

2 Animals as Media

Speaking through/with Nonhuman Beings

Tony E. Adams

Two days before Halloween and four days before the 2004 U.S. presidential election, I sit outside my favorite coffee shop and prepare to read the newspaper. I am quickly distracted by people walking decorated dogs, animals sporting costumes and political propaganda. I watch a Doberman in a miniature cowboy hat and a pumpkin-suited Chihuahua pass, followed by a Labrador with a John Kerry/John Edwards bumper sticker attached to its fur.

I notice that the decorated dogs and their owners receive more attention than owners of undecorated dogs; the decorated dogs seem to work as conversation starters, separating the animals and their owners from the mundane and boring owners and animals. The Labrador in support of Kerry/Edwards also functions as a vehicle to take the owner's political message into narrow alleys, sidewalks and dog-friendly venues.

In this essay, I describe how animals can function as media, as tools humans use to facilitate human interaction. In so doing, I add to existing research on human-animal relationships, research that tends to emphasize the dilemmas that arise when humans treat animals as people, objects or a combination of both (Francione; Sanders); ways humans speak for animals, ways animals communicate with people and ways humans can and should interpret animal communication (Arluke and Sanders); what animal behaviors tell us about human behaviors (MooAllam; Roughgarden); ways (human) representations of animals can influence human interactions with and communication about live versions of these animals (Berger; King); animal selfhood and the "shared intersubjectivity" of humans and animals (Jerolmack 655; Irvine); and the mutual, coevolving qualities of "companion species" relationships, meaningful endeavors created by all species involved (Anderson; Haraway, "Species").

Some writers have acknowledged ways humans use animals as media. For instance, Cain describes how humans talk "to their pet instead of to other family members" in ways "other family members could hear" (79); Messent refers to dogs as "social lubricants" (45); Williams frames dogs as "relational media" (103); Arluke and Sanders provide examples of people presenting a "virtual voice" of an animal to express their own "orientation,

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desires, or concerns" (70); Robins, Sanders and Cahill demonstrate ways an animal can work as a "conduit" humans use to speak to other humans (22); and Ramirez illustrates how humans can use dogs as "props" in order to create "presentations of self" (375). However, the specific ways humans use animals as media and the implications of such use are tangential discussions in many of these projects.

Given my interest in understanding ways humans use animals as media in human interaction, tenets of symbolic interactionism ground this research. Interactionists concern themselves with what happens in moments of relating, in the time and space of interaction. In particular, interactionists work to discern the "taken-for-granted meanings" entrenched in interaction processes (Denzin 19), attend to meaning-making processes (Goffman, "Interaction"; Mead), conceive of personal accountability in interaction (Goffman, "Strategic"; Scott and Lyman) and demonstrate how meanings are used, by humans, to make sense of themselves, others and society.

Adhering to interactionist goals, I have two interrelated objectives. First, I describe what it means to make animals media, and specifically note how humans, *in* interaction, make animals meaningful *for other humans*. I use two case studies to formulate this animals-as-media theory: (1) the use of dogs by humans and (2) the use of penguins at the Central Park Zoo (New York) and in the film *March of the Penguins*. I then discern possible consequences of using animals as media by illustrating how the rhetoric of "invasive species" exhibits found at many zoos and aquaria can implicate humans labeled "illegal," "invasive" and "nonnative."

Second, following Irvine's call for researchers to better understand "how" animals mean something for human interaction (15), I illustrate how the human use of animals can influence meaning-making processes and personal accountability. As I demonstrate, animals are not "neutral delivery system[s]," an assumption often held about media (Meyrowitz 15). Animals can, and do, harbor personal and political human agendas.

METHOD

A case study is a detailed account of an activity or a process. The purpose of the account is to provide insight into, advance theorizing about and attend to the social and political characteristics of the activity or process (Stake). Case studies utilize multiple methodological procedures and sources of evidence (Yin), and they are helpful because they refine theory and introduce complexities for future research (Creswell).

In this project, I use two case studies—the use of dogs by humans, and the use of gay and straight penguins—to provide an account of how humans can use animals as media. I use personal experience, textual analysis and ethnographic fieldwork to develop each case. I then use grounded theory (Charmaz) to inductively discern patterns—repeated words, phrases

and topics of discussion—across my two cases in order to theorize human animal-use.

As my opening narrative suggests, this project emerged from observations of people using dogs as interactional devices in everyday settings. I treated these observations as meaningful and valuable, and decided to research human dog-use. My first case thus describes ways humans can make dogs meaningful for other humans.

Using phrases like "dog clothes," "dressed up animals" and "dogs and human interaction," I searched online newspaper, magazine and journal databases to find stories of humans communicating with other humans through the use of dogs. I wanted examples that complemented my personal experience and initial observations. I was not interested in articles about human interpretations of dog communication (or dog interpretations of human communication), whether dogs and humans can meaningfully relate or the ethics of humans speaking for dogs.

While I was working on human dog-use, controversy emerged around Roy and Silo, a same-sex penguin couple at the Central Park Zoo (New York), their accompanying children's book *And Tango Makes Three* and penguins featured in the film *March of the Penguins*. In this controversy, I noticed a similarity between the human use of penguins and the human use of dogs reported in my opening anecdote. I thus decided to research articles about human penguin-use as well.

Using phrases like "gay penguins," "Roy and Silo," *And Tango Makes Three* and *March of the Penguins*, I searched online newspaper and magazine databases to find stories of human penguin-use. Similar to my dog search, I wanted articles that discussed ways humans made penguins meaningful for other humans. I was not interested in articles that that announced the release of the book or the film or articles documenting how well the book or film sold.

While doing this research, I was also conducting ethnographic fieldwork at the Florida Aquarium (Tampa). I soon noticed that the rhetoric of the invasive species exhibit resembled ways humans were using dogs and penguins. But it seemed that the rhetoric of these exhibits was much more politicized, particularly because it called for the eradication of animals labeled "illegals," "invaders" and "nonnatives," labels that, when viewing animals as media, could have consequences for humans labeled in similar ways. Therefore, I found it important to illustrate possible consequences of such rhetoric by discussing not only the discourse at the Florida Aquarium, but also the discourse at other invasive exhibits around the United States.

MAKING ANIMALS MEDIA

Media are "agencies" that enable "communication to take place" (Fiske 176–177). Media are vehicles humans use to communicate goals and

pleasures, vehicles that harbor values and ideologies (Lorde; Spigel). Media are sensory “extensions” of human bodies, extensions that make new and unique ways of human interaction possible (McLuhan; Ong; Schivelbusch). And media facilitate human “sense-making” (Pauly).

In this essay, I frame animals as media, as agencies humans can use to speak to other humans and agencies that enable human interaction. Animals function as media when humans use them to convey information to other humans, as the Labrador sporting the Kerry/Edwards bumper sticker demonstrates. When clothed, decorated animals signify, for other humans, creative and responsible owners (Prager). Conceiving of animals as media provides another way to make sense of human-animal relationships and, more importantly, makes animals important interactional phenomena.

This animals-as-media theory may initially resemble anthropomorphism—“the projection onto animals of our own feelings, thoughts, motives, and other human qualities” (Challinor 1). However, the theory differs from anthropomorphism in that an animal need not be humanized to function as a medium. Humans can make “statements” *with* an animal for other humans, and such statements may not involve ascribing human qualities to an animal. In some instances, anthropomorphism may occur, but it is not necessary for animals to function as media.

Next, I describe how dogs can “speak for” their owners. As I demonstrate, these ways of speaking are made possible only by the presence of dogs and are ways of speaking that are meaningful for and directed at humans, not necessarily for or at other dogs. I also illustrate how people can evaluate a person based on the type of animal the person owns and how the person cares for a particular animal.

MAKING ANIMALS MEDIA

Prager asks, “Do owners dress their dogs because it’s cold outside? Or just because it’s cool?” (V1). She writes of dressing nonhuman beings and considers animal attire socially important: “leaving the house spells clothing to human beings. It’s a lesson learned from infancy: you dress to go out. You have a furry creature with you, you dress it, too” (V8; see Levine). Prager suggests that humans dress animals because it is socially appropriate—that is, appropriate for humans. Based on this logic, naked animals can signify inappropriate and irresponsible owners. It is this signifying possibility that makes animals media.

Or consider the following statements made in a human argument: “‘Stop fighting—you’re upsetting the dog,’ or ‘Get quiet—the dog is upset’” (Cain 76). In an attempt to get someone to stop fighting or to get quiet, a person uses a dog to justify a request. The argument may have nothing to do with the dog itself, but the person’s request and justification of the request is based on the presence and anthropomorphizing of a dog. But here the dog

functions as a medium, an agency that enables a particular discourse to take place.

Or consider a question posed by Tapper: “Can we judge a man by his dog?” (12). Tapper describes how the types of dogs U.S. presidents own and the presidents’ treatments of these dogs suggest to other humans—and not to other dogs—what the presidents are like as humans. Here dogs, by being owned and acted upon by humans, speak for humans to humans. Tapper specifically focuses on Mitt Romney’s transporting of Seamus, the family dog, in a cage on top of the car. Based on Romney’s inhumane treatment, people wondered if Romney was compassionate. Tapper also illustrates how a similar evaluation occurred when Lyndon Johnson lifted his beagles by their ears, when it was revealed that Bill Frist adopted cats from humane shelters in order to conduct experiments on them and when Barack Obama broke a campaign pledge of adopting a rescue mutt by instead adopting a pure breed (Tapper and Miller). In these examples, anthropomorphism did not apply: People did not give dogs and cats *human* qualities. Rather, dogs and cats—and human acts performed in relation to these dogs and cats—mediated human evaluations of humans.

Or consider Ramirez’s observation that the presence of a dog next to a person is often indicative, for others, of this person’s masculinity (cats, Ramirez suggests, are indicative of femininity). Miller adds another layer to Ramirez’s claim. He notes that because of the “froufrou” factor associated with poodles, few men “want to be seen parading down the street with one” (16). Miller suggests that, by adhering to gendered stereotypes, some men believe others will find them less masculine if they walk a prettified dog, less masculine if they attach a poodle to a leash and walk it in public settings. Here, concern does not reside with the dogs themselves but with the owners and (perceived) human evaluations of the owners. Ramirez and Miller demonstrate that by (not) using dogs, some men articulate and perpetuate gender “statements” by showing others (and themselves) that they can “do” masculinity well, that is, by walking a dog (and not a cat) or by refusing to walk a “froufrou” dog.

Human attributions of meaning can also affect the human-animal relationship. For instance, if a man considers a cat feminine or a poodle unmanly and thus does not want to be seen with either emasculating being, the cat and the poodle could suffer from the man’s neglect. Anthropomorphism does not apply in these examples either: This man did not give the cat or poodle *human* qualities. The man invested a cat or poodle with meanings important for himself and possibly other humans; the animal only functioned as a medium, as a vehicle that transmitted particular gendered information.

While I have illustrated how particular dogs and cats might function as media, I next introduce a more politicized example of human animal-use. I specifically show how some people used straight and gay penguins to justify (human) arguments and political causes, arguments and causes that, while

made possible by the presence of penguins, have no direct bearing on the everyday existence of the penguins.

PENGUINS AS MEDIA

June 10, 2002. Freelance journalist Cristina Cardoze introduces Wendell and Cass, a pair of male penguins living at the New York Aquarium. At this time, Wendell and Cass have been coupled for eight years. The penguins' caretaker, Stephanie Miller, says, "There are a lot of animals that have same-sex relations, it's just that people don't know about it." This lack of knowledge makes Wendell and Cass newsworthy. "At the New York Aquarium, no one suspected Wendell and Cass were gay when they first bonded," Cardoze explains. "Penguins don't have external sex organs, so visually there's no surefire way to tell whether they are male or female." The birds regularly copulate but never produce an egg, and Miller, the caretaker, debunks the myth that Wendell and Cass, because they are gay, have the cleanest nest: "These are penguins. They poop in their nest. Nobody's got a clean nest."

Humans categorize animals on human terms. Animals are deemed "ugly" or "cute," "clean" or "dirty," "female" or "male." When it comes to sexuality, however, animals are often categorized as "heterosexual." Based upon human definitions of sexuality, nonheterosexual animals have always existed, but, because of conservative politics and "histories of censorship" (Adam 18), they have only recently appeared in scientific studies (see Bagemihl; Chris; Giffney and Hird; MooAllem; Reiss; Terry), in children's books (Richardson and Parnell) and on television (Alexandresco, Loyer, and Menendez; Minhas and Littleboy; Thomas). Nonhetero species still remain absent from most museums, zoos and aquaria (Desmond; Liddiard) and many nature documentaries exclude them as well (Uddin and Hobbes). Enter Roy and Silo.

February 7, 2004. Dinitia Smith, a reporter for the *New York Times*, tells of a "love that dare not squeak its name." It is the story of Roy and Silo, a male penguin couple residing at the Central Park Zoo in New York. Smith notes that the birds have been partnered for six years, and, out of a desire to incubate an egg, "put a rock in their nest and sat on it, keeping it warm in the folds of their abdomens." Rob Gramzay, the penguins' caretaker, noticed the incubatory practice and gave Roy and Silo a fertile egg to tend. After thirty-four days, the couple successfully hatched "Tango" and cared for the chick until it could survive on her/his/its own. According to Smith, the caretaker was "full of praise for them" (B7).

Roy, Silo and Tango achieved celebrity status for some people, primarily those belonging to same-sex advocacy groups. The birds served as evidence, for these groups, of the naturalness of homosexuality (e.g., "If it is normal for animals to have same-sex attractions then it must be normal

for humans"). Roy and Silo also served as evidence that same-sex human couples can effectively rear children (e.g., "If gay birds can successfully rear offspring then gay humans can too"). Roy, Silo and Tango started to function as media, as vehicles for promoting human social change. But a year after the penguin family made headlines a film was released that implicitly questioned the legitimacy of same-sex attracted penguins.

June 24, 2005. *March of the Penguins* begins airing in the United States. Narrated by Morgan Freeman, the film features a slice of penguin life as it occurs in Antarctica. Viewers catch a glimpse of a penguin reproductive cycle, the community ethos of bird hatching and rearing and the harsh living conditions that, based on human standards, penguins weather. The film becomes the highest grossing documentary after Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9-11* and stirs up just as much controversy.

September 13, 2005. Jonathan Miller describes how socially conservative groups appropriate penguins from *March of the Penguins* to promote monogamy, advance antiabortion arguments, display tenets of "intelligent design," and vilify homosexuality (Zuk). Pro-life activist Stanek enjoys the film because nearly "every scene and narrative verified the beauty of life and the rightness of protecting it." Stanek relates the *birds'* activities, depicted by the film's (human) creators, to her thoughts about *human* activities:

As I watched [the movie], I wondered how people could ooh and aww when baby penguins pecked out of their shells, or cover their eyes when a giant petrel attacked a baby penguin, yet not give a thought to the dismemberment and killing of human babies.

For Stanek, the filmed penguins work as media, as vehicles for making arguments against human proabortion groups. And while the birds serve as conditions for Stanek's discourse—that is, while they make Stanek's claims possible—her arguments are not aimed at the birds.

September 20, 2005. In an editorial in the *Times* (London), Caitlin Moran responds to uses of penguins in *March of the Penguins*:

Still in the US, a Christian audience is making a documentary about penguins the biggest factual cinema release since *Fahrenheit 9/11*. Churches are block booking seats for *March of the Penguins*. . . . To be honest, this is good news. If American Christians want to go public on the fact that they're now morally guided by penguins, at least we know where we all stand. (2.7)

Kluger also critiques the "religious right" for turning the "family film" into a "family feud," especially since Laura Kim, vice president of Warner Independent Pictures (the film's distributor), says, "They're just birds" (13A).

September 27, 2005. During the hype surrounding *March of the Penguins*, Roy and Silo emerge again, only this time in another human-created

story: They separate. "A famous gay penguin at Central Park Zoo in New York has reignited the 'culture wars' over homosexuality by going straight," Bone writes in the *Times*:

The widely publicized story of the two males bringing up a baby, named Tango, made them gay icons. Their same-sex household was cited by liberals as a corrective to the traditional "family values" displayed by Emperor penguins in the hugely popular new documentary, *The[sic] March of the Penguins*, which has been hailed by Christian Conservatives. But Silo walked out on Roy for a girlfriend from California called Scrappy, who moved to Central Park from SeaWorld in San Diego. The new heterosexual couple built a nest and hang out by the pool, while Roy broods alone.

Earlier the same week, FOXNews.com released an article subtitled "New York City's Most Famous Gay Penguin Couple Has Split Up." The spin FOX added to the story, however, was conservative when juxtaposed against the (liberal) *Times* article:

Even worse, one of [the penguins] has taken up with a female penguin new to the Central Park Zoo . . . Silo and Roy, two male chinstrap penguins native to the South Atlantic, made local headlines six years ago when they came out with their same-sex relationship. Since then, the pair have successfully hatched and raised an adopted chick—after trying to incubate a rock—and become [sic] role models for six other same-sex couples among penguins at the zoo. . . . Roy, all alone, sat disconsolately at the edge of the penguin area, staring at the wall.

Throckmorton refers to Silo as the "world's first documented ex-gay penguin," and describes Scrappy as a "hot little bird" from San Diego. "I guess [Silo] was wishing for a California girl," Throckmorton writes.

With Silo and Scrappy picking out curtains together, will gay rights groups now acknowledge that sexual orientation changes? The concept of gay penguin permanence painted by the [*New York Times*] and *And Tango Makes Three* [a children's book about Roy, Silo and Tango] now seems more like fiction than [a] public policy sign post.

While the *Times*, FOXNEWS.com and Throckmorton use penguins as media, they also "spin" Roy and Silo in particular ways. Roy and Silo become human-sexualized birds, and interpretations of their (lack of a) relationship differ with each source, that is, with the liberal *Times* or the conservative FOX and Throckmorton. Each promotes a liberal or conservative agenda directed at humans, but the birds themselves do not create this spin. Roy and Silo are also not the audience of these messages.

While debates about human same-sex marriage fueled debates about penguin sexuality, the straight penguins in *March of the Penguins* served as political fodder because they surfaced around the time that gay penguins surfaced in mainstream media outlets. The film aired without a "single queer bird to be found" (Uddin and Hobbes 1), and, combined with the credibility often attributed to documentaries, allowed the very presence of straight birds to function as antigay advocates. However, introducing gay animals into mainstream discourse assists progay groups that argue for the naturalness of human homosexuality and thus the need to protect and respect gay humans. But introducing gay animals into discourse can also perpetuate antigay rhetoric that deems gay beings "animalistic" and "uncivilized." With the penguins, homosexuality literally becomes "for the birds."

One event further dramatized the use of penguins in mass-mediated discourse: the separation of Roy and Silo. For antigay groups the separated birds served as evidence that human sexuality can "change" or "correct" itself. Roy and Silo's separation also perpetuated the unfaithful, promiscuous discourse commonly attributed to nonheterosexual humans, and Silo's "conversion" reinforced the heterosexual and thus factual story of *March of the Penguins* (that is, it could now be argued that gay penguins do not exist and therefore need not be in the film.) While penguins made the conditions for such discourse possible, the discourse was directed at humans, not the birds. The animals functioned as mediators of human communication.

Furthermore, in the penguin debates humans anthropomorphically sexualized the birds. This sexualizing, however, moved beyond anthropomorphism when the birds served as evidence, for humans, that "homosexuality is natural" or that "gay people can go straight" (i.e., since Silo went straight). Anthropomorphized penguins functioned as the necessary conditions for communication used by humans to target human populations with human-relevant messages. It is this idea that makes the penguins media.

Thus far, I have illustrated ways in which humans can use dogs, cats and penguins as media, as agencies to accomplish particular tasks as well as to advance particular goals, pleasures and ideologies. In the next section, I move from showing *how* humans have used animals as media to highlighting one area of concern about human animal-use. In particular, I discern possible consequences of human animal-use by criticizing the rhetoric of invasive species exhibits, rhetoric that calls for the eradication of harmful "illegal," "alien," "foreign" and "nonnative" animals and rhetoric that, when conceiving of animals as media, might promote hatred toward human populations labeled in such ways.

INVASIVE SPECIES AS MEDIA

Nonindigenous animals are "alien or exotic" beings that did not originate in a particular area (Lodge and Shrader-Frechette 32). These animals

become “invasive” when they pose “significant threats to the environment, the economy and human health” (Olson 34), alter how ecosystems (should) function, work against biodiversity, contaminate the value of “regional biota” (Donlan and Martin 267) and affect the aesthetic desires of humans. Over seven thousand invasive animals live in the United States, and invasive species exhibits found at many zoos and aquaria provide strategies to stop “the introduction of new species” and to eradicate “existing [invasive] populations” (Swift 5). In 1999, Bill Clinton even developed the National Invasive Species Council, an institutionalized authority designed to protect native species.

Authorities categorize species as invasive depending on (human) aesthetic, temporal, environmental and economic goals. “What is harm for one person may be good for another,” Lodge and Shrader-Frchette (32) write, further emphasizing the contingency of invasive categorization: “Any characterization that any or all nonindigenous species are good or bad is a value judgment, not science. In deciding which nonindigenous species are invasive, value judgments from many societal constituencies are required” (34–35). Lodge and Shrader-Frchette conceive of invasive species as natural and believe definitions of “nonindigenous” and “invasive” hinge upon the “time frame” being considered (33); human temporal “benchmarks dictate who is native and who is not” (Donlan and Martin). Thus, animals that arrived in a region centuries ago may easily acquire a “native” status whereas those that arrived within the last few decades may not get such a privilege.

In order to demonstrate how the rhetoric of invasive species can be harmful when viewing animals as media, I must acknowledge two assumptions. First, I assume that museum, zoo and aquarium exhibits are “partial” and “partisan” (Goodall 55). As Bernard Armada suggests, “By privileging certain narratives and artifacts over others, museums implicitly communicate who/what is central and who/what is peripheral; who/what we must remember and who/what it is okay to forget” (236). Karp argues that museum exhibits are “bound up with assertions about what is central or peripheral, valued or useless, known or to be discovered, essential to identity or marginal” (7; see also Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki; Haraway, “Teddy Bear”). Invasive exhibits categorize invasive animals as peripheral, useless, marginal and okay-to-forget beings.

Second, I assume that language is both representational *and* constitutive—the words we use to describe a phenomenon influence our understanding and evaluation of this phenomenon *and* call this phenomenon into existence (Althusser). “The seeing created by language,” Ricoeur writes, is “not a seeing of this or that; it is a ‘seeing-as’” (133). And language use—naming—is a seeing-as “permeated with attitudes, opinions, and social evaluations” (Ellis 215; Lakoff and Johnson), a seeing-as that constitutes identities, “social relations” and “systems of knowledge and belief” (Butler; Fairclough 309; Foster; Milstein), and a seeing-as that matters.

These two assumptions coupled with the animals-as-media theory make the use of animals in invasive exhibits especially salient, prompting such questions as “What kinds of human sensemaking do invasive animals make possible?” and, more specifically, “What ideologies do invasive animals harbor, ideologies that implicate not only the animals themselves but also human populations?”

Furthermore, I previously noted that when humans use animals to speak to other humans, the discourse is not often directed at the animals. With invasive species discourse, however, this is inaccurate. Invasive discourse implicates the animals discoursed about—the goal of invasive discourse is to eradicate the harmful, nonnative, invasive beings.

When invasive animals function as media, they enable harmful kinds of human sensemaking. For instance, the New York State Zoo (Thompson Park) calls invasive animals “alien invaders.” The Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium (Tacoma, WA) refers to invasives as “bad neighbors” (Olson 35). And Shedd Aquarium (Chicago, IL) defines invasives as “animals that arrive in a place where they didn’t originate, then multiply, spread and do harm in their new environment” (Holland and Mason 1). In a study of the Florida Aquarium in Tampa, Serrell & Associates find that visitors often refer to invasive animals as nonnative beings who “take over” natives, beings who invade “the area of another” and beings who “harm” and “destroy” and do not “belong here” (1; see Dale; Reed; Zayas). Serrell & Associates argue, however, that invasive animals should not be described as “foreign invaders” because these words may suggest a “double meaning post 9/11” (4). Moreover, as a former volunteer at the Florida Aquarium, I was asked by authorities to refrain from calling invasive animals “aliens” and “nonnatives” because these terms resemble the language of human citizenship.

These examples illustrate that the ways invasive animals are taken up in discourse—that is, the ways they are languaged—resemble the ways that human “immigrants” are taken up in discourse. In other words, animals in invasive exhibits—exhibits designed to eradicate harmful “nonnative,” “alien” and “foreign” beings—are described in terms similar to those used to describe human immigrants. And this matters because a dislike of nonnatives, aliens and foreigners—or of phenomena labeled as such—becomes institutionally justified by animals in invasive exhibits. By advocating for linguistic caution, Serrell & Associates and the Florida Aquarium authorities realized that language matters; that animals and the terms used to describe animals enable particular kinds of human sensemaking. They realized that animals could function as media.

I also call attention to the ethnic identifiers of invasive animals, such as “Asian” carp, “Norway” rats, “Japanese” Shore Crabs. When animals are labeled using ethnicized or nationalized terms and then placed in exhibits that promote the eradication of ethnicized animals, the conditions develop for a devaluing of similarly labeled humans. In other words, if language matters, then a desire to eradicate Asian animals has relevance for Asian-labeled

humans, especially when the language used to name undesired animals is the same language used to name humans. I do not suggest that when people see a headline such as "Chicago Canal Flooded with Toxin to Kill Asian Carp" (Schaper) they unquestioningly want to kill anything Asian. However, I do suggest that negative attitudes toward Asians are enabled and perpetuated by the inclusion of animals in anti-Asian discourse. Reconsider Serrell & Associates' concern about calling invasives "illegal aliens." Why? Because alien animals can mediate negative sentiments between these animals and alien humans; as Gergen observes, "patterns of action are typically intertwined with modes of discourse" (115).

If language is both representative and constitutive and if animals can function as media, then invasive animals enable an insidious form of anti-immigration discourse found in prominent cultural institutions. Again, I do not think that animals in invasive exhibits "inject" people with nativist beliefs or that people will unwittingly embrace xenophobic attitudes. I am also not questioning the legitimacy of invasive exhibits. I am only calling attention to the kinds of sensemaking that invasive animal discourse—discourse created by humans for other humans—makes possible. Conceiving of animals as media makes for a new way of understanding such taken-for-granted, institutional discourse.

ANIMALS AS MEDIA: CONSEQUENCES AND POSSIBILITIES

Throughout this chapter, I have demonstrated ways humans can use animals for human purposes. I have also discerned reasons why an institution should refrain from using particular animals (e.g., invasive species) in particular ways (e.g., to promote anti-immigration discourse). In this last section, I use tenets of symbolic interaction to further theorize human animal-use. I offer a general discussion of how animals can function in (human) discourse and note why we cannot take animals—and human uses of animals—for granted.

Symbolic interactionists highlight how meanings emerge in interaction and illustrate how humans use these meanings to make sense of themselves, others and society. Thus, in this section, I describe how animals can influence meaning-making processes. I specifically illustrate how animals function as symbols of "flexible innocence," symbols that can come to mean a variety of things and symbols that can seem free of intention and bias. Using examples from my three cases, I describe how the concept of flexible innocence develops and conclude by demonstrating what the concept suggests about personal accountability in human interaction.

Animals can function as flexible symbols in human interaction. They can appear happy or sad, cold or warm, gay or straight, as having acted with malicious intent or having not a care in the world. Such ascriptions, however, can only happen if *a human puts forth appropriate evidence.*

Since animals do not speak the same languages as humans, they cannot dispute what humans say about them, contest how they are represented in language or challenge the human use of them as evidence. As ambiguous entities, animals can thus be molded to fit human discourse in a plethora of ways, all of which remain difficult to discern, disprove and critique.

For instance, consider the statements "Stop fighting—you're upsetting the dog" and "Get quiet—the dog is upset" (Cain 76). While many scholars acknowledge the ability of humans and animals to communicate (Arluke and Sanders; Irvine; Haraway), I argue that a human can never know, with any certainty, what a dog thinks or feels; she or he can only infer *in human terms*. An animal is "strategically ambiguous" (Eisenberg) in that it can be made to mean a variety of things; a look of disgust could resemble a look of fear, sickness or apathy depending on the context, interpretations and arguments offered by humans.

The flexibility of animals in interaction can also be observed with the gay and straight penguins. No person or group could definitively know what the penguins were doing or what their actions meant; they came to mean a variety of things for a variety of constituencies. For instance, the story of Roy and Silo emphasized the naturalness of human homosexuality; however, it also framed homosexuality as animalistic, uncivilized and subject to change. The penguins in *March of the Penguins* came to suggest that homosexuality did not exist in the wild—that is, outside of zoos and aquaria; however, the existence of gay penguins in zoos and aquaria disqualified the accuracy of the film.

Animals can function as "innocently involved" symbols in human interaction as well (Goffman, "Strategic"). This innocence can develop in two ways. First, when animals are conceived of as politically neutral beings, as creatures believed to be without intention and bias, then human uses of animals can—because of the animal "content"—make such use seem innocent, depoliticized and indisputable. For instance, some reviewers of earlier versions of this essay have criticized me for criticizing the language of invasive species. They responded by saying that invasive animals—and the language affiliated with the animals—were innocent, scientific and thus bias free; it did not matter how they were labeled.

The ways in which media are understood can also add a layer of disinterest to ways meaning happens in human interaction. Media are often assumed to have little influence on these meanings (McLuhan; Ong; Schivelbush). Thus, when animals work as media, it can be difficult to acknowledge their influence on the interaction. Laura Kim's reference to the penguins in *March of the Penguins* as "just birds" is indicative of this disinterested logic. The penguins were not relevant to and are disinterested in human affairs. However, such an ascription of disinterest serves a purpose: By perceiving an animal as disinterested, humans can easily disregard the human ideologies the animal harbors. This disregard can allow the animal to come across as an innocent and thus meaningless variable in (human) interaction.

When an animal comes to possess an aura of flexible innocence, the human origins of animal discourse become distanced from the human originator(s). As such, the human use of the animal can function, for the human, as an "avoidance ritual" (Goffman, "Interaction"), an act that can make the human less "accountable" (Goffman, "Strategic"; Scott and Lyman) for what is said or done with the animal. The human origins of animal discourse become "hinted" origins, ones that can be disregarded and denied (Goffman, "Interaction" 30), and any ideas of human strategy or use of the animals become futile; because of the aura of innocence, the human use of animals, consequently, can be seen as innocent, too.

For instance, it would be politically incorrect for someone, especially a public figure, to say, explicitly, that a foreigner, an illegal alien, a nonnative human should be eradicated. However, by using a flexible and innocent animal as a medium, it is easy for a human to say that a foreign, alien, nonnative animal should be eradicated. The human messenger can deny responsibility for her or his role in the (offensive) claim by saying that science supports it or that the message originated with the invasive animal or that such a message has no relevance for human populations labeled "illegal," "alien," "foreign" or "nonnative." By using an animal to avoid personal accountability, a human can engage in "tactful blindness," a face-saving technique (Goffman, "Interaction" 18), especially since the animal cannot talk back.

An area of this research that needs to be further addressed is how animals are implicated by the messages they mediate. For example, the discourse made possible by and taken up in television does not implicate television itself; for example, a television news reporter is able to be a television news reporter partially because of the television, but what the reporter says does not implicate television itself. However, the discourse made possible and taken up by an animal often does implicate the animal: Humans use dogs, penguins and invasive species to speak to other humans, but *what* humans say often implicates the animals used to say this *what*; saying a "foreign" animal should be killed will have consequences for this animal *as well as* suggest to other humans ways in which foreigners should be treated.

Conceiving of animals as media means that we must attend to the ways in which animals function in human relations. This means attending to the ways humans talk to and about animals, the ways humans use animals in television programs, films and advertisements and the ways aquariums and zoos represent particular species. Animals *are* important interactional phenomena, especially when they produce and perpetuate harmful human agendas; we must not take them, or their affiliated humans, for granted.

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3 Beached Whales

Tracing the Rhetorical Force of Extraordinary Material Articulations

Deborah Cox Callister

INTRODUCTION

Rhetorical theory has long been plagued by a material/discursive binary. This chapter explores linkages between these two concepts and ways in which they are mutually constitutive. Marxist feminist theorist Dana Cloud treats them as a dyad, arguing that governmental apparatus, institutional structures and taken-for-granted daily practices must be accounted for, because they present material barriers for people who experience social and economic marginalization. This critique charges that rhetorical theory erases the material by apprehending rhetoric as text, thereby privileging discursive constructions of realities. Environmental communication scholar Richard Rogers moves the discussion beyond humans, explaining that the marginalization and objectification of nature is a result of the anthropocentric ontological and epistemological assumptions that constitute communication theory. This critique presents an even larger set of tensions.

For example, how can a discipline that apprehends everything as text account for communication between humans and the natural world, except through the discursive meanings ascribed to it by human rhetors, critics and audiences? Although I agree with environmental ethicist Bryan Norton that perhaps the most humans can achieve is some form of weak anthropocentrism (because we are constrained by our own corporeality), I suggest that focusing on extraordinary material events might be one way for rhetorical theory to begin to account for and deal with animals and nature. For example, whale beachings, as extrahuman material ruptures, are a window into understanding two different ideologies about animals and nature in hegemonic and counterhegemonic discourses. Moreover, we can draw from Ronald Greene's materialist rhetorical theory and Kevin DeLuca's definition of articulation in order to respond to environmental communication scholar Richard Rogers's call for decentering humans in constitutive theories toward a transhuman dialogue with the natural world.

A dispute over the Navy's use of active sonar in antisubmarine training provides the context for this analysis. In 2007, campaigns to save the whales from deleterious harm associated with low frequency sonar testing off the