

## Encountering the Posthuman Animal: Revisiting Dian Fossey's *Gorillas in the Mist*

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Posthumanist theory has rendered possible the rereading of texts that have until now been subjected to more traditional humanist critiques. By opening new exegetical dimensions through which to approach the literary artifact, we can not only challenge *speciesist* assumptions but also revisit the implications of both literary conventions and literary theory. The aim of this paper is to present an alternative, posthumanist interpretation of Dian Fossey's *Gorillas in the Mist* (1983) so as to analyze the manner by which the de-voiced nonhuman others are rendered as full biographical subjects that rise above the humanist emphasis on speech and reason. I begin with a critical overview of the posthumanist challenge and of the dialectical resistance imposed by humanist ideology. I then turn to an in-depth analysis of *Gorillas in the Mist* as an example of literary defiance of humanism. Through a series of rhetorical strategies, Fossey finds a way through which to *speak* the gorillas, at the same time as she relocates her own condition as a human within a space where a new form of encountering the other is possible.

Keywords: posthumanism; Dian Fossey; primatology; (auto)biography; (animal) consciousness

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## Encuentros con el animal posthumano: una relectura de *Gorilas en la Niebla*, de Dian Fossey

El marco teórico del posthumanismo ha permitido la reinterpretación de textos sometidos a posicionamientos de índole humanista tradicionales. La apertura a nuevos acercamientos críticos ha posibilitado desafiar los preconstruidos *especistas* y reconsiderar sus consecuencias tanto en las categorías como en la teoría literaria. El objetivo de este artículo es presentar una interpretación posthumanista y alternativa a la obra de Dian Fossey *Gorilas en la*

*Niebla* (1983) con el fin de analizar el modo en que la alteridad no-humana carente de voz es retratada en tanto que sujeto biográfico de pleno derecho, susceptible de elevarse por encima de los parámetros de enjuiciamiento humanista como son el habla y la razón. En primer lugar, atenderemos a una síntesis crítica del desafío posthumanista y de la resistencia dialéctica impuesta por la ideología humanista. Acto seguido, se procederá a un análisis en profundidad de la obra en tanto que ejemplo de desafío literario al humanismo. Por medio de una serie de estrategias retóricas, Fossey logra dotar de voz a los gorilas, al tiempo que reposiciona su propio lugar en tanto que ser humano en un espacio en el que un nuevo modo de reunirse con el otro es posible.

Palabras clave: posthumanismo; Dian Fossey; primatología; (auto)biografía; conciencia (animal)

The object of this paper is to analyze the posthuman interpretative challenges posed by primatologist Dian Fossey in her 1983 classic, *Gorillas in the Mist*. I begin with a critical overview of posthumanist theory to illustrate the issues at play in the reconsideration of animal subjectivity. I then turn to the study of *Gorillas*. This personal account of thirteen years spent in the Rwandan mountains doing field work is representative of the manner by which traditional hermeneutical and ontological understandings of the animal other are called into question, offering varying possibilities through which both human and animal subjects reemerge as sense-able beings. *Gorillas* allows readers to consider a series of thematic and rhetorical variables that, by their very nature, invite posthumanist considerations: from the subject matter of primatology to the activist undertones of this memoir by a white American female, and from gorilla consciousness to the implosion of human speech itself, the text emerges as a prosperous site from which to approach the (non)human.

### 1. THE MUTED ANIMAL: HUMANISM AND POSTHUMANISM

In his recent study *What Is Posthumanism?* (2010), Cary Wolfe claims that the roots of both the term and the concept of posthumanism may be genealogically traced to a number of twentieth-century forms of thought that challenge the privileged position in which the human has always stood in relation to alternative forms of otherness. Whether or not the roots of posthumanism may be found in Foucault, in computer, communications and cyborg technologies or in bio-related fields such as ethology or cognitive sciences, what seems clear is that combined factors of historical circumstance impelled us to question the maxims stipulated by humanism. At a basic level, humanism revolves around anthropocentrism, ethnocentrism and androcentrism, and it stabilizes reason and speech as the principle attributes that justify the ethical, moral and political nature of the human.

Indeed, in light of empirical discoveries regarding the consciousness of other species, the human as much as the nonhuman may (finally) be more accurately comprehended. In the words of Wolfe, posthumanism “forces us to rethink our taken-for-granted modes of human experience, including the normal perceptual modes of the *Homo sapiens* itself, by recontextualizing them in terms of the entire sensorium of other living beings and their own autopoietic ways of ‘bringing forth a world’” (2010, xxv). Acceding to assimilate the inherent forms of communication of nonhuman others—and considering what such communicative alternatives mean for human ontology—is a fundamental step through which to comprehend both the human and the nonhuman as relational beings. This is of course a generalization that is imbalanced from the beginning: as Derrida points out, the concept of *the animal*, in “general singular, within the strict enclosure of the definite article” ([2006] 2008, 34), rounds up the rich diversity of animal species within a single category as opposed to that which is human. In conceptually placing together shark and lamb, parrot and chimpanzee, squirrel and tiger (to use some of

Derrida's own examples), not only are the hierarchical binarisms that are so much a part of western thought reasserted, but also the distinctiveness of each species is obliterated. The human/the animal antinomy reaffirms humanist notions, and so "animality is associated with instinct, wildness, irrationality, emotionality, [and] being uncivilized" (Morris 2015, 46).

What posthumanism offers, among other things, is a closer inspection of the particularities of different species—and even individuals of any one such species—a scrutiny of their own language, reflected at an environmental and at a relational level, and, hence, an appreciation of where that leaves the human. Donna Haraway, for instance, explores the questions posed the moment "when species meet." Through telling encounters with domestic and wild specimens, she dissolves human exceptionality but nonetheless remains vigilant as to who it is that we will become (2008, 5). Similarly, Kelly Oliver (2009) uses the posthumanist lens and rereads Rousseau, Derrida, De Beauvoir, Heidegger and Agamben, among others, to analyze what we come to know about humans and about being human after having liberated the animal from the humanist constraint. Hence, and leaving apocalyptic aesthetics aside, we come to define the human through—as opposed to *in stark contrast to*—what is decisively of the animals.

Science may indeed have brought us closer to understanding the *telos* of the nonhuman other. Bernard Rollin defines *telos* as the fulfillment of the genetically based and environmentally expressed interests of each and every animal (1998, 162). One would hope that the mysteries uncovered by ethologists as to how nonhuman others reveal emotions through their social interactions and through their expressive behavior in their environment would have more rightfully determined the moral and legal position that nonhuman others occupy in relation to humans. Yet, as suggested earlier, it has been the signature force of western thought to structure its power relations over nonhuman others in accordance with human language and its complex layers of communication.

This fundamental heterogeneousness between the human and the nonhuman animal on the grounds of speech, needless to say, is rooted in Aristotle's *Politics*, where the political was declared an essentially human domain because of man's condition as *zōon logon ekhōn*:

The mere voice, it is true, can indicate pain and pleasure, and therefore is possessed by other animals as well [...] but speech is designed to indicate the advantageous and the harmful, and therefore also the right and the wrong; for it is the special property of man in distinction from other animals that he alone has perception of good and bad and right and wrong and other moral qualities. ([335-323 BCE] 1996, 47-48)

Contrary to the covenant of contemporary utilitarian animal liberation, which is strongly based on eighteenth-century philosopher Jeremy Bentham, the Aristotelian

acknowledgement of interests, expressed through indications of pain and pleasure, does not trigger an ethics of inclusiveness based on sentience. "Sentience is more than the capacity to respond to stimuli," writes David DeGrazia, "it is the capacity to have at least some feelings. Feelings include (conscious) sensations such as pain—where 'pain' refers to something felt and not merely the nervous system's detection of noxious stimuli—and emotional states such as fear" (2002, 18). Commonness on the grounds of an interest-based *telos*, therefore, was dismissed by Aristotle in favor of an ethics erected upon reason: human speech enabled reasoned discourse, a power far above sense perception. Nonhuman others did not respond; they merely reacted and were hence inferior to man and could be subjected to forms of exploitation for the benefit of the superior species.

French philosopher Jacques Rancière has gone beyond Aristotle in his definition of the speaking animal, arguing that it was not just the *logos*—the speech capacity used for expression—that distinguished man from animal, but what he referred to as "literarity." As he stated in an interview with David Panagia:

[H]umans are political animals because they are literary animals: not only in the Aristotelian sense of using language in order to discuss questions of justice, but also because we are confounded by the excess of words in relation to things. Humans are political animals, then, for two reasons: first, because we have the power to put into circulation more words, "useless" and unnecessary words, words that exceed the function of rigid designation; secondly, because this fundamental ability to proliferate words is unceasingly contested by those who claim to "speak correctly"—that is, by the masters of designation and classification who, by virtue of wanting to retain their status and power, flat-out deny this capacity to speak. (Rancière and Panagia 2000, 115)

According to Rancière, "literarity" is conducive to subjectivization or *assujétissement*, the political process of "becoming through disidentification" within the given *police* order. Rancière offers the term *police* as a suitable substitute for the term *politics*. For Rancière, the *police* is "the set of procedures whereby the aggregation and consent of collectivities is achieved, the organization of powers, the distribution of places and roles, and the systems for legitimizing this distribution" ([1995] 1999, 28). Subjectivization, meanwhile, is a political process because it involves the act of counting (or demanding to be counted) those who do not count, and thus, in the words of Samuel A. Chambers, "[exposing] the very mechanism of that order as deficient, if not delinquent" (2013, 103). Subjectivization, therefore, emerges not as a process of identification but as one of "disidentification" (Rancière [1995] 1999) whereupon those who demand to be counted refute their previous, fixed identity within the *police* system.

Rancière fundamentally includes within the categories of those potentially capable of subjectivization "workers, women, people of color, or others" (1992, 59), categories that come together under the concept of *demos*. Richard Iveson (2011) strongly contends

that, unfortunately, Rancière's sense of others is short-sighted in that its anthropocentric bias neglects providing a space for the nonhuman other within that category, precisely because the principle of literarity once again reinstates an up-down hierarchical domination between the units articulating the human/animal binary, thus reproducing the very same logic that the philosopher seeks to deconstruct. The principle of literarity, as such, invites a logic of domination because it inhibits the nonhuman other's potential to displace itself into a "polemical scene" of subjectivization (Rancière and Panagia 2000, 125). The 'excess of words' inherent to literarity is dependent on human speech alone: it attests to the un-fixity and the freeing of words as the *police* order is exposed for its zeal to figure as an innocent structure incapable of appropriating words. As words are emancipated from this mirage of appropriation and meaning (in much the same way that Rancière himself changes the original designation of the term *politics*), the excess becomes evident, for words belong to everyone and no-one simultaneously, notwithstanding gender, social or racial divisions. The other rises as a political being through literarity because s/he becomes a sense-able subject, a visible and audible-sayable creature that no longer operates within the domain of animality. Where the outcasts determined by race, color or gender can transcend an existence of noise and muteness, the nonhuman other is denied subjectivization and the possibility to enter a polemical scene because the principle of literarity, self-evidently, rests on human speech (words). In other words, the nonhuman other remains fixed, locked within the Platonic ideal where entities are secured within their *proper* place—the same ideal that Rancière, ironically, seeks to dismantle elsewhere. The nonhuman other is but invisible noise and babble, and therefore cannot become sense-able, visible and audible-sayable.

As one of the properties of "literarity" indicates, those in positions of power, the "masters of classification and designation," protect their status by denying the other's "capacity to speak" (Rancière and Panagia 2000, 115). As Iveson argues, one is left to wonder why for all of Rancière's questioning of the human-animal encounter, he ultimately undertakes the position of the master by denying subjectivization to nonhuman others on an ontological basis, secluding them within a muted existence of noise, rendering them as invisible, un-sayable beings (2011, n.p.). Hence the animal is hermetically displaced from the *demos* and is destined to flesh out the *ochlos*, the "great collective body, the zoology of orders justified in terms of cycles of nature and function" (Rancière [1992] 1995, 33; quoted in Iveson 2011, n.p.). Nonhuman others remain the "figures of fixed, machinic reaction [...] the undifferentiated pathic herd" (Iveson 2011, n.p.).

Rancière's proclamation of animals as un-sayable and unsense-able beings runs parallel to the type of humanism practiced by other twentieth-century philosophers. Although Rancière is notably absent from the discussion initiated by Wolfe in his groundbreaking study *Animal Rites* (2003), his stating of his position concludes in a manner not unlike that of Lévinas or Heidegger. As Wolfe suggests, Lévinas's rendering of the animal as an unreasoning being lacking *logos* is metaphorically absorbed in the

image of its facelessness, which is not unlike Heidegger's own reflection on the animal as a handleless entity (2003, 65). All these forms of maiming the nonhuman other ultimately signify and reassert the muted existence to which animals are bound within a humanist world.

The act of making the speechless, the faceless and the handleless a subject in and of itself worthy of moral consideration is an issue that has been explored by posthumanists and animal rightists or welfarists. Wolfe himself has interrogated the assumptions underlying animal rights and welfare philosophies, arguing that both rights-based approaches—such as those endorsed by Tom Regan—and utilitarian frameworks—fundamentally represented by Peter Singer—for all their good intentions, tend to fall back on humanist conjectures. Crucial to this criticism is the fact that animal rights and welfare theories build a case for animals on the grounds of their likeness to that which is human, at the emotional, cognitive, sentient, physiological and behavioral levels. Basing moral consideration on similarity *to* and difference *from* the human is, in Wolfe's view, another way through which to solidify up-down hierarchical binarisms, whereupon resemblance to a superior species determines the moral import of the nonhuman other. For instance, though he views the Great Ape Project as an admirable enterprise, he laments both the reasoning behind the scheme and its possible implications: "To put it very telegraphically, great apes possess the capacities that we possess, but in diminished form, so we end up ethically recognizing them not because of their wonder and uniqueness, not because of their difference, but because they are inferior versions of ourselves, in which case the ethical humanism that was the problem from the outset simply gets reinforced and reproduced on another level" (Wolfe 2003, 192).<sup>1</sup> In a recent article reviewing the trajectory of the Project, Paola Cavalieri acknowledges the articulateness of Wolfe's argument. Nonetheless, she turns to what she seems to regard as a reality check of sorts to refer to the impracticability of abolishing any type of institution (in this case *speciesism*) under non-humanist pretexts. Even the Great Ape Project, she contends, must answer to the anthropocentric tradition to be viable (2015, 23).

## 2. HUMAN AND ANIMAL SUBJECTIVITY IN DIAN FOSSEY'S *Gorillas in the Mist*

How does a writer accomplish the type of intersectioning of species that posthumanism advocates? How does a writer make both the human and the nonhuman textually legible within a system of knowledge that no longer prioritizes the human nor places it at an epicenter towards which other species must gravitate to reach resemblance? Dian Fossey's *Gorillas in the Mist* (1983) strove to explore new ways through which to

<sup>1</sup> The Great Ape Project (GPA) was initiated in 1993 and joined by internationally acknowledged professionals from a wide range of fields (philosophy, primatology, anthropologists, etc.) in the struggle to advocate a United Nations Universal Declaration of the Rights of the Great Apes. This was collected and signed by the thirty-four contributors to the publication titled *The Great Ape Project* (Cavalieri and Singer 1993).

assimilate the nonhuman other (namely, the gorilla), aiming to transcend the nature/culture divide on the grounds of speech. Although the notion of posthumanism was then only in its infancy, the strategies she employs at a formal level as much as her content and overt argumentations suggest that she was envisioning and practicing a similar philosophical stance from which to apprehend the self and the gorilla other. By learning and interacting with the gorillas, Fossey proposes an alternative way through which to place the nonhuman other as a political subject, a placing which involves a redefinition of the human just as much as of the nonhuman. Implicit in Rancière's doctrine is the fact that animals are instrumental in teaching and reminding us of what is human; we tend to think that it is their limitations which determine our privilege and superiority, their lacks, their inabilities, their silence. Where Rancière cites limitations, Fossey envisages possibilities; what Rancière suggests is an irreconcilable, ontological difference, Fossey overcomes through an occupation of the liminal fringes between species. It is only through the assimilation of an identity within the margins of the dichotomy that the gorilla can become a senseable, audible-visible and sayable being.

*Gorillas in the Mist* depicts the story of Fossey's evolving communion with the mountain gorillas of the Virungas, from around 1967 to the early 1980s; the autobiography was published in 1983, two years prior to her brutal murder. Fossey, a native of San Francisco and occupational therapist in Louisville, Kentucky, first visits Africa in 1963 on a self-financed seven-week safari. It is during this trip that she meets the renowned British archeologist and naturalist Louis Leakey, and though little does she know it at the time, Fossey would eventually become the second figure in what would popularly be known as the triumvirate of Leakey's Angels, a tripartite primatological project spearheaded by Jane Goodall's research on chimpanzees in Tanzania, Fossey's on gorillas in Rwanda, and Biruté Galdikas's on orangutans in Indonesia. Three years after her safari, Fossey, then thirty-three, approaches Leakey after a lecture at the University of Kentucky and quickly convinces him that she has what it takes to follow in the footsteps of Goodall and take on a gorilla project. Fossey forever abandons her life in America and, under the sponsorship of the Wilkie Foundation, sets out for Kabara, in Congo, to begin her research. Six months later, the unrest following the country's recently-won independence unleashes a civil war, and Fossey is detained for two weeks, before finally escaping to Uganda. Fossey and Leakey, much to the American embassy's reluctance, resolve for her to continue her project on the Rwandan side of the Virungas, where she founds the Karisoke Center, and where the remainder of her narrative is set.

### 2.1. Interspecies (Auto)biographical Pacts

The very nature of the text potentially invites an interesting discussion regarding its adherence to a specific genre. In many ways, the text could be considered an activist's autobiography. And yet Fossey's focus is not so much to write about the *bios* as it is to



build a case for the conservation and protection of her kindred nonhuman others, to *speak the animal* that cannot be listened to on its own, to make it legible. For Fossey, to write the *bios* is to write the gorillas and, conversely, to write the gorillas is to write the *bios*. Such an approach bends Phillipe Lejeune's (1989) autobiographical pact between narrator, reader and publisher that interweaves the author, the narrator and the character to form a single identity and name.

Individual gorillas, recognizable by name and behavior, emerge as powerful biographical subjects within the text—indeed, we become more intimate with Digit, Beethoven, Uncle Bert, Pablo, Coco and an array of dozens of other gorillas than with Fossey herself. We know nothing about Fossey's life prior to her first trip to Africa, nothing about her upbringing, her education—except that she worked as an occupational therapist—her interests, her life-changing experiences, her joys or tribulations. Indeed, the only remark that Fossey regards as self-explanatory of her crusade is that which opens the book: "I spent many years longing to go to Africa, because of what that continent offered in its wilderness and great diversity of free-living animals" ([1983] 1985, 1). Enough said. Her story, like those of her gorillas, begins and ends in Africa. A meager first chapter of roughly twenty pages is used to condense the period of her life from the safari to her relocation in Rwanda, omitting traumatic experiences during her imprisonment that, as Virginia Morell (1993, 423) suggests, may have included being raped and held in a cage for public display. Nor is there any hint of her subsequent romance with National Geographic photographer Bob Campbell. This righteous sense of privacy was probably one that she also adhered to in her everyday life. As two friends declared after her murder, "Dian's true personality remains a mystery to many of us who knew, admired, and loved her" (Hausfater and Kennedy 1986, 955).

The gorillas that she becomes more intimate with, on the other hand, emerge as fuller subjects not only because we are familiarized with their individual physical attributes, collected in a scientific fashion, or with their behavioral particularities, which are illustrated through colorful anecdotes, but also because they are the instruments that bring out the truth about Fossey herself. In other words, we as readers come closest to glimpsing Fossey's secluded persona during the moments of gorilla encounters described, as though it were through the lens of the nonhuman other's gaze which purified into transparency Fossey's most private self. The gorillas' lives do not constitute a compendium of recorded data; rather, as subjects, they reveal an individual and social world where highly complex emotions determine their relationality with the environment, with other members of their species and with other living creatures.

Fossey's absence from her own text, as a human character overtly describing, examining and self-assessing herself, could be used to argue that the narrative resists full categorization as an autobiography (or life-writing)—after all, if the prime focus and narrative development is, for the most part, structured and cadenced by the trials and tribulations of generations of gorillas, Fossey as a narrator may not be deemed

to qualify as an autobiographer. However, if we are to evade the simplifications of genre conventions, perhaps the more appropriate matter in hand is not to quantify the absence versus the presence of the autobiographical subject, but rather to qualitatively evaluate the types of presences and absences projected by Fossey's *autos*—that is, “the self writing and being written” (Olney 1998, xv). In other words, analyzing how and why she is present/absent may more suitably guide our understanding of the rhetorical strategies through which to convey a different sort of human self.

The possibilities such consideration provides are all the more revealing if we are indeed to accept the text as an autobiographical act. The very conventions of the genre inherently challenge posthuman assumptions; but when bent and reinvented under what I would venture to call an “interspecies (auto)biographical pact” whereupon subjects become audible-visible, sayable and sense-able through their relational encounter with the other species, autobiographical potential is multiplied, diversified and fragmentized. As Smith and Watson (2010) argue, autobiographical subjectivity forges a highly complex site whereby memory, experience, identity, space, embodiment and agency, along with newer concepts such as performativity, positionality and relationality, operate within a constant flux of implications. If the nonhuman other can be experienced by the human in such ways, then the interspecies pact may just be viable enough.

In spite of her absences, the types of presences that Fossey does reflect in the text do, for the most part, qualify as techniques in the line of activist autobiography: the activist self, who exists in the public realm, appears as secondary to the struggle; unjust and oppressive situations are denounced and exposed; and those that have been de-voiced are granted a voice within the text. To return to Rancière's doctrinal terminology, the activist autobiography can only exist as such if it contributes to the polemical scene and fabricates a political act through subjectivization. Activist autobiographies, Martha Watson argues, are highly dependent upon their powers of persuasion. Presenting a contestation of forces, she contends, is imperative to render the cause as one of immediate urgency: “The tension between the scene—what is—and the purpose—what ought to be—becomes the explanation for their controversial activities and behaviors” (1999, 104). Watson was actually more specifically referring to autobiographical writing related to the feminist cause; however, the basic parameters are applicable to the crusade undertaken by Fossey, who integrates the gorillas within the polemical act and grants them a presence based on their potential as subjects worthy of moral consideration. Indeed, it becomes rather evident through reading her that Fossey's devotion to the conservationist movement prevails, both over an introspective rendition of the *bios* and the *autos*, and over the scientific objectives which Leakey sent her to Africa for in the first place.

*Gorillas* stands as a doubly-disrupting political tool not only because it challenges the accepted popular ontological distinction between human and nonhuman, but also because it openly confronts the scientific community and its instrumentalization

of the other. The narrative is both written and published during a period of intense primatological and anthropological research in America. In the early 1960s the chimpanzee Ham became the first specimen to be launched into outer space by the American space program. In the early 1970s, Columbia professor Herbert S. Terrace began the controversial Nim Chimpsky Project—a failed attempt to teach grammar to a chimpanzee specimen. Along with countless other biomedical, neurological and nuclear experiments performed on apes, these research procedures painfully tested, violated and dissected apes not necessarily in the hope of discovering vital information about the animals themselves, but also of acquiring knowledge about humans, through a scientific acknowledgement of the likeness between the human and the ape. Fossey's mission imposed by Leakey and Wilkie was to approach the apes as primal embodiments of a long-lost link. In the words of Fossey, “[Leakey and Wilkie] felt that by studying man's closest living relatives, the great apes, new light could be shed on how our ancestors might have behaved” ([1983] 1985, 5).

It becomes fairly evident through the text, however, that Fossey's priorities and research cease to focus upon the search for a past link, due both to conservationist urgency and to the revelations resulting from her encounters with the gorillas. I mentioned above Wolfe's disillusionment with animal rights and welfare perspective on account of their reliance upon the likeness-to-human factor. Fossey redeems herself from the profoundly humanistic modes of scientific research by de-centralizing her own subjectivity—her search is one of commonness where not only do both species move towards the encounter, but one where experiencing the encounter, as I have argued throughout this section, can be translated at a textual level, bending genre conventions, and surrendering narratives of interspecies, relational selves.

## 2.2. Interspecies Encounters: Woman Meets Ape

Fossey's defiance of the then traditional approaches to primatology and anthropology has generally been associated with her womanhood. Surprisingly, there is little explicit attention to the topic of gender oppression on the part of Fossey in her text, which suggests that she probably regarded the gender debate more as a competing issue which threatened to distract readers from conservationism than as a hierarchical form of domination with solid connections to *speciesism*. That women tend to outnumber men in the animal rights movement has, however, not been lost on scholars, and neither have the speculations about what makes their involvement particularly feminine. Carol J. Adams (1990), Greta Gaard (1993), Karen J. Warren (2000) and Emily Gaarder (2011), among scores of other academics and ecofeminists, have attempted to decipher the reasons underlying the alleged care ethics approach of female activists. These scholars all agree that the position that both women and animals share as the less advantaged subjects in the respective value dualisms they occupy leads to a kind of bond to which men cannot relate.

In her observations as to the recruitment of activists, Pattrice Jones writes that “boys and men tend to make their decisions on the basis of laws or abstract principles while girls and women tend to make their decisions on what is best characterized as an ethos of care” (2004, 146). This ethos of care is fleshed out through the assimilation of the woman’s position as a nurturer and provider, a self-conscious role that now and again sparks in Fossey’s narrative as she protects the gorilla individuals in much the same way that a mother of any of the two species would. The lengths to which she went to impose her active conservationism, which included terrorizing the locals through black magic and her wearing masks so as make them believe she was a sorceress, go to show the extent to which ethics of care can translate within the context of activism. Fossey’s one-woman war and witchcraft against poachers were, unfortunately, viewed by the public as the deeds of a madwoman, deeds that ultimately determined her violent fate.

As Elizabeth Cherry (2010) has pointed out, cultural strategies of animal rights activists involve all sorts of boundary crossing. Although Fossey, as indicated earlier, pays little attention in the text to the gender issue, it is clear that her situation as a white American woman in the role of a scientist raises significant considerations as to how gender transcendence relates to and affects the blurring between the human and the nonhuman. Fossey appears fairly comfortable in her skin as sorceress and as *nyiramchabelli*, “the old lady who lives in the forest without a man” (Fossey [1983] 1985, 154). She incorporates the female stereotype to which she is reduced in Africa to make it her own and use it for her cause. Sy Montgomery collected a number of testimonies from people who had worked or been close to Fossey, concluding that most coincided in their belief that Fossey had brought her death upon herself: “By imposing her own laws on a sovereign nation, by making enemies of local people instead of friends, by caring more about gorillas than people, Dian was just as responsible for her death as the person who wielded the panga that split her skull” ([1991] 2009, 186). Fossey’s flaw, according to these testimonies and to local authorities, was to prioritize her and the gorillas’ affairs over the public wellbeing of the Rwandan population peripheral to the Virungas. And, in the view of many, it was just like a woman to do that.

Within the male-centered scientific and academic domain, it was also just like a woman to collect research data the way she did. That women could endow the field of primatology with fresh and unbiased perceptions was certainly not lost on Leakey (King 1991, 19). Being fully immersed in his role as a proud father figure to the three trimates, he was right in his predictions that these women could liberate scientific discourse from its constrictive, male-centered approach of domination. The image of women side by side with apes, on the other hand, fascinated the public, leading to a fruitful outburst of media and popular culture products (Jahme 2000, 220-243), including the 1988 biopic on Fossey starring Sigourney Weaver. Indeed, Goodall, Fossey and Galdikas also brought their respective ape species into focus not only

through discoveries related to their behavior which challenged previous observational records, but also by writing about them as individuals. Goodall, the pioneer, was the first to ever write about chimpanzees with pronouns indicative of their sex—as *he* and *she* as opposed to *it*—(Rees 2007, 882), she was the first to christen the specimens with names (as opposed to numbers), and she was the first to refer to the individuality of each specimen through such challenging terms as *emotion* and *personality* (Morell 1993, 422), strategies which Fossey would incorporate in her own writing.

Needless to say, the trimates' views were perceived as sentimental and whimsical by the androcentric scientific community, who aggressively criticized their research on account of their apparent inability to establish themselves within the comforts of scientific detachment. Science and primatology had been solidly built upon the foundation that nonhuman others could in no way veer from a behavioral path—that is, their every act was the product of instinct—whereas humans were endowed with cognitive capacities that could not be studied exclusively from a behaviorist approach (De Waal 2006, 66-67). As such, to present nonhuman others as biographical subjects with different personalities and emotions, was a thoughtless feminine act that threatened to pervert the objectiveness of serious ethology. The trimates were accused of succumbing to this pathetic fallacy, a displacement of human cognition onto the nonhuman other. These critics, however, missed the point that at least in Fossey's text, the human-nonhuman other encounter constitutes an epistemological process of double displacement in which, as I shall attempt to argue, both species gravitate towards a tangential ontological meeting point. In other words, it is not so much about humanizing the animal, nor about animalizing the human, rather it is about rising above the asphyxiating implications of such structures, about venturing into a terrain so virginal that even language has yet to conceptualize it through nomenclature.

### 2.3. Interspecies Encounters: Becoming Sense-able

Let us consider in depth the specific rhetorical techniques that Fossey employed to *speak* the gorillas. The gorilla emerges as a sense-able being not by transcending its limitations regarding human speech, but by invoking us to transcend our own. Only by overcoming the human-imposed barrier of establishing speech (and literacy) as the ontological boundary can the human and the nonhuman other assimilate one another. Fossey accesses a matrix of multi-communicative signs where the association between the signifier and the signified is not limited to just expressing “a state of being,” as Rancière would have it, but is suggestive of an ample display of emotions that attest to the gorilla's consciousness beyond the immediately sensible.

For instance, describing nursing towards health an infant gorilla whose family has been slaughtered, she writes: “Pucker showed a spark of interest in the familiar foods, but *possibly* because they evoked memories of the past” ([1983] 1985, 113; my italics). In another episode in which Fossey and a fellow tracker are immersed in

the act of rescuing a *duiker*—a kind of regional antelope—from a poacher trap, she takes the opportunity to describe what she regards the most compelling of gorilla emotions—curiosity: “Sitting in a row on a large Hagenia branch about twenty feet away were the four adolescent males of the group. They *seemed* totally fascinated by our activities. The intensity of their concentration *gave the impression* of their lending moral support to our efforts” ([1983] 1985, 32; my italics). The choice of words in passages such as these is significant: ‘possibly,’ ‘seemed’ and ‘gave the impression’ constitute a discursive effort to reveal inclinations against conventional hermeneutical interpretations of the nonhuman other sign. They situate the enunciations within the specter of the contingent, of the feasibility of nonhuman others experiencing such complex emotions as nostalgia, emotional trauma or curiosity, traditionally only associated with human consciousness.

The nonhuman other, therefore, becomes liberated once interaction is established through other mediums that render both human and nonhuman as sense-able subjects. Fossey learns to imitate an array of gorilla vocalizations, she learns to interpret the emotional meaning behind their odors, she adapts and stretches the possibilities of her own body by adopting the communicative code of gorilla body language, ensuring that, like the gorillas, emotion is not contained, but environmentally expressed. This is a key issue in the study of primatological empathy.

Consider for example the following anecdote in which Fossey is observing Group 5. One of the young, Icarus, immersed in his playful antics of branch swinging, ungracefully falls to the ground before Fossey. Alarmed, the adult members bluff-charge Fossey, “as though they all held me responsible for the fall” ([1983] 1985, 62). Oblivious to the stir he has created, Icarus gets up and continues climbing, but the gorillas, filling the air with “pungent fear odor,” remain alert to Fossey’s every move. Another young member, Piper, then takes center stage and begins climbing the broken sapling between Fossey and the gorillas: “She exuded blasé self-importance as the attention of myself and the gorillas’ was riveted on her. No high-wire artist ever had such a rapt audience. The glances of the silverbacks darted back and forth between Piper and myself as if they expected me to leap forward and grab her at any moment. When our eyes met, they roared their disapproval” (62). Here the line is blurred between the observer and the observed. Fossey’s awareness of her vulnerability results from her understanding of her relational self through the gorilla gaze. Similarly, the adult gorillas view their relational selves through Fossey’s gaze: they act not according to their own emotions but according to the image they want to convey to Fossey, which is preceded by a dislocation of identity into the observer’s sense-able being. This dislocation implies an awareness of the other’s position as the observed within a particular space and in a particular moment. The brief instants of eye-contact are definitive in their signification: for the gorillas, to be looked in the eye in a moment of tension cannot but be a sign of the looker’s defiance and awareness of the one who is looked upon.



The dislocation of identity implicit to the act of empathy on both sides renders all the selves within the scene as relational subjects immersed in a simultaneous act of mutual response. The fundamental distinction of relationality through reaction and response has long erected divisions between the nonhuman and the human. Following Aristotelian tradition, Lacan ([1956] 1999), for example, argued that where language only reflects reaction, speech elicits response, thus separating humans from nonhumans as relational subjects. Derrida ([2006] 2008), on the other hand, challenged the separation between response and reaction by questioning the nature of such behaviors. Kelly Oliver summarizes Derrida's position by asking "why does man think that among the creatures on earth, he alone responds rather than merely reacts, that he alone is not determined by instincts?" The question Derrida poses is whether "man" is capable of response at all, as all those abilities that have been associated to "his uniqueness [...]" are inscribed by social conventions, including language and technology" and therefore they could be regarded as being "also trained" (Oliver 2009, 119).

What Fossey seems to suggest is that regardless of whether the leveling of the human-animal encounter is one based on reaction or response, both ontological subjects are acting with the same degree of consciousness. They anticipate each other's actions and attempt to preclude them by responding or reacting to one another, breaching the gap between reaction and response, between the human and the nonhuman and between the private and the relational. It is not just the issue of eye-contact that deserves attention: prior to the suspenseful moment of response-anticipation and reaction/response to it, is the gorillas' bluff-charge against Fossey, a form of deception that again points to the nonhuman other's awareness of the other's awareness of the self "If the animal is capable of pretense, then it has already taken the other into account [...] Once a creature starts thinking about how to deceive another and once the other creature can be deceived, it is difficult to discern the possible levels of deception since it (deception) takes place in the relationship itself" (Oliver 2009, 188).

The act of gazing appears frequently in Fossey's recreation of the numerous and varied types of encounters with the gorillas, most often as a sign of recognition. Fossey describes two kinds of encounters: the obscured, whereupon the gorillas are oblivious to her presence, and the open, through which she works on a habituation process. The former provides her with rich insight into the private group behavior, where the roles between observer and observed are clearly demarked. Instances of habituation, of getting the gorillas used to her presence, on the other hand, provide the most colorful reflections of the autobiographical subject, the *I* through the gorilla gaze that fleshes out Fossey's most private self. These passages of reciprocal understanding are the most lyrical in the book: "Suddenly I heard a noise in the foliage by my side and looked directly into the beautiful trusting face of Macho, who stood gazing up at me. She had left her group to come to me. On perceiving the softness, tranquility, and trust conveyed in Macho's eyes, I was overwhelmed by the extraordinary depth of our rapport. The poignancy of her gift will never diminish" ([1983] 1985, 201).

The text not only refocuses attention onto the alternative languages of the nonhuman other but also implicitly dismisses speech itself at a formal level. Despite the considerable amount of human characters, there are but a handful of utterances in direct quotation where they have a voice of their own. This rhetorical strategy, nonetheless, provokes a series of problematic implications within the African context. As Donna Haraway (1989) argues, in the postmodern world, primatology cannot become dissociated from its multinational and postcolonial connotations. In *Gorillas*, the native Rwandans sometimes become the accidental object of anthropological study, as Fossey depicts their ways of economic subsistence—farming, poaching—and their religious rites and beliefs. These characterizations could be interpreted as biased from the imperialist position of the *I* of an American white woman, as the passages often yield to the racial other as a natural, wild creature guided by instincts and superstitions. Their speech—reported and therefore controlled by Fossey—is generally reduced to the articulation of isolated terms, usually conceptual nouns, suggesting a direct correlation between signifier and signified that can be likened to gorilla vocalizations of first-order semiotic signs. This linguistic characteristic may be regarded as a romanticized verbal reflection of the African's primal reliance on his other senses to adapt to the environment. Describing the process of breaking the language barrier between herself and the racial other, Fossey states that “Africans have a great facility for learning languages quickly because they do not tend to rely upon the crutch of books” ([1983] 1985, 25). In another instance she claims that “the locals’ senses, especially their eyesight, were more acute [than that of the western students]” (43). These kinds of assumptions have precise implications within the discourse of western primatology. As Haraway writes regarding the position of *National Geographic*—of which, incidentally, Fossey was a contributor—people of color were “insufficiently differentiated from nonhuman apes” (1989, 153).

Yet to reduce Fossey's characterizations to racist portrayals would perhaps overlook what more convincingly appears to be her main enterprise: to debunk the human/nonhuman other antinomy by obliterating speech as the means to interact with other relational selves. To be fair to Fossey, all human characters, regardless of race, are to a wide extent speech-deprived. It is revealing that practically the only time that a white character is granted a space for direct speech, the enunciation exhibits a profound anthropocentric stance. Before parting for England, a student carrying a large plastic bag containing the hide of one of the gorillas informs Fossey that: “This is Rafiki's skin and I want to take it home with me.” Shocked and revolted by this request of “gruesome violation,” Fossey confiscates “the trophy” ([1983] 1985, 150). The student's short enunciation is enough to contain at least two anthropocentric maxims: (1) the slaughtering of the nonhuman identity through material degradation, for Rafiki is now nothing but matter whose only value is one of cultural, and potentially economic, import, that of representing a souvenir, a booty of sorts, and (2) the reinstatement and legitimization of the legal status of the nonhuman other as a property.



## 3. CONCLUSION

Posthumanism, even at its most external, fundamental level, invites revisions of texts where dominating humanist critique has been prevalent. In the case of *Gorillas in the Mist*, such humanist critique, I have attempted to argue, challenged conventions such as, on the one hand, literary genre categorization and the implicit humanist ideology associated with autobiography and, on the other, androcentric approaches to primatology. In reading Fossey's text through the posthumanist lens, these conventions become themselves questioned, as traditional resistance to truly encountering and responding to the other species is weakened. Speech becomes secondary, and even irrelevant in the act of assimilating the other—the text finds a way to encounter both the gorillas and Fossey herself as incompletely human and incompletely gorilla according to humanist standards. Subjectivization, limited by Rancière to the human specter, becomes possible not through literarity, but through the 'disidentification' of the gorilla—and of Fossey herself—by taking into account the relationality between autobiographical and biographical subjects. Fossey was able to overcome such temptations and dislocated her own human condition to find common ground with the gorillas' own disidentification. It is in these textual mists where perhaps we can from hereon gaze into the uniqueness of other species and ask ourselves who we will become *through* them, *in* them and *of* them.

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