbolic language, and notes his own failure to respond in turn:

As I entered the orang-utan’s cage, she seized my hand in a powerful grip. Holding my left wrist. . . . The sense that she was asking me about the scar, as a child might, was irresistible; so irresistible, in fact, that I found myself talking to her as I would to a foreigner with a limited grasp of English . . . . Then I felt a wave of frustration at being unable to answer her. (214)

<sup>xvii</sup> As Dale Jamieson relates,

[t]he irritated meow of my (late) cat Sassafras expressed her hunger and displeasure at me for not feeding her sooner. When a caged gorilla in a zoo throws feces at the gawkers there is little question about what is on his mind—not because the behavior implies a particular mental state ascription, but because our seeing the behavior in context as an expression of boredom and anger is virtually irresistible. (58)

But anyway—even if and when we *cannot* fathom the feelings or thoughts of other animals—why, as Montaigne put it, may “[t]he defect which hindreth the communication betweene them and us . . . not as well be in us as in them?” (57 – 8).

<sup>xviii</sup> For example, Koko taught her companion Michael to sign, Washoe taught her adopted son some ASL, and the bonobos at the GAT teach each other signs. There is also the fascinating story, retold by Haraway on *YouTube*, of an orangutan named Princess who taught the primatologist Biruté Galdikas’ son Binti his first human word, an ASL sign. Here we have an orangutan teaching human language to a human baby (“Donna Haraway Reads the National Geographic on Primates”).

<sup>xix</sup> See, for example “The Faculty of Language: What Is It, Who Has It, and How Did It Evolve?” (2002), by Chomsky, Marc D. Hauser, and W. Tecumseh Fitch.

<sup>xx</sup> For an anecdotal example of a moral criticism: in an early review of *The Evolution of Bruno Littlemore*, Marya Zanders expresses outrage not only over the novel itself, but over the “millions of tax dollars [that went] into building a primate center [in Iowa] to house . . . orangutans who would be taught to communicate through sign language”—money that, according to Zanders, should have gone towards funding public libraries for school children. Zanders’ objection, both to the primate center and to the novel, is not concerned in the least with whether or not apes are capable of language, but rather with the moral implications of investing in the potential of apes over children in the first place.

<sup>xxi</sup> Isabel qualifies that “‘it doesn’t imply mastery, or superiority, or anything of the sort. We are, all of us, collaborators’” (10). The qualification is questionable, considering that the relationship between who is called “human” and who is called “animal” in a Western context entails a dominance/subordination hierarchy.

<sup>xxii</sup> There is an analogy to be made here with the phenomenon of “Baby Storm.” Professionals (doctors, psychologists) and the public alike are outraged because Baby Storm’s parents are not gendering their baby or revealing her/his sex. The fear is that the baby will grow up not *knowing who s/he is*, which will lead to irreparable confusion and distress. Baby Storm’s parents also encourage their other two children to shape their own gender identities. However, the parents’ deconstructive philosophy only goes so far and not actually very far at all. In a public statement in defense of her and her husband’s parenting choices, the mother, Kathy Witterick, asserts that her children do not need prescribed or rigid genders to *know themselves*. “My children know who they are,” she declares—thus underwriting the very identity complex that was the problem in the first place.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Coetzee originally delivered *The Lives of Animals* as the 1997 – 98 Tanner Lectures on Human Values at Princeton University. The book version was published in 1999 and includes responses from other academics in various disciplines.

<sup>xxiv</sup> A documentary film on Nim’s life, entitled *Project Nim*, was featured at the Sundance Film Festival this year, and will be released in theatres in July 2011.

<sup>xxv</sup> As we have already seen, Anstötz aligns apes and disabled people, and Patterson aligns Koko with young disabled children. Even full-grown apes are aligned with children all the time, both in primatology and in popular culture. We saw this in *Ape House*. For another example, in *The Wachula Woods Accord* Siebert remarks that chimpanzees are “now said to have the sentience of a human five-year-old”; he extrapolates that

---

the animals are “like ongoing, superannuated children” (42). Moreover, the discipline of primatology is highly gendered—a point that Haraway draws out in *Primate Visions*. It is overwhelmingly the women primatologists that we see in photographs and films, and also in literature, as mediators between the animals and white men (the white men are often shown in observatories overlooking enclosures; or designing the experiments; or then sending women to the jungle, as was the case with the famous primatologist Louis Leakey and his “girls”). Moreover, not only are the women portrayed in close contact with apes, it is often in a maternal role. Think of Jane Goodall and the chimps at Gombe, or Dian Fossey in Rwanda, or Sue Savage-Rumbaugh in Iowa; but also Isabel Duncan in *Ape House*, Jenny Lowe in *Lucy*, and Lydia Littlemore in *Bruno Littlemore*. Each of the recent ape novels I look at here takes up the Western notion of a deep and essential affiliation between women and animals; Hale articulates it explicitly through Bruno: “This is why . . . all great primatologists are women,” the chimp proclaims: “the female mind is quicker to empathy than indignation, and that is one reason why Jane Goodall and Dian Fossey and Sue Savage-Rumbaugh and Lydia Littlemore made such great pioneers in primatology” (65). As Derrida puts it, here we have “a discourse that never resists placing the woman and child on the side of the animal” (*The Animal That Therefore I Am* 57).

<sup>xxvi</sup> In the end, Lucy wants no part of U.S. society, even if it would have her. She feels sorry for the “lonely human beings,” who lack the animal’s curiosity and “light of recognition” (109, 18). Gonzales spins a home for her amongst the Oglala Sioux people on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. Here, Lucy is able to express her animal side freely because it is a side that the Native Americans, as represented in the novel, have not left behind. Moreover, the reservation’s isolation and sovereignty ensure the protection of the Native space from the world outside. The government is not concerned with her anymore, and why should it be? On the already-animal territory of the reservation, she is no longer a threat to humanity. As Lucy acknowledges, “So long as [she] stay[s] out of sight, they’re just going to pretend that [she] never existed” (307). Gonzales’ animalization of the Native Americans, and their containment on the reservation, (re)produces and (re)settles a human that exists outside of indigeneity and of course outside of the animal.

## Bibliography

- Agamben, Giorgio. *The Open: Man and Animal*. Trans. Kevin Attell. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2004. Print.
- . *The Sacrament of Language: An Archaeology of the Oath*. Trans. Adam Kotso. . Stanford: Stanford UP, 2011. Print.
- . "What Is an Apparatus?" *"What Is an Apparatus?" and Other Essays*. Trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2009. 1 – 24. Print.
- Aristotle, *The History of Animals*. 350 B.C.E. Trans. D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson. Web. 15 June 2011.
- Asquith, Pamela J. "Why Anthropomorphism Is *Not* Metaphor: Crossing Concepts and Cultures in Animal Behavior Studies." *Anthropomorphism, Anecdotes, and Animals*. Eds. Robert W. Mitchell, Nicholas S. Thompson, and H. Lyn Miles. Albany, NY: State U of New York P, 1997. 22 – 34. Print.
- Bacon, Francis. *The New Organon, or True Directions Concerning the Interpretation of Nature*. 1620. *Liberty Library of Constitutional Classics*. Web. June 5, 2011.
- Bavidge, Michael and Ian Ground. *Can We Understand Animal Minds?* London: Bristol Classical, 1994. Print.
- Benston, Kimberley W. "Experimenting at the Threshold: Sacrifice, Anthropomorphism, and the Aims of (Critical) Animal Studies." *PMLA* 124.2 (2009): 548 – 55.
- Burroughs, Edgar Rice. *Tarzan of the Apes*. 1914. *Literature.org*. Web. 30 Dec 2010.
- Cavalieri, Paola and Peter Singer. "Preface." Eds. Cavalieri and Singer. *The Great Ape Project: Equality Beyond Humanity*. New York: St. Martin's, 1994. 1 – 3. Print.

- Cenami Spada, Emanuela. "Amorphism, Mechanomorphism, and Anthropomorphism." Mitchell, Thompson, and Miles. 37 – 49.
- Celan, Paul. "Threadsuns." *Poems and Excerpts*. 6 Nov. 2006. Web. 11 July 2011.
- Clark, David L. "On Being 'the Last Kantian in Nazi Germany': Dwelling with Animals after Levinas." *Postmodernism and the Ethical Subject*. Eds. Barbara Gabriel and Susan Ilcan. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2004, 41 – 75.
- Clark, Stephen R.L. "Apes and the Idea of Kindred." Cavalieri and Singer. 113 – 25.
- Cheyfitz, Eric. "Tarzan of the Apes: US Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century." *American Literary History* 1.2 (1989): 339 – 60.
- Chomsky, Noam, Marc D. Hauser, and W. Tecumseh Fitch. "The Faculty of Language: What Is It, Who Has It, and How Did It Evolve?" *Science* 298 (22 Nov 2002): 1569 – 79.
- Coetzee, J.M. *The Lives of Animals*. Ed. Amy Gutmann. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1999. Print.
- Corbey, Raymond. *The Metaphysics of Apes: Negotiating the Animal-Human Boundary*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005. Print.
- Congo. Dir. Frank Marshall. Paramount, 1995. DVD.
- Creager, Angela N. H. and William Chester Jordan. "Introduction." *The Animal/Human Boundary: Historical Perspectives*. Eds. Creager and Jordan. New York: Rochester, 2002. ix – xviii. Print.
- Crichton, Michael. *Congo*. 1980. New York: Avon, 2003. Print.
- de Waal, Frans. *Our Inner Ape*. New York: Penguin, 2005. Print.

- . *Primates and Philosophers: How Morality Evolved*. Eds. Stephen Macedo and Josiah Ober. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006. Print.
- Derrida, Jacques. “‘Eating Well,’ or The Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida,” *Who Comes After the Subject?* Ed. Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy. New York: Routledge, 1991. 96 – 119. Print.
- . *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. Trans. David Wills. New York: Fordham UP, 2008. Print.
- Diamond, Jared. “The Third Chimpanzee.” Cavalieri and Singer. 88 – 101.
- Fisher, John Andrew. *Interpretation and Explanation in the Study of Animal Behavior, Vol. 1: Interpretation, Intentionality, and Communication*. Eds. Marc Bekoff and Dale Jamieson. “The Myth of Anthropomorphism.” 96 – 116. Print.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. 1966. New York: Vintage, 1994. Print.
- Fouts, Deborah H., and Roger S. Fouts. “Chimpanzees’ Use of Sign Language.” Cavalieri and Singer. 28 – 41.
- Fukuyama, Francis. *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution*. New York: Picador, 2002. Print.
- Gonzales, Laurence. “Human-Animal Hybrids in ‘Lucy,’ A Look to the Future.” National Public Radio Interview. Web. 10 July 2011. Audio.
- . *Lucy*. New York: Knopf, 2010. Print.
- Griffen, Donald R. “Foreword.” Bekoff and Jamieson. xiii – xviii.
- Gruen, Sara. *Ape House*. New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2010. Print.
- Hale, Benjamin. *The Evolution of Bruno Littlemore*. New York: Twelve, 2011. Print.

- Haraway, Donna. "Donna Haraway Reads the National Geographic on Primates." 1987  
*YouTube*. 12 June 2011. Video.
- . *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science*. New York: Routledge, 1986. Print.
- . *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*. New York: Routledge, 1990. Print.
- "hominoid, *adj.* and *n.*" *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1989. *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. 19 July 2011.
- Huxley, Thomas H. *Man's Place in Nature*. 1863. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1959. Print.
- Jamieson, Dale. *Morality's Progress: Essays on Humans, Other Animals, and the Rest of Nature*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002. Print.
- Kafka, Franz. "A Report for An Academy." Trans. Ian Johnston. Web. 29 Nov 2010.
- "Kanzi and Novel Sentences." Perf. Kanzi, Sue Savage-Rumbaugh. *Great Ape Trust: Insights Through Collaboration with Apes*. Web. 17 June 2011. Video.
- Kennedy, J.S. *The New Anthropomorphism*. Cambridge, NY: Cambridge UP, 1992. *Google Books*. Web. 2 June 2011.
- Kiriazis, Judith and Con N. Slobodchikoff, "Anthropocentrism and the Study of Animal Language." Mitchell, Thompson, and Miles. 365 – 9.
- Klages, Mary. *Literary Theory: A Guide for the Perplexed*. New York: Continuum, 2006. Print.
- Koko: A Talking Gorilla*. Dir. Barbet Schroeder. Perf. Koko, Francine ("Penny") Patterson. 1978. *YouTube*. 21 May 2011. Video.

Lacan, Jacques. "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud."

*Écrits: A Selection*. 1966. Trans. Alan Sheridan. Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005. 161 – 97. Web. 20 June 2011.

---. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the *I* as Revealed in

Psychoanalytic Experience." *Écrits: A Selection*. 1966. Trans. Alan Sheridan. Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005. 1 – 8. Web. 20 June 2011.

Latour, Bruno. "A Well-Articulated Primatology: Reflections of a Fellow-Traveller."

*Primate Encounters: Models of Science, Gender, and Society*. Eds. Shirley C. Strum and Linda M. Fedigan. Chicago: Chicago UP, 2000. Print.

---. *Aramis, or, The Love of Technology*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Cambridge, MA:

Harvard UP, 1996. ACLS Humanities E-Book. Web. 17 June 2011.

---. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1993. Print.

---. "Where Are the Missing Masses? The Sociology of a Few Mundane Artifacts."

Web. May 25, 2011.

Levinas, Emmanuel. "The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights." *Animal Philosophy:*

*Essential Readings in Continental Thought*. Eds. Matthew Calarco and Peter Atterton. New York: Continuum, 2006. 47 – 50. Print.

Mallet, Marie-Louise. "Foreword." *The Animal That Therefore I Am*. New York: Fordham

UP, 2008. ix – xiii. Print.

Miles, H. Lyn. "Language and the Orang-utan: The Old 'Person' of the Forest." Cavalieri

and Singer. 42 – 57.



Patterson, Francine and Wendy Gordon. "The Case for the Personhood of Gorillas."

Cavalieri and Singer. 58 – 77.

Pinker, Steven. *How the Mind Works*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1999. *Google Books*.

Web. 2 June 2011.

Radick, Gregory. *The Simian Tongue: The Long Debate about Animal Language*. Chicago:

U of Chicago P, 2007. Print.

Richter, Virginia. *Literature After Darwin: Human Beasts in Western Fiction 1859-1939*

New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. Print.

Rollin, Bernard E. "How the Animals Lost Their Minds: Animal Mentation and Scientific

Ideology." Bekoff and Jamieson. 375 – 93.

Sahlins, Marshall. "Only Apes Have 'Human Nature.'" University of British Columbia

Department of Anthropology and Centre for the Study of Human Evolution,

Cognition and Culture. UBC, Vancouver. 4 Mar 2011. Lecture.

Searle, John R. "Animal Minds." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 19.1 (1994): 206 – 19.

Sebeok, Thomas A. "Zoosemiotics." *American Speech* 43.2 (1968): 142 – 44.

Self, Will. *Great Apes*. New York: Grove, 1997. Print.

Siebert, Charles. *The Wauchula Woods Accord: Towards a New Understanding of*

*Animals*. New York: Scribner, 2009. Print.

Sober, Elliot. "Comparative Psychology Meets Evolutionary Biology: Morgan's Canon and

Cladistic Parsimony." *Thinking with Animals: New Perspectives on*

*Anthropomorphism*. Eds. Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman. New York: Columbia

UP, 2005. 85 – 99. Print.

Sorenson, John. *Ape*. London: Reaktion Books, 2009. Print.

- H. Peter Steeves, "The Familiar Other and Feral Selves: Life at the Human/Animal Boundary." Creager and Jordan. 228-264.
- Stine, Peter. "Kafka and Animals." *Contemporary Literature* 22.1 (1981): 58 – 80.
- Tattersall, Ian. *Becoming Human: Evolution and Human Uniqueness*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1998. Print.
- Varsava, Nina. "Beyond the Window: Scenic Views and the Order of Nature-Culture in Vancouver." *Spaces and Flows: An International Journal of Urban and ExtraUrban Studies* 1.2 (2011): 63 – 74.
- Werber, Bernard. *Les Fourmis*. Paris: Livre de Poche, 1993.
- . *Le Jour Des Fourmis*. Paris: Livre de Poche, 1995.
- . *La Révolution des Fourmis*. Paris: Livre de Poche, 1998.
- Winthrop-Young, Geoffrey. "Talk." Message to the author. 13 Apr. 2011. Email.
- Witterick, Kathy. "Baby Storm's mom on gender, parenting and the media." *The Vancouver Sun*. 28 May 2011. Web. 17 June 2011.
- Wolfe, Cary. *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory*. Chicago: U Chicago P, 2003. Print.
- . *What is Posthumanism?* Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2010. Print.
- Woolf, Virginia. *Flush: A Biography*. 1933. New York: Harcourt, 1983. Print.
- Zanders, Marya. "marya zanders says . . . ." *i just finished: a conversation of books*. 2010. Web. 10 Jan. 2011.