

Intersecting Spaces and Species: Women's Bodies and the Domestic Sphere in Animal Rights Activism

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ABSTRACT

The object of this article is to explore how current animal rights activism draws on images of women-animal corporeal hybrids to articulate a plight for animals, and how the domestic setting used in such campaigns is strategically conveyed to either instill sympathy or abhorrence at the 'miscegenation' of species within a single bodily space. I begin with a few observations on the matter of animal ontology in accordance with the much-debated notion of commonness with humans (and in particular women). I then make a comparative analysis between video campaigns by two major animal rights organizations, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) to evaluate how their rhetoric of species hybridism conveys different assumptions regarding womanhood, and how domestic settings serve as instrumental tools through which to strengthen their rhetoric of animal liberation.

Key words: women, animal rights campaigns, hybrid bodies, domestic sphere.

Espacios y especies en intersección: Cuerpos femeninos y la esfera doméstica en el activismo por los derechos de los animales

RESUMEN

El objetivo de este artículo es analizar cómo los activistas de los derechos de los animales recurren, en sus campañas actuales, a imágenes compuestas por mujeres y animales en tanto que entidades corpóreas híbridas, apuntando, igualmente, al espacio doméstico como catalizador estratégico de simpatía o de desprecio provocados por la mezcla de especies en un mismo cuerpo. Comienzo con unas observaciones relativas a la ontología animal y al debate surgido respecto a las similitudes entre el animal y el humano (particularmente la mujer). En segundo lugar, realizo un análisis comparativo de las campañas audiovisuales lanzadas por dos de las principales organizaciones pro-derechos de los animales, la Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) y People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), de las que se desprende una retórica sobre la mezcla de especies que vehicula toda una suerte de implícitos concernientes a la mujer, a los que se suma la instrumentalización de la esfera doméstica en tanto que herramienta de consolidación del discurso de liberación animal.

Palabras clave: mujeres, campañas de derechos de los animales, cuerpos híbridos, espacios domésticos.

Much postcolonial feminist scholarship has focused on an interpretation of women's bodies as a site of knowledge, a sort of palimpsest inscribed with competing cultural meanings, structures and images through which identity is negotiated. Consequently, theoretical approaches to the female body as a space in itself have stimulated new readings of the traditional gendered dichotomy of the private/public spheres, where the body-as-experience enters in performative dialogue with the two domains. The object of this article is to examine how women's bodies within the domestic sphere are portrayed in current animal rights campaigns so as to analyze the discursive intricacies motoring new identities of womanhood and non-human others. I begin with an overview of how female activists have conceptualized their own bodies as akin to that of animals and explored the possibilities of these connections, ultimately subverting women's confinement to the domestic sphere as well as other gender stereotypes. In the second part I analyze two samples of video campaigns from two prominent animal rights groups, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). In both campaigns women's bodies play an instrumental part in making a plight for animals, and both strategically feature the domestic sphere as the setting of choice for different reasons. These campaigns are of course aimed at raising awareness about animal cruelty, not feminist issues; however, the creative choices underlying their rhetoric provide significant insight as to the type of gender identities that are envisioned and sought for an anti-speciesist ideal.

1. CONNECTING WOMEN AND NON-HUMAN OTHERS

In her recent study *Animal Lessons*, Kelly Oliver offers an alternative reading to De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* in which she cleverly exposes the inconsistencies and contradictions of the text regarding non-human others: De Beauvoir initiates her discussion by drawing on biology to articulate the underlying cultural assumptions that endorse the shared oppression of all female subjects, regardless of species. "De Beauvoir points out that patriarchal values are placed on these female animals and then that valuation becomes biological data, which in turn support the patriarchal thesis that women are inferior to men" (Oliver, 2009: 158). However, when De Beauvoir turns her attention to history, she advocates the necessity for women to transcend their animality and be like men, for biological features do not justify women's cultural emplacement. "The ambivalent conclusion," Oliver writes, "is that female animals teach us something about ourselves because they are like us but that woman is human because ultimately she is not like them" (2009: 159).

Indeed, the degree of commonness and difference between humans and animals and between women and animals has always loomed within philosophical and cultural explorations of anthropocentric identity. Within animal liberation discourse, activists defend commonness with non-human others on the grounds of identification,

an anagnorisis that is revealed through epistemic processes of sympathy and empathy. Yet likeness between species becomes ever so much more problematic when animals are to be exploited. While the case of meat-eating may be more transparent (differences are emphasized to as to justify the slaughtering and consumption of animals), Rachels observes the dilemma arising from animal experimentation: "In order to defend the usefulness of research, [researchers] must emphasize the similarities between the animals and the humans, but in order to defend it ethically, they must emphasize the differences" (Qtd. Waldau, 2011: 71).

The matter of likeness and the moral and legal difficulties it poses creates additional disputes when dealing with the particular type of connection that women feel towards animals. In her observations as to the reasons for joining the movement, patrice 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). It has often been argued that this ethos of care stems from the position that both women and animals share as the less advantageous subjects in the respective value dualisms they occupy. The victimization of women and non-human others through a patriarchal system of domination and exploitation has reached modern acknowledgement mostly thanks to Carol Adams's classic study, the extensively documented *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990), whose leveling of male supremacist ramifications has inspired and consolidated current animal rights propaganda based on the equalization of institutionalized systems of oppression:

"Meat eating is to animals what white racism is to people of color, antisemitism is to Jewish people, homophobia is to gay men and lesbians, and woman hating is to women. All are oppressed by a culture that does not want to assimilate them fully on their grounds and with rights" (Adams, 1990: 70).

Ecofeminists and animal rights feminists have frequently resorted to accessing animal emotional lives through the commonness of bodies. "Perhaps it is our own [women's] bodies that remind us that we, too, are animal, kin to those we work with, live with, love, and swallow" (Hogan, Metzger, and Peterson, 1998: xiii). Female activists' empathy for animals on the grounds of bodily suffering can be traced back to Victorian England and the anti-vivisectionist stance of leaders such as the suffragette Frances Power Cobbe, Ouida, and Lind af-Hageby. Ouida emphasized the thin line separating vivisection from conducting scientific procedures on women and working-class human subjects (Pollock, 2005: 153). Cobbe made laboratories the target of her stinging criticism, as they represented a space where men with sadistic inclinations were free to exercise torturous procedures in the name of science. In the midst of the vivisection debate was the controversy surrounding ovariectomy in the 1870s and 1880s, which linked the brutal surgery to physiological research on animals. Sympathy for non-human others developed as "women were explicitly

invited to identify themselves with the animals, as potential victims of sexual assault by materialist medical men” (Ellston, 1987: 279). Isabella Ford, anti-vivisectionist, chair of the Leeds RSPCA branch and a socialist feminist evoked “the experience of non-human animals to illuminate the experience of women” (Kean, 1995: 29) in her pamphlet “Women and Socialism” (1907): “In order to obtain a race of docile, brainless creatures, whose flesh and skins we can use with impunity, we have for ages past exterminated all those who show signs of too much insubordination and independence of mind” (Qtd. Kean, 1995: 29).

Contemporary female scientists have provided us with ground-breaking insight into animal minds by releasing their own bodies from cultural constraints and human language. Jane Goodall and Dian Fossey studied and imitated the body language and communicative codes of apes; Temple Grandin revolutionized the meat industry by crawling through the pens that livestock were harassed into and applying animal-adapted hug mechanisms to relieve stress, thus connecting autism to animal cognition. More recently, Alexandra Horowitz’s 2009 *New York Times* bestseller, *Inside of a Dog*, invites readers to interiorize the capabilities inherent to canine senses. “Anyone who wants to understand the life of an animal must begin by considering what [Jakob von Uexküll] called their *umwelt* (OOM-velt): their subjective or ‘self world.’ Umwelt captures what life is like *as the animal*” (Horowitz, 2009: 20).

In connecting their bodies to that of animals, women have also challenged the traditional spatial distribution associated to the masculine/feminine dichotomy. Nineteenth-century activists recognized the commodification of animals’ and women’s bodies as one institutionalized through the confinement to specific spaces. In much the same way that animals, deemed as servants, were enslaved within certain spaces for the sake of civilization (prominent Victorian spaces of animal exploitation include vivisection theaters and laboratories, zoos and modern zoological parks, abattoirs, and even the streets, where passer-bys were witness to the abuse of horses, cart-dogs and to reminiscent practices of baiting), so were women relegated to the private sphere on the basis of their alleged emotional, wild and irrational nature. These private domains were customized for the performance of female labors. As S.J. Kleinberg summarizes, “in the nineteenth century, domestic space delineated social and economic hierarchies” and “separated the responsibilities of the sexes at the same time that it defined their geographical ranges” (1999: 142). By campaigning for the humane treatment of animals, women were challenging the limitations and the surveillance they were subjected to by negotiating their niche within the public sphere.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the escalating participation of women in the movement gained much public attention, and it was not long before opponents back-lashed with accusations of sentimentalism. Richard Ryder has noted that “the scientist’s oft-voiced castigations of anti-vivisectionists as ‘emotional’ and

‘sentimental’ . . . imply that overcoming a natural reluctance to inflict pain is a sign of rationality and manliness” (1989/2000: 153). Consequently, men who supported the cause were deemed as effeminate, whereas women were stereotyped into hysterical ‘old maids’ and spinsters (Ryder, 1989/2000: 142). The stigma of animal advocacy as emotional and irrational subsists today. Josephine Donovan has observed that the two leading philosophers in animal rights, Tom Regan and Peter Singer, are also biased by these assumptions, as they tend to dismiss emotion on behalf of a rationalist cause. Consequently, “they expose the inherent bias in contemporary animal rights theory towards rationalism, which, paradoxically, in the form of Cartesian objectivism, established a major theoretical justification for animal abuse” (DONOVAN, 1993: 168).

2. WOMANHOOD AND THE DOMESTIC SPHERE IN CURRENT ANIMAL RIGHTS CAMPAIGNS

Philo and Wilbert note that “the conceptual placing of animals is first about what is or is not an animal” (2000: 7), and that “related to the conceptual placing of animals is also a strong human sense of the proper places which animals should occupy physically” (2000: 10). The cause-effect principle governing between the ontology and the situating of non-human others, of course, has been directly and indirectly discussed by anti and pro-animal rightists alike. Animal ontology, I have suggested above, is for better or for worse generally discussed in terms of commonness. If animals are different and inferior to humans, the logical conjecture is that they are deserving of different moral and legal consideration, which results, often enough, in their *belonging* to a given set of spaces such as slaughterhouses, laboratories, or cages. If ontology legitimizes placing and vice versa, then the counterargument can also be easily justified by animal liberationists. Karen Warren, for instance, claims that one of the stipulations structuring ecofeminist philosophy is that “*what* a thing (person, community, population, species, animal, river) is partly is a function of *where* it is – a function of the relationships in which it stands to other things and to its own history, including the evolutionary history and geographic location” (2000: 153).

In the two campaigns which I will now consider, women’s bodies become spaces that incorporate animality within the domestic setting. These symbols raise compelling questions as to *what* a subject *is* and *where* that subject *belongs*. The processing and assimilation of animality within women’s bodies and the house, I argue throughout, provokes a disrupting vision as to the assumptions regarding animals, women, and spaces, and, although aiming for similar goals, the creative manners through which each campaign fathoms the woman/animal hybridization ultimately lead to different appreciations of womanhood.

2.1. THE RSPCA'S DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CAMPAIGN.

In April 2008, the RSPCA launched its Domestic Violence Campaign with the airing of a video commercial that shocked audiences with its connections between woman battering and pet abuse. The ad shows a man unmercifully beating a woman whose cries come out in the form of piercing dog yelps and whimpers. As the man punches and kicks her to the floor, she is further animalized through her attempt to get away on four legs. The triviality of domestic abuse is emphasized through the lack of communication; before taking his swing at her already-swollen face, the man and the woman/dog stand for a second opposite each other in silence, avoiding eye contact. The woman/dog makes no effort to subdue her attacker: her helplessness and innocence lock her within her victimhood. Captivity within a body unable to retaliate is concentrically symbolized by the setting itself: the beating takes place within the living room of what appears to be a middle-class residence, the private space in which the family comes together to constructively interact. Batterers can come in the form of the most unlikely guise, and they unleash their fury in the most secretive places. The rules of the domestic sphere become shattered: as a space denoting the systematic routine of everyday life, the un-exceptionality of the ordinary and the quotidian, the images suggest that the middle-class value of the home as the haven is instead substituted by an imprisoning entity whose indifference (emphasized by its stagnation in stark contrast to the violence and the camera movement) only invites its use as a space for fortuitous physical domination. The pattern followed by the visual perspective is significant: beginning with a close-up on the woman's face from behind the man's shoulder, the camera gradually increases its distance to include the whole setting. The upwards angle peeking from behind a wall suggests that perhaps it is the couple's child who is witnessing the atrocity; seeking refuge first within and then outside the house (from which, through the glass windows, we can still look on to the violence). Even the night, with its capacity to obscure and isolate, seems yet another protective agent to the covertness of what goes on within the home. The supposed child's final view coincides with what could be the scope of a passer-by strolling by the house. The imaginary passer-by has become a witness, and now *knows*, like the viewers of the ad themselves, what that space actually represents and whose actions it actually enables. The final shot seems to linger on a very precise ethical question: how should one react to this responsibility of knowing? The viewer has the obligation to make a choice: ignore or intervene; let the incident remain private or acknowledge its sociopolitical nature. In the final scene, a female narrator interferes to explain: "Thirty-seven percent of violent criminals admit to being cruel to animals in their childhood. To break the cycle, the RSPCA runs programs teaching kids to respect animals." As the screen turns to black and the yelping comes to a halt, the campaign's slogan appears: "You need the RSPCA. The RSPCA needs you."

The ad's education-through-awareness modus operandi simultaneously uses metaphors and temporal overlapping as its tools: on the one hand, metaphorization sustains the ontological tautology that the woman is the dog and the dog is the

woman. This metaphor also draws on a fairly common behavioral display of domestic abuse, the emotional injury of the woman through the assault on the beloved pet. As Zilney explains, “a batterer may turn to harming an animal in order to emotionally or psychologically harm his partner” (2007: 101). On the other hand, the narrator’s comments indicate that the semiotic layers that are intertwined are those of cause and effect, the past (animal cruelty) and the present (domestic violence against women). Moreover, the presence of the supposed child eye-witness suggests that it is not just the cycle between the abuse of animals and women that must be broken, but also the cycle that is perpetuated when the child becomes accustomed to such cruelty; it is precisely the restriction of physical violence to that secretive, private space of quotidian routine which causes children to imitate and incorporate such behaviors into their own adulthood.

A TV campaign ad represents a space that is able to penetrate within the walls of the domestic sphere, violating the emotional retreat by ‘inoculating’ that room with intruding images of the world outside. The RSPCA commercial lasting roughly thirty-three seconds, it complies with many of the exigencies of a successful political campaign ad while at the same time it strives to nourish its mirroring of animals and women as victims to criminal behavior. Sanders states that one of the strategies employed to captivate and persuade audiences is to use “common genres that allow viewers with limited knowledge of the details of politics (or products) to understand the message” (2004: 3). A favorite amongst these genres is horror, which shocks the spectator enough to create a lasting memory of the images witnessed. Horror has the power to fabricate “a mood and theme that viewers can easily absorb.” Thus, Sanders continues, “effective ads draw on common themes, phrases and storylines . . . coupled with dramatic images and sounds, to create a memorable and compelling message” (2004: 3). In the case of the RSPCA ad, the use of horror is evident: the viewer, probably sitting down on the couch, is subtly invited to identify that home as his/her own, and to feel uncomfortable at his/her own stagnation before such an atrocity. It is also the horror of the arbitrary, the fortuitous: there is no explanation to the beating because there is no justification for violence. The shrieking pitch of the yelps augments the dramatic effect as it vividly illustrates pain and fear; the identification with the woman completely breaks from the eighteenth and nineteenth-century vivisectionist view through which “the screams and howls of the tortured animals were assimilated to the concept of mechanism: the howls were merely the grinding of machinery” (Birke, 1986: 120).

Another prime creative feature that campaigners often resort to is the portrayal of individual people: “Viewers find it easier to relate to characters than to more abstract principles. They can empathize with or despise the people they see” (Sanders, 2004: 4). Sanders is referring throughout his piece to political campaigns, yet his observations also apply to the RSPCA ad. The characters in the commercial are representative of what goes on in many homes, but it is important for the campaign to

stress at the same time the individuality of each of the victims, woman and dog. By placing part of the emphasis on the individual self (through the close-up on the woman's countenance or the yelping, for instance), the victim resists objectification in the eyes of the viewer, and is conceived instead as a subject. Indeed, the RSPCA has always attempted through its videos to picture the individuality of each animal (a common RSPCA commercial will feature a succession of images of abused or neglected individual animals, often named and having their situation explained by the narrator). In this case, the dog whose presence is marked by the yelping is further individualized through two main strategies enabled by the symbolic association with the woman: (1) the emphasis on sentience, and (2) the emphasis on the dog as 'charismatic megafauna.'

(1) Practically since the eighteenth century, animal rightists have made sentience the banner of their discourse. "Sentience is more than the capacity to respond to stimuli;" writes 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). The treatment of animals had occupied eighteenth-century philosophers who were skeptical of the Cartesian separation of man/animal on the basis of reason. Most notably, these philosophers asserted that exploitation of animals, as sentient beings, should involve as minimal an infliction of pain as possible. To do otherwise attested to the cruelty of the individual and the tyranny of humankind as a whole. Rousseau wrote in 1755 that "if I am obliged not to injure any being like myself, it is not so much because he is a reasonable being, as because he is a sensible being" (Qtd. Donovan, 1993: 171). In a similar line, Bentham famously wrote what today headlines the main sub-fields of the animal rights movement: "The question is not, Can they *reason*? nor, Can they *talk*? but, *Can they suffer*?" (1789/2005: 311). Sentience offers an escape from the anthropocentric veneration of reason to focus on suffering. What the commercial provides through its metaphoric layout is a spatial meeting point between the visual suffering of the woman and the suffering of the dog by way of soundscape. As subjects made vulnerable to the domination exercised by the male figure in the household, both beings fuse into one another through both animalization and personification on the grounds of sentience and in the hopes of effectively creating a new ontological identity for both canine and woman.

(2) The term 'charismatic megafauna,' often used in the fields of conservation and biodiversity, refers to those non-human others that hold a sympathetic appeal for people. Usually, this group includes "wildlife groups that have drawn the most attention from the animal protection movement," such as large mammals, exotic birds, or animals with "interesting personalities, lifestyles, and communications" (Waldau, 2011: 49). Although not wild, domestic animals such as cats and dogs could also classify as such in that they are often perceived as distinct individuals whose

capacity to communicate and understand their owners earns them membership in the family. Pets' individuality is invariably dependent on their adherence to a home (in contrast, stray or feral cats and dogs are still systematically exterminated). According to Dorothee Brantz, "these cultural classifications [divide] the animal kingdom into the tame and the wild, the clean and the dirty, and the desired and the unwanted, with the result that some animals [are] cherished while others [are] forcefully eliminated" (2007: 80). I would argue that the RSPCA's choice of a dog to identify with the woman is not just due to its being a domestic animal and to its capacity to produce poignant sounds, but to the fact that dogs themselves hold a very privileged position in Anglo-Saxon culture for their alleged loyalty and capacity to empathize with humans. The loyalty associated to the dog extends on to the image of the woman; received by audiences as a faithful housewife, her victimhood is incremented.

(3) The violent home is hence stripped from its privacy and exposed for its capacities to perpetuate, legitimize, and conceal abusive relationships implicating both gender and species divides. The commercial violates the automatic correspondence between ontology and location: the dog's individuality is humanized and the woman's individuality is animalized; as a simultaneously single and plural sentient being, they do not *belong* to a space in which the only purpose is to objectify them.

2.2. PETA'S "FUR BELONGS TO ANIMALS" CAMPAIGN

Founded by Ingrid Newkirk and Alex Pacheco in 1980 and based in Norfolk, Virginia, today PETA is the largest animal rights organization with over three million members and supporters worldwide. Its active campaigning and undercover research have led to unprecedented legal action against animal cruelty, and its aggressive reliance on shock-tactics to boycott and sabotage industries, businesses, research facilities, franchises and even individual people have rendered it the most controversial (and despised) animal rights organization. One of the aspects most frequently subjected to public suspicion, even within the animal rights groups, is the organization's branded campaigns of nudity and its subsequent questionable representation of women's bodies. The sexualized and racialized posing of women in PETA's campaigns and protests has received ample attention by recent scholars, including Phelps (2007), Deckha (2008) and Gaarder (2011). In this last item, I examine three video campaigns to analyze how female bodies and domestic spaces operate and how they compare to the RSPCA ad. Before beginning, however, I would like to clarify that despite my own focus on these videos for this article, it is important to keep in mind that these represent just one of the factions of the organization, and that although they have captured and initiated fruitful public response, it would be reductive to overshadow PETA's many triumphs and long-standing humane war against animal exploitation solely by analyzing it through its campaigns.

The most frequent exposition directed against PETA's use of naked, provocative women for its campaigns is that the ads perpetuate the heterosexual norm of women as consumable objects. Phelps explains that "the argument is that PETA is exploiting women and contributing to gender stereotypes that have been used for centuries as instruments of female oppression" (2007: 242). Deckha very tellingly observes that connected to the danger of overlooking the connections between the domination of women and animals, is the fact that "any campaign that relies on standard representations of women that associate them with and even reduce them to their bodies continues the very same logic of commodification and objectification that is used against animals" (2008: 55). With celebrities such as Pamela Anderson headlining the ads, the usual image of PETA's anti-fur campaign is that of a scantily-clad white female seductively inviting beholders to rejoice at the gazing of her body, which, incidentally, answers to the heterosexual standards of the 'bombshell.' On the other end, obese and decrepit women are used to denounce inhumane choices and behaviors, as if external decadence were a mirror of the impurity of the soul. As Deckha points out, although there are male and black female ads (which, she argues, are controversial in themselves for their penchant towards a racialized animalization of sexuality), those of white women clearly outnumber the rest, which may suggest that the organization seeks attention not only by conforming to a type of nudity that is evocative of mild pornography, but also by complying with the mainstream beauty canon of the white woman. In these white women campaigns, Deckha also notes, the slogans themselves provide different exegesis of the types of ads that, if closely examined, resist monolithic appreciations of the entirety of the campaigns as anti-feminist. This is a central concern to keep in mind, as the three video ads that I will now be considering do not necessarily intend to be representative of PETA's use of women's bodies as a whole.

The three videos (available at the PSA section of peta.org) belong to the "Fur is for Animals" campaign. Each feature a model, dressed in a fur coat, in a specific room within a sparkling clean middle-class home. Like in the RSPCA commercial, the subjects appear as hybridized beings because of their performance of common animal conducts; however, identification on the grounds of sentience and suffering is completely absent. Rather, the object is to elicit disgust at the model's awkward and explicit behavior. In the "toilet" video, the camera travels into a bathroom following an unidentified sound until it reaches a woman covered in a fur coat with her head in the toilet, engaged in the act of licking and slurping from the can. As if realizing she is being interrupted, she momentarily glances back, and then unassumingly returns to drinking. The webpage features an explanatory note: "dressing in animal skins in no different from acting like animals in other ways." In the "hairball" video, viewers encounter a woman indulging in licking the sleeve of her fur coat on the living-room couch. Yet what sensual allusions could be gathered from her lapping are immediately lost as she begins to choke. Slightly erecting herself as she leans on her front 'paws,' she coughs out a giant black hairball, after which she resumes her

hygienic occupation. The explanatory note points out that “the revolting nature of human fur-wearers becomes clear.” Finally, in the “litterbox” clip, the camera briefly moves along a kitchen counter following the sound of some kind of leak. Squatting on the floor, a model in a fur coat looks on nonchalantly. She peeks between her legs as the dripping is momentarily interrupted. When the leaking finally stops, she gets up and glances down to the floor, revealing the litterbox where she has been urinating. According to the note, the video is “reminding us that wearing animals’ fur is on a par with mimicking their toilet habits.”

Through these shock tactics, PETA implicitly and explicitly aims to incite abhorrence at the symbolic overlapping of women’s and animals’ identities, as opposed to inspire sympathy, as in the RSPCA advertisement. The resulting trans-species perverts even the perfection of the setting: the bathroom, the living room and the kitchen, all characterized by their immaculateness and the excellent taste of their inhabitants, betray the type of domestic behavior that one would like to associate with only one type of creature. At this concession of privacy, spaces themselves become contaminated, tainted by the impurity of the repugnant miscegenation of species. Whereas in the RSPCA’s clip the home represented the impenetrable fort that protected and enabled domination, in this case the home emerges as the space that shelters a different kind of monstrosity, the mongrel and vicious nature of fur-wearers. The horror genre and the leitmotif of victimhood are no longer operative: what revulsion is provoked stems from the conception of the body itself as a single space to be occupied by two different species, a body whose presence pollutes the entirety of the setting. Paradoxically, the cat’s much appreciated natural sense of hygiene (cleaning its fur and using the litterbox) within the home becomes disgusting when enacted by a woman – and an attractive one at that. Domestic sounds and soundscapes themselves are used to intrigue and to take the incongruent ‘storyline’ to its climactic shock of shame and loathing, not to stir pity and catharsis.

PETA’s trans-species miscegenation in these videos raises a series of interpretative matters that challenge the basic ontological principle that PETA nonetheless assumes in other campaigns: that humans and animals are equal as sentient beings and as bearers of a body susceptible to pain and pleasure. It is not so much the overlooking of a more dramatic story that perverts the woman/animal hybridization as it is the loss of sentience as the argumentative axiom. The RSPCA ad pictures a metaphor and/or an overlapping of time to state the indignities suffered by women and animals, who, it is implied, are akin to one another. The RSPCA makes use of the high statistics of domestic violence against women to build a case for animals because empathy is deemed as the most vital tool from which to raise awareness, for “when humans who have themselves experienced suffering as both a material and emotional condition recognize parallels between their experience and those of . . . animals, they are more likely to be empathetic” (Malesh, 2010: 65). PETA, on the other hand, twists the rhetoric of empathy by omitting suffering from

the scene; its metaphor advocates the separation of beings, suggesting that *where* one is (inside the fur) is indeed *what* one is (an animal). Sentience provides a meeting ground in which animals are humanized and humans are animalized: both processes are regarded as elevating the subject, for, in accordance with ecofeminist and animal liberation philosophy, full entelechy of the self must be reached through interconnectedness. In the PETA videos, not only is the animalization of women's bodies deemed as degrading, but the cycle is furthermore imploded because the animal referent (the fur) is itself dead, so completely objectified and commodified that it impedes the exegesis of a humanized animal.

Nonetheless, it is precisely the notable absence of the animal through the 'dead' fur which allows PETA to denounce another aspect: the invisibility of animals through institutionalized exploitation (Adams, 1998: 327). In these commercials, the acceptance of institutionalized exploitation is exalted because of the stark contrast between private and public domains provided by the household setting. Whereas standard anti-fur campaigns feature footage of fur-bearing animals being anally electrocuted or skinned while still alive (to name just some of the many cruel practices sustaining the industry), these ads create a playful interplay between fur and spaces to illuminate the invisible. We assume the social norm to be that women only wear fur coats in public and thus, the placing of a fur coat on a female body within the domestic sphere becomes disquieting in itself. The fur is doubly de-centered through its placing on the women's bodies and through its use within the private realm, creating an incongruence that incites the viewer to question one's own responsibility in the choice to wear fur. Undercover recordings of animal cruelty can potentially either alienate viewers because of the crude realism of violence (and hence invite spectators to look away or change channels), or redeem them as consumers, for the images focus on the *producers*, located in an unknown and unidentified place to which the viewer can hardly relate. Such footage deepens the divide between spaces and the actions performed within them, whereas PETA's campaign turns the spotlight on the female consumer in her private habitat and, through its dislocation of accepted norms of when and where to wear a fur coat, establishes the connections between industry and buyer, rendering the process of exploitation as a single continuum in which all individuals play a decisive role.

CONCLUSION.

Women's bodies provide multiple rhetorical possibilities for the animal rights cause. As a cryptogram engraved with contesting valuations of the masculine/feminine and human/animal antinomies, they emerge as powerful instruments through which to explore animal sentience, ontology, and placing. What identities result from the homogenization of animal and woman within the female body-as-space and within the domestic sphere, however, may vary. Current

representations such as the ones included in the campaigns described are heir to traditional epistemic processes of identification in accordance to sameness and difference, yet they lead to different implications regarding womanhood. While likeness through suffering invokes the image of woman-as-victim, the metaphor of likeness through fur ultimately endorses the conceptual separation of species to protect animals. As we venture into new terrains in the discussion of animal and human ontology on the basis of commonness, women's bodies, ever the palimpsest, strengthen their agency through the reinvention and reinterpretation of previous discursive layers, asserting themselves as powerful cosmoses through which to combat the chaos of cruelty.

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