Other(ed) Rabbits:
Using Otherness as a Frame to Teach Critical Approaches to Human-Animal Relations in Japan

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Introduction

With the rise of animal studies, increasing attention has been paid to the teaching of human-animal relations. Particularly within critical pedagogical approaches to teaching human-animal relations from human-animal studies (HAS), and also critical animal studies (CAS) scholars, it has been suggested that instructors should strive to deconstruct prevailing ideas of human-animal relationality (Corman and Vandrocová 2013; Pedersen 2010), and engage students in a critical dialogue about human-animal relations. The hope of such engagement is to teach students to think critically about how nonhuman animals are treated differently as a result of their species, and the social construction of such conditions.

In conversation with pedagogical discussions pertaining to animal studies, this paper critically reflects on the experience of using otherness as a frame to teach students about human-animal relations, and address the epistemic and symbolic roots of such relations, within the context of a Japanese university. In reflecting on using otherness to teach a critical approach to human-animal relations, this article observes two important results: 1) a gendered engagement with nonhuman animal otherness and 2) a large amount of students expressing concern for nonhuman animals, and

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suggesting that modes of othering nonhuman animals are negative, and should be done away with. In light of these observations, this article concludes with a set of implications, namely 1) that otherness, within this context, was an effective frame for teaching human-animal relations in a way that promoted creative and critical engagement with the nonhuman animal condition[1], and 2) that future critical pedagogical work concerned with human-animal relations may want to consider the limitations of explanatory models centered on making "visible" the nonhuman animal condition and structures related to this condition's determination as a means to effect change in human-animal relationality.

Constructing a Unit on Nonhuman Animal Otherness

Through critical reflection and detailing the construction of this unit and student[2] response to it, this article critically examines a unit on nonhuman animal otherness in an introductory level film studies course in a basic education grouping, taught in English at a university in Japan[3] within the broader context of pedagogical work on teaching human-animal relations. The roughly 30 students in the course were fluent in English, and ranged from first to fourth year standing. The course consisted of eight films and essay assignments, with each film addressing a specific form of othered identity (race, gender, species, social class, etc.). The course met twice

[1] To clarify, I am positing that otherness served as an effective framework independent of a value judgment on the negative positions taken by students. That is, I am suggesting effectiveness due to the depth, analysis, and insight student essays presented, not because students evaluated otherness negatively.

[2] In awareness of the ethical dilemmas in a post-facto report of a class to the public at large, any and all identifying/individuating information has been removed. While students who took the class may be able to read this paper and realize which course this paper refers to, all other identifying information has been removed.

[3] It is important to keep in mind that, contrary to some prior critical pedagogical analysis of teaching on nonhuman animals and human-animal relationships, this article explicitly details a singular unit as opposed to analysis of an entire course specifically on nonhuman animals. Rather, this article attempts to outline from a critical pedagogical standpoint the teaching experience of using otherness as a framework to promote critical reflexivity regarding representations of nonhuman animal others in students.

weekly, once to view a film and have a small discussion, and the other day to listen to a lecture from the presiding professor and then break into small groups to discuss the film and think through that week's essay prompt with their peers.

As the course's teaching apprentice, I worked with the presiding professor prior to the beginning of the course, helping to pick films, readings, and build individual units.[4] As I had previously prepared and given lectures on two separate occasions under the supervision of a professor, I was offered the chance to provide one unit's small lecture under his supervision and have a larger role in the design of a specific unit of the course. I remarked that I would feel most comfortable teaching about nonhuman animal identity, given my past research and familiarity with prominent pedagogical discussions.

Before continuing, it will likely provide clarity to offer a very brief outline of my understanding of nonhuman animal otherness, and remark succinctly on the generals of students' conception of nonhuman animal otherness. My own standpoint on nonhuman animal otherness is broadly informed by understandings of nonhuman animals' lived experience as phenomenologically distinct from humans (and other nonhuman animals), unknowable in its exactness, with otherness resultant in part from the impossibility of knowing the lived experience of nonhuman animals (e.g. Nagel 1974). Also key to my own understanding of nonhuman animal otherness, and subsequently my conception of anthropomorphism, is the human/animal binary pair with its distinct legacy in what has been considered broadly "Western" thought, with "animal" being considered the negative of human and devoid of certain qualities, and with the figure of the animal foundational to conceptions of the human. Also important to note prior to elaborating on the unit is that student conception of

[4] To clarify, during the course I was not responsible for grading at any point. As part of my duties as a teaching apprentice, I would read through essays prior to the presiding professor, commenting and drawing attention to positive points of individual papers, alongside suggesting themes in the overall engagement for that week.

otherness, that is, what they stated in papers and that I gained from discussing films during class with them, appeared generally to be an assessment of otherness as the social construction of non-hegemonic forms of difference (gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity) in negative ways. Thus, I would argue that the discussion herein of student conceptions of nonhuman animal otherness should be thought of in terms of how they perceived media – and society at large – as depicting nonhuman animal difference, and the portrayal of difference as motivated by cultural and political reasons, often in order to construct hegemonic forms of relationality across difference.

The unit on nonhuman animal otherness was designed to complement the overall aim of the course by providing students another facet to their understanding of otherness. Specifically, from the outset of planning the unit, the intention was to provide students with a toolset to critically view media representations of nonhuman animals, akin to the representation of human difference and politics of its screening that the rest of the course dealt with. The presiding professor's design of the course was not to provide an overview of film studies, but rather to foster critical thinking in students, particularly with regards to media consumption. As this was the only film studies course offered at the university, unless students pursued graduate work in film studies, it was unlikely they would further engage with the field; as such, providing students with an important takeaway beyond disciplinary approaches and paradigms was forefront in the construction of the course overall.

As each week's new unit brought new theories to analyze various manifestations of otherness, the unit herein discussed fit quite well, both as an examination of a specific form of othered identity, and as a unit able to draw on extant pedagogical work on human-animal relationality. Scholars writing on teaching human-animal relations have long suggested that a primary goal of courses should be to have students think critically regarding nonhuman animals, rather than reinforce

the hegemonic social constructions that abound in the academy and society at large (DeMello 2010; Pedersen 2010). Furthermore, other scholars undertaking analysis of teaching the place of nonhuman animals in society have suggested that presenting nonhuman animal issues alongside human ones can provide the ground for robust student engagement and learning, deconstructing the boundaries between "human" and "animal" (Beirne and Alagappan 2007; Corman and Vandrocová 2013).

In constructing the unit on nonhuman animal otherness, my two chief concerns were continuity with prior and future units in the course (using otherness as a frame), and additionally, focusing on what Pedersen (2010, 122) refers to as the "material and symbolic roots of harmful and oppressive practices." As she asks in the final chapter of *Animals in Schools*: "How can they [the material and symbolic roots] and their effects be critically addressed? And how can alternatives be envisioned and evaluated?" (ibid.). In maintaining continuity with the other units of the course, the unit on nonhuman animal otherness could not merely become a critical reading of a particular manifestation of nonhuman animal otherness, but rather had to address how the film could help to explain and demonstrate the othering of nonhuman animals, or provide a foil for prevailing images of nonhuman animality. Additionally, as with prior units, the ultimate goal was to provide students with a toolset to critically analyze further representations of otherness that they would encounter. Thus, selecting materials (a film and readings) that emphasized critical self-reflection was paramount to constructing this unit.

A key part of the course overall was the design of the essay prompts, which were written in a way meant to encourage bringing together self-reflection and critical analysis of each unit's film and concepts. This type of writing assignment was well received from the beginning of the course by students, who stated that they appreciated the chance to write about their own experiences alongside their opinions on the film. While some students did struggle at first with merging an argumentative

writing style with self-reflection, by the final assignment of the course, all had risen to the occasion quite well, especially given some of the students' remarks on their lack of training in writing argumentative essays.[5]

Due to the expected topics of discussion and a pedagogical orientation towards honesty with students about instructor standpoint, I forthrightly noted that I am vegan[6] in order to more fully disclose to students my own biases. I anticipated that class discussion of nonhuman animal otherness, regardless of the inclusion of the readings to be discussed later, would turn to the consumption of nonhuman animal bodies, however partially, as it is indeed a prominent feature of human-animal relations and students had to this point displayed particularly incisive thinking. Disclosure of such a minority standpoint runs the risk, as Pedersen (2010) details, of being cast as political in the face of the prevailing perspective's supposed neutrality.

While disclosure of my own veganism and perspectives could have led students to be cautious, given their common responses as supportive of the consumption of nonhuman animals, I would suggest that the honest foregrounding of my own biases may have actually led to a richer engagement, as the prompt did not

[5] Such comments from students intersect trends in Japan of students exiting high school with sometimes less training in being asked to write an essay critical of a topic, compared to the predominantly Euro-American context in which pedagogy of human-animal relations has been theorized. Herein it is also important to distinguish between prior preparation in argumentative writing and critical thinking skills. I mean to situate the context of this unit for an audience likely unfamiliar with the Japanese educational system, not reflect in-depth on its impact on students' modes of engagement with course content. Students, as evidenced by class discussion, were as adept at critical engagement with course topics as other contexts (see footnote 8), but I note some issues with the nature of the assignment to be reflexive in consideration of how their engagement was evaluated by the presiding professor and myself through the assigning of essays with an argumentative component. See Karan 2005, 182-183; Suzuki and Oiwa 1999, 290-291; Ozawa 1993, 251-257 translated in Lu 1997, 569-571, for discussions of the Japanese education system and critical thinking in the context of secondary education.

[6] The presiding professor also noted his vegetarianism; however, my dietary and consumer choices were connected to broader issues through a brief explanation of my personal standpoint, as I would be providing the prompt and leading class discussion the following period. It was my hope that detailing my own beliefs, students would not feel there was a hidden motivation behind the film and writing response.

lead in a direction that privileged my standpoint, but rather provided ample ground for disagreement. Students had previously challenged elements of the readings and the presiding professor and myself on interpretations of films, and in a critical pedagogical context where students were openly sharing details of themselves – including in their responses about nonhuman animal otherness – I felt it would have been disingenuous not to disclose this, given how often such dietary choices are associated with political orientation. Additionally, responses to the prompt never seemed focus on defensive writing regarding consumption, but rather to examine it within the context of supporting normative conceptions of nonhuman animal otherness.

Within the small lecture I gave, I did not present much discussion of the material treatment of nonhuman animals by humans; rather, I eschewed any sort of didactic presentation of "ideal" human-animal relationality, and aimed instead to, per the entire view of the course, promote critical thinking about human-animal relationships.[7] In this sense, what is herein discussed can be taken as the result of a unit that sought to have students reflect critically on human-animal relationality through the framework of otherness, and the gendered and consumption focused response that will be discussed emerges out of such a context. What is also important to note in my foregrounding of standpoint to the students is that throughout the entire course, the presiding professor had explicitly noted that grades would not be given based on viewpoints taken, but rather the clarity of argument, basic elements of writing style and citation, and subjective strength of the paper in making an

[7] Such a choice for the lecture is also due to *Watership Down* largely being a wildlife film, and aside from several scenes involving the rescue of female rabbits from a barn (and resulting human violence towards the rabbits), there is no interaction with humans. Students were encouraged to engage with *Watership Down* on the basis of its *representation* of nonhuman animals, with prior lectures having discussed the politics of representing otherness.

argument, would determine grades.[8] Pedersen (2010, 54-56) has previously pointed to the importance of conveying to students that their disagreements with an instructor's view will not determine their grade; similarly, I forthrightly noted that disagreement was not grounds in any way for a lower grade reinforcing the point from prior units that even critical thinking counter to the presiding professor and myself was encouraged.

The essay prompt[9] that was provided to students also stands as an important factor in student response and also warrants discussion, given student divergence from the prompt. The prompt was designed to have students reflect on their own views of nonhuman animals, but in no way to suggest preference for, or indictment of, a certain perspective, beyond students engaging in some way with otherness. Even then, the prompt did allow for challenging even the assumption that otherness is a factor in human-animal relations.

Similar to the avoidance of an assumption of students holding certain viewpoints or overly steering students in a certain direction, I wish to qualify why I chose a fantasy film over a "realistic" or violent depiction of nonhuman animal life. Pedersen quotes from her interview with a teacher of courses on human-animal relations about why she, a person critical of human-animal relations and speciesism, has stopped doing class activities such as going to the slaughterhouse:

[8] This is important to highlight in particular with regards to the Japanese context, given that first and second-year students more accustomed to Japanese high school than university may have been reluctant to express their own views, particularly in argumentative form due to the nature of prior schoolwork (see footnote 5). However, per Stapleton 2001 & 2002, and Davidson 1995, this is not to suggest a presumption of students as having a dearth of critical thinking skills in relation to other cultural contexts. As will be detailed, students indeed displayed adept critical thinking for the prompt, which may have implications for debates on Japanese students and critical thinking exercises, which are beyond the scope of this article.

[9] The prompt was: "Looking at *Watership Down*, do you see the animals othered [in the film]? Can you think of examples of animal otherness from your life to relate to the discussion? Be sure to refer to the film."

> There is no reason to take students there because they are already upset and on their way to becoming vegetarians anyhow, if I didn't *curb* them. And if I took them to a slaughterhouse, there is *nobody* who would eat meat after that, at least not for a month, then maybe they will have forgotten. /…/ I feel that, my students who are so sensitive, we watch films, quite a lot of films in the course and I warn and warn prior to [watching], and even then they just sit like this, crying and are unable to eat. So, I changed my approach a lot. There is no reason to *show* things that produce *such* terrible reactions (2010, 49, emphasis original).

While there is indeed a robust strand of argumentation within critical animal studies as to the importance of revealing the oppression of nonhuman animals (especially to those not critical of such oppression), I decided early on with the presiding professor of the class to forego screening of films that centered the oppression of nonhuman animals by humans in gruesome or violent ways. While Aaltola (2014), Jenni (2005) and Freeman (2012), amongst others, have provided an important discussion about the moral imperative to reveal nonhuman animal suffering to those who are not critical of hegemonic modes of human-animal relationality, I decided against using such visuals or giving a lecture adopting a stance of firm disavowal of exploitative human-animal relationality. More specifically, as I was teaching in a context that has seen little pedagogical work on providing students with critical perspectives on human-animal relations, I felt that applying the largely Euro-American conclusions of human-animal relations would be premature. Moreover, in observation of the overall course goal of providing students with a toolset to think critically about their relationship to othering processes, my aim with this unit was to encourage them to think critically about the epistemological roots of nonhuman animal otherness rather than what Pedersen's interview details as a temporary lifestyle switch. By not teaching my own viewpoint/political stances, I aimed to avoid privileging my own personal reactions (for example veganism) to the subject being taught. And through not assuming the validity of prior approaches and models to a different context, I hoped to remain flexible to engagement in order to best dialogue with students,

hopefully having them walk away with a critical set of skills to read media representations of nonhuman animals.

Similarly, scholars writing on the connections between representation and what Pedersen and Stănescu (2012) refer to as the "animal condition" have suggested that such a material condition has (deeply problematic) epistemological roots (Lippit 2000; Rule 2010; Wadiwel 2015). This stance parallels Pedersen (2010, 122) who, writing in a critical pedagogical context, asks how a critical pedagogy strategy for teaching human-animal relations can address these roots in order to have students critically evaluate human-animal relations. In light of such work, this unit avoided the use of imagery that depicted extreme violence towards nonhuman animals, and set out to have students critically reevaluate human-animal relations through showing a film that was not narrow in its depiction of nonhuman-animal life, and to not provide a monolithic lecture on the nonhuman animal condition. My goal, derived largely from that of the course overall, was more an attempt to encourage critical and creative thinking that addressed the roots of the nonhuman animal condition. Likewise, my address (and problematization) of the material and symbolic roots of nonhuman animal otherness in this reflection is present in no small part due to the student problematization of otherness that will be presented.

In noting the above about the construction of this unit, it is my hope to situate this critical reflection as detailing the experience of selecting materials and teaching human-animal relations through a frame of otherness. As such, I engage with the class response to further evaluate and reflect on this frame, and suggest future directions in using otherness, and perhaps animated film, to help students think creatively and critically through human-animal relations.

Choice of Film and Supplemental Readings

Having discussed key pedagogical aspects of the construction of this unit, this article now turns to a discussion of the choices for the film and supplemental readings of the unit. As noted above, the film chosen for this unit was *Watership Down*, the animated adaptation of Richard Adams's (1972) eponymous novel that details the adventures of a group of rabbits seeking to avoid disaster and establish a new colony. *Watership Down*, however, is not an uncomplicated choice – especially due to its anthropomorphic depiction of rabbits.

A key aspect of choosing *Watership Down* as opposed to a live-action film, was that rather than using a didactic (and perhaps subsequently, polarizing) film that screens nonhuman animal suffering, I decided with the input of the presiding professor to use a film that would require students to critically, and creatively, think through the implications of otherness in regards to human-animal relationships. If the goal of the unit, and the course overall, was to have students think critically about the hegemonic construction and representation of various identities, then using a film that showed nonhuman animals outside of human control, and even resisting it, would provide a foil to everyday human-animal reactions.

Beyond this, *Watership Down* and other animated films about nonhuman animals take viewers on fantastical imagined journeys instead of employing quite different emotions in screening the factory farm. I have already noted Pedersen's (2010) observation of one teacher's reluctance to use shocking and disturbing imagery of suffering, and I shared such a sentiment; instead of merely shocking students, I wished to, per the course as a whole, place faith in their critical thinking skills and have them respond to a particular work. Taking note of arguments about the epistemic nature of nonhuman animal oppression and the complications of theories of obfuscation as leading to nonhuman animal exploitation, I found it more

prudent in this case to levy students' imaginations and critical thinking skills in thinking through nonhuman animal otherness.

Jenni (2005) notes in her article, "The Power of the Visual," that those seeking to effect change in viewers' relationships with nonhuman animals should be most concerned with moving beyond mere affective experiences that may linger and fade, and seek out visuals that convert affective experiences into knowledge. As already mentioned, Pedersen, but also DeMello (2010), notes that imagery of nonhuman animal suffering is, particularly in the first exposure to it, more emotionally jarring than anything for students. Owing to such observations, using an animated or fantasy film seemed a theoretically viable choice in more than one way, and also a means to avoid screening (human) violence towards nonhuman animals. My primary motivations for such a choice were that the film presents nonhuman animals, namely rabbits, as whole individuals, determining their own lives, and with many characteristics that are often only prescribed to humans in cinema.

The choice of *Watership Down* is not without complications, particularly given historical issues pertaining to the representation of wildlife, and also issues of anthropomorphism. Films depicting wildlife have consistently proven problematic in the effacement of individuality (Rule 2010), alongside heavily framing and controlling representations of nonhuman lives (Ganetz 2004; Welling 2014). In the case of *Watership Down*, one is also given the complications of sexism extending from Adams's original work, and the problematic of adaptation and reception. In the original novel, and then later the film, the heroes and main actors of *Watership Down* are the male rabbits that must break away and establish a new colony. It is only after the colony is established that they begin to think of female rabbits, and seek out mates to continue the colony. Such a framing of interactions with female rabbits lead Jane Resh Thomas (1977) to be harshly critical of Adams's book. *Watership Down*, Thomas, argues, anthropomorphizes male rabbits as human, but the male rabbits only

seek out female mates as a secondary plot point. Thomas's contention is that the female rabbits are a rather negative aspect of Adams's work, because if the male rabbits can be read as men, the female rabbits, cast as helpless and secondary, paint a rather detrimental picture of women.

Watership Down's particular legacy of adaptation and reception are also important to note in light of it being chosen. The 1972 novel version of *Watership Down* was marketed to children, in contrast to the mainstream marketing of the film in 1978. The mainstream marketing and reception of the film, as opposed to it being narrowly marketed as for children, was addressed by the presiding professor in his remarks prior to the screening of the film, connecting it to director Martin Rosen's other animated films and their reception in Britain more specifically. Moreover, the film adapts Adams's initial work, transferring in part the sexist portrayal of the female rabbits; as such, one could argue, following Thomas, that while the male rabbits are fully anthropomorphized, the female rabbits take on a somewhat subhuman status in *Watership Down*.

Anthropomorphism is a complicated issue, particularly in light of teaching a perspective critical of otherness. Criticism of anthropomorphism has often pointed to how such representations of nonhuman animals efface their individuality, and reduce them to vehicles for human meaning; however, others have suggested that while anthropomorphism is anchoring nonhuman animals to human epistemology and refusal to accept or know animals as they are, anthropomorphism paradoxically can spur viewers to place more value on the lives of nonhuman animals (Halberstam 2011; Malamud 2007; Welling 2014). In short, the usage of film that deploys anthropomorphism as a key representational strategy is admittedly complicated, and the specifics of how much to dialogue with students regarding anthropomorphism – particularly in contexts where wildlife cinema, anthropomorphic, or animated films are not the central focus of a course – are likewise complicated. Certainly, students

might have responded differently to the unit if I had incorporated a discussion on anthropomorphism. However, given the time constraints of the unit – and also students' expressed concerns of some readings being too complex for non-native speakers of English, and subsequently quite time-consuming for incorporating into essays assignments – focusing on perspectives critical of anthropomorphism in this case likely would have made the unit overwhelming and diluted focus and depth of reflection.

Because of concerns arising out of its anthropomorphism and relationship to wildlife cinema, *Watership Down* was not a choice without its issues. However, having noted the particularly prominent issue of sexism within the film, I do believe that the anthropomorphism did not significantly impede critical engagement with human-animal relationships. Rather, similar to Malamud's (2007) contention that anthropomorphism conveys a message of valuable nonhuman animal lives (even if tied in a human epistemology), the film promoted rich engagement. Similarly, the work of Halberstam (2011), albeit largely on 3D computer-generated animation, points also to the contradictory nature of such anthropomorphic images. While the nonhuman animals are stuck only acting as humans, they ironically achieve value through such an act. *Watership Down* perhaps models excellently the contradiction Halberstam observes in more recent animation, except that instead of the contradiction of finding portraits of queer childhoods within corporate-produced imagery for mass consumption, *Watership Down* provides the contradiction of a fundamentally conservative set of human relationships in a narrative that imagines an otherwise radically different rabbit life.

A part of Halberstam's (2011) conclusion on anthropomorphism is that while indeed precarious, teetering always on the edge of humanism, animated anthropomorphism offers chances to be creative (ibid., 50-51). Malamud (2007) similarly suggests that a particular strength of anthropomorphism is that it forwards

nonhuman animal individuality, a possible counter-representational strategy to the effacement of individuality that Lippit (2000) and Rule (2010) find in cinema at large. I would also note in a final remark on framing *Watership Down* and (animated) wildlife cinema that animation provides a different context than live-action. Specifically, it sees the world in a radically different way, transforming it from inert recipient of humanity's choices to an actor (Halberstam 2011; Heise 2014). Both Halberstam (2011) and Heise (2014) point to the animated nonhuman animal's human likeness as harboring potential to challenge anthropocentrism. Animation allows for the visualization of something quite different, and while there are myriad difficulties with using a film that others through anthropomorphism, given that the unit, and more largely, course, were on critical perspectives to otherness, students were accustomed to critically analyzing films by the time we reached *Watership Down*.

In addition to the film, there were three optional, supplemental readings: an excerpt from Anthony J. Nocella II's (2012, 3-6) chapter introducing the concept of eco-ability, an excerpt from Kim Socha's introduction to *Women, Destruction, and the Avant-Garde* (2012, 30-37), and Marie Houser's (2013) article "Bodies of Literature." Before elaborating on the choice of these pieces, what is important to note is that, as with all readings in the course, the Houser, Nocella, and Socha readings were optional for students. As the course was meant to teach students critical engagement with media in addition to honing argumentative essay writing skills, the course stressed gathering supportive citations and using them in a way that buttressed one's argument. Varying from week to week, either the presiding professor or I would offer optional readings, particularly in cases where students might not have a robust understanding of a film's cultural context or were being introduced to a new theoretical paradigm.

A selection from Nocella's (2012, 3-6) chapter on the concept of eco-ability was selected for two reasons, the first of which is that he details a particular vision of connectivity between human and nonhuman otherness through divergent, but intersecting usages of ableism targeting different humans and nonhumans. Additionally, Nocella's chapter brings together critical reflection and academic writing, parallel to hopes for student papers in the course. In essay responses, a small number of students cited Nocella's piece; this may be due in part to concerns parallel to those that Geurts and Hansen (2015) detail in their reflection on student engagement with eco-ability, namely that the environmentalism aspect caught students off-guard.

Houser's (2013) shorter piece was chosen, similarly to Nocella's, because she merges critical reflection with analysis, but also due to how she specifically mentions *Watership Down*, albeit Adams's original novel. Houser reflects on Adams's novel, remarking that it demonstrates how fiction can powerfully envision how nonhuman animal life may be. Her stressing of creativity and imagination in relation to nonhuman animal representations was well suited to the overall approach of encouraging personal reflection as well as thinking of anthropomorphic representation as not dichotomized good/bad. Houser's piece was the most cited of the optional readings in student papers, perhaps due to the piece's shorter length, alongside her specific mention of *Watership Down*.

Socha's piece was perhaps the most theoretical and animal advocacy-grounded, although still relatively short and accessible. In the excerpted subsection from her introduction, Socha (2012, 30-37) discusses with specific reference to children, how the consumption of nonhuman animals is not "natural" to humans, but culturally and historically emergent. Additionally, Socha also addresses anthropomorphic representations of nonhuman animals, specifically those that are targeted towards children. I chose the Socha piece primarily for her straightforward

and succinct detailing of how the cultural construction of nonhuman animals can have material effects; as detailed previously, a key goal for this unit was to teach students that human-animal relationships are not natural but subject to an array of cultural forces. However, being accustomed to the general concerns and language of CAS was most likely an unconscious factor in my choice of the piece. In hindsight, the piece may have incited some students' essays to be addresses of consumption. However, given that a small minority of papers cited Socha's piece or addressed any of her points, the turn to discussing consumption may have more to do with the class's assessment of the relationship between animal alterity and human-animal relationality.

Perhaps most apparently, the fact that the readings were all critical animal studies-related in nature could be suggested as a factor in turning students towards analysis of consumption, due to the language of the readings. Regardless of the readings being optional, the fact that readings' claims may have been read as having instructor approval certainly could have led students to feel the need to turn to, and rationalize, consumption. As student papers did not address the readings' theoretical concepts specifically, and their overall emphasis on consumption is only addressed explicitly in Socha's work, it is difficult to firmly suggest the exact impact of readings, since the readings were framed as optional to begin with.

In light of the selection of such readings a criticism that the unit was a particularly CAS-emphasizing approach to the place of nonhuman animals in cinema may be offered, which deserves response. While all three readings were critical of current modes of human-animal relationality, all offered elements that dovetailed with my overall approach to the unit, which was to encourage critical thinking regarding nonhuman animal relationships. The excerpt from Socha's book addresses, in a rather simple and forthright manner the fact that human-animal relationships are not pre-determined, an important concept for the address of nonhuman otherness.

Tangentially, Houser and Nocella's pieces both employ personal narratives and critical reflection on personal human-animal relationality, which was the practical goal for the unit and course.

Student Response

Having now noted the construction and underlying pedagogical concerns of this unit, I will turn to the student responses to the unit. I turn to student responses largely because of the rich engagement with otherness they represent, and the pedagogical challenge for future courses that I believe they present.

Before suggesting implications, however, it is important to sketch a rough outline of what responses addressed in a general manner. As noted above, the prompt asked students to critically reflect on the film, and think through otherness in everyday human-animal relations, similarly to previous prompts. Students, by a significant majority, chose to address how consumption of nonhuman animal bodies is related to otherness (out of the nearly 30 person class, under 5 papers addressed other topics as their central focus, with consumption still on the periphery). Given the nature of the responses as being critical reflections, there was obviously great variety throughout papers, yet a number of commonalities can be gleaned from the whole. Most apparently (beyond the predominant focus on consumption), there was a gendered response to conceptions of otherness, particularly in terms of addressing its implications for nonhuman animals. More specifically related to consumption, though, students interestingly engaged with biological aspects of nonhuman animal alterity, offered strategies for addressing nonhuman animal otherness as negative and contrasting responses that argued for furthering nonhuman animal otherness as a strategy, and finally, some students argued for nonhuman animal welfare.

A key aspect of student response to the unit was the marked division of gender in the discussion of certain issues and strategies for addressing nonhuman

animal otherness. Previously, those studying other cultural locations have noted that conception and consumption of, interaction with, and response to nonhuman animals is different according to gender (Adams 1990; Cudworth 2010; Gaarder 2011). While most of these studies have not looked at otherness as the ontological concept with a possible gender differentiated conception, they have shown clearly that women and men engage with the "animal question" in different ways. Papers written by female students followed the trend that authors, beginning with Adams have spoken to, namely, on average, more of a concern for nonhuman animals was demonstrated. Female students were more likely to be critical of nonhuman exploitation. Furthermore, male students, instead of being more ambivalent towards consumption and use of nonhuman animals, were more likely to directly argue in support of consumption and use, again in correlation with previous studies on masculinities and regards of nonhuman animals by them (Adams 1990; Luke 2007). Male responses also followed a number of patterns for defending the otherness and usage of nonhuman animals that have been attested to elsewhere, such as using scientific justification (Rothgerber 2013).

Most evident of this gendered difference in responding to the unit were language differences between female and male responses. Female responses clearly stood apart from male responses in direction and tone, stemming from language choices, particularly diction. Specifically, responses from female students more often used uncertain language and many times avoided taking unambiguous stances on their view of nonhuman animal otherness. Since language was differentiated along a gender binary, the influence of gendered language in responses was accounted for and responses were read critically with this in mind for analysis. Female students occasionally made strong statements about human-animal relations, but would often qualify these statements by offering a statement critical of the consumption of nonhuman animals, or alluding to cultural relativism and individual choice as factors

in permitting what they disagreed with, amongst other qualifications. This correlates with linguistic studies on deployment of more uncertain language by girls and women (e.g. Ide 1982; Takahara 1991) and was something that was mirrored by similar qualifying statements in class discussion of *Watership Down*; "I think," "Maybe," and sporadically apologizing for viewpoint, etc. Male students, however, were far more likely to directly offer their opinion and many times present it in an argumentative format demonstrating that they believed it to hold a large degree of objective worth.

While uncertain language rendered statements expressing value judgments towards nonhuman animal otherness diluted, female students' papers still contained the only responses with explicitly negative evaluations of current human-animal relations (some male responses did mention welfare as desirable, but did not outright condemn the present state of human-animal relations). However, in the responses most critical of nonhuman animal use, phrases and words such as "completely wrong", "cruel", and "unforgiveable" were used; in essence, female criticism of nonhuman animal exploitation was percolated at times by emotions and value judgments, something that male responses tended to avoid. Opposite of the emotional language implemented by female papers, many male papers were – in a detached, objective manner – referencing to biological and other natural science work to support their arguments. Beyond simply equating this with increased embrace of emotions by female students because of femininity, I believe that an argument can also be made that this may evidence gendering of relationality towards nonhuman animals, particularly when we consider the embrace of science, due to its supposed objective nature, by many male responses. Given the students' overall focus on consumption, the gender-differentiated evaluation of human-animal relations may have stemmed from a relationship between gender and consumption.

Gender and consumption suggest in this context a correlative relationship, particularly in light of studies in other cultural locations and Japan especially. The rise in consumption of nonhuman animal "products" beginning at the end of the 19th century has thoroughly reshaped Japanese dietary habits and also agricultural production (Fujita 1993; Morishima, Aita and Nakagawa 1993; Rothacher 1989). Such an impact has been noted as gendered, with men consuming more meat and expressing more of a preference for it, particularly red meat (Kerr et al. 1994). Moreover, the role of schools in normalizing the consumption of nonhuman animal bodies and "products" is notable in the Japanese context, as in the United States and other cultural locations (DeLeon 2011; Kerr et al. 1994; Pedersen 2010, 103-105). As such, authors have remarked on a gradual normalization of the consumption with each subsequent generation. This normalization is crucially important to note in light of consumption of nonhuman animal products being addressed as a normalized practice by student papers, and certain responses being divided by gender.

Normalization was central to the analysis of numerous students, who focused on consumption as in fact, normal. This trend is particularly interesting because students by and large identified human-animal relations as socially constructed, including students who defined consumption of nonhuman animals as a biological imperative. Thus, numerous responses forwarded problematization of how humans interact with and use nonhuman animals, but the underlying biological or scientific reasons students professed belief in were seen as the true nature of human-animal relationships to nonhuman animals. As such, students did not engage critically with what they held as constituting biological fact. This being noted, there was variance, with numerous female students openly expressing dismay that consumption was normative, and confessing they felt caught up in a system they did not wish to participate in. Alternatively, numerous male students argued along a more cultural relativistic line of thought, weaving in not cited biological and scientific

argumentation to suggest that we should merely embrace current modes of consumption because of their desirability (similar perhaps to the "niceness" factor of consumption of "meat" that Piazza et al. (2015) identify).

As such, with a supposedly natural, non-socially constructed foundation to the consumption of nonhuman animals observed in many responses, there were interesting critical takes on nonhuman animal otherness by students. Perhaps the most concerned responses to nonhuman animal otherness, however, were those responses which took for granted the biological naturalness of humans consuming nonhuman animals, but suggested that othering nonhuman animals is negative. This group of responses saw students arguing that there needs to be "food education" and other types of programming for children in order to teach them where their "food" comes from. Students remarked that the unit had indeed made them reconsider how they think about nonhuman animals, and made them more conscious about their diets. Such responses often overlapped with those that argued nonhuman animal welfare is a serious issue, parallel to issues discussed in other units.

Yet, almost opposite to the idea of dispelling otherness was another group of student responses arguing that current conceptions of nonhuman animal otherness needed to be upheld precisely because of a biological imperative. These responses saw a possible danger in doing away with otherness as a defining feature in the representation and discussion of nonhuman animals, as it could spell serious changes for the consumption of nonhuman animals, which was seen as either a biological necessity, or a fundamentally important facet of human nature. These responses were not the majority, and were largely male. This group of responses stands as an interesting foil to the group which argues for doing away with current perceptions of nonhuman animal otherness – those that view otherness as harmful place firm faith in the immutable nature of the biological foundation of human-animal relations, whereas those positively assessing otherness's function with regards to nonhuman

animals see consumption patterns as precariously positioned, and enforced through social behaviors and cultural construction.

Given that the majority of responses identified consumption as part of a trajectory of othering nonhuman animals, the juxtaposed nature of students arguing for recognition of otherness as negative and those supportive of it as a strategy for maintaining hegemonic patterns of consumption, warrants analysis. Struthers Montford (2013), in her article on "beef" consumption as a factor in the maintenance of dominant Albertan identity, suggested that assumptions of consumption of nonhuman animal bodies being only possible if practices are obfuscated from view may not be relevant in all contexts, which is observed in the student response to this unit also. The two groups of students that most clearly engaged with othering nonhuman animals as a trajectory, and ruminated on the material aspect of such a trajectory – "meat" – also demonstrate the limits of an explanatory model which argues the visibility of practices of harming, using, or consuming nonhuman animals spurs those engaged in such practices to halt them. Students very clearly identified that they were consuming nonhuman animals, and rather than merely identifying this, also proposed that those mechanisms which obfuscate from view the processes of raising "livestock" and eventually consuming them should be made visible and taught to other people – with the belief that doing so would not change dominant patterns of consumption.

This being noted, there is cause for interrogating why students turned to consumption and expressed support for hegemonic practices and relationality towards nonhuman animals. This is especially the case in light of prior explanatory models suggesting that understanding the visual obfuscation of exploitative practices towards nonhuman animals transforms one's relation and ideas regarding nonhuman animals, including a subconscious othering of nonhuman animals. As thought through in the first and second sections of this paper, the issues of anthropomorphism, and more

largely, the representation of nonhuman animals being "always-already" a given (Fudge 2002, 6) prompts a discussion of the merits and demerits of using fictional as opposed to non-fictional representations of nonhuman animals, given substantial problematization of both types from myriad scholars. Certainly, the disingenuous and fictional (not to mention at times, biologically reductionist, and false at that) portrayal of rabbits, who are not commonly consumed in Japan, may have not actually made visible to students the practices of consuming nonhuman animals. But nonetheless, the fact that students identified such practices themselves seems to suggest that students did have ample awareness of what consuming nonhuman animals entailed – and a number seemed confident that revealing this would not change human-animal relations at large.

Such a moral imperative to truthfully speak of the structures and realities behind consuming nonhuman animals calls to mind the challenge posed to often-cited current explanatory models of nonhuman animal consumption. In particular, Vasile Stănescu (2010; 2014) has documented the often intersecting "humane" slaughter and locavore movements, and how there is a growing number of consumers raising (and killing) their own chickens, becoming interested in the raising of nonhuman animals they consume, and other welfarist contentions against what is cast as more abhorrent dominant ways of killing nonhuman animals. Those who argue for "happy meat," Stănescu contends, are not fundamentally reconfiguring human-animal relationships, but seeking a way to make anthropocentrism more ethical and viable. I turn to Stănescu's work because he keenly notes that those who are advocating for "happy meat" express concern about nonhuman animals' conditions and indeed how to change them, and make people aware of where their "meat" comes from; it is a notion similar in some ways to the responses from students discussed herein. That is, overt and genuine concern for the welfare of nonhuman animals to a certain degree, but not a fundamental change in relationality – rather, the epistemic issues of nonhuman

animal identity that Lippit (2000) and Rule (2010) are concerned with remain unaddressed.

Tangentially, activist M. Ryan Leitch (2013) argues that those heavily invested in specific criticisms of hegemonic human-animal relationality may need to re-evaluate the efficacy and details of current critical explanatory models; for Leitch, activism on behalf of nonhuman animals may have inadvertently lead to the "humane meat" movement. Similarly, Struthers Montford (2013) suggests that a larger logic of sacrifice underpins nonhuman animal consumption, and that the visibility of practices may not change their predominance, which is similar to the concerns about overexposure to nonhuman animal suffering inuring humans to it, raised in the context of animal theory by Ralph Acampora (1998) and more recently by Timothy Pachirat (2011).

While an extended meditation on the limits of explanatory models of visibility/concealment determining the shape of current human-animal relationships, primarily in the context of consumption, is beyond this article, I do find it crucially important to note that the student response to this unit details an incredibly robust engagement with the concept of otherness. The students exceeded the presiding professor's and my own hopes for this unit, bringing more of their own independently gathered sources to this unit than any other in the course. Students very clearly argued a key concept in animal studies – that obfuscation of nonhuman animals is related to their consumption (with student opinion on what such leveraging of otherness means) – without having been taught this in class. In light of the engagement that has been detailed, it is important to note that the student engagement herein goes against a significant body of work that argues the concealment of practices harmful to nonhuman animals is what enables them. Rather, students showed awareness of what happens, and a number argued that educating others about what consuming nonhuman animals entailed was the moral thing to do. Underlying

this, though, was the belief that consumption was natural and predetermined above the level of a social construction. The engagement delineated herein, particularly in light of the implementation of otherness as a framework for teaching human-animal relations, implies that there could perhaps be limitations in using visibility as an explanation for current nonhuman-animal relations, particularly in a critical pedagogical context.

Conclusion

Within this article, I have aimed to critically evaluate and reflect on my role within this unit and the implementation of otherness as a frame to teach human-animal relations. The student engagement with this frame was particularly rich, and even though students primarily did not address the film, their engagement with otherness and also consumption demonstrated adept critical thinking around human-animal relations.

Having noted this, the student response to this unit suggests that, with numerous limitations arising from contexts of these remarks, future critical pedagogical work on human-animal relations may want to consider how visibility of practices and structures related to nonhuman animals does not necessarily serve to change them, nor even inspire a desire to change them. While some students were indeed concerned about the visibility affecting the importance of consuming nonhuman animals, more often than not students expressed little to no concern that visibility would impact predominant modes of relating to nonhuman animals, most notably consuming them. Again, these conclusions are anchored to a specific context, but may be important to revisiting evaluations of visibility in animal theory. Additionally, the correlative nature between response to consumption and gender may be important to future research on the nonhuman animal condition in the

Japanese context, particularly in thinking through a critical pedagogy of human-animal relations more concerned with the Japanese university setting.

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