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Unraveling the Wild: A Cultural Logic of Animal Stories in Contemporary Social Life

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Unraveling the Wild: A Cultural Logic of Animal Stories in Contemporary Social Life

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
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DEDICATION

For my parents. I'm endlessly grateful for your love and support. Thank you for teaching me to learn from all good things.

For those lost in the way of life.

May you discover the innate freedom and compassion in the heart of your being.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is about the stories people tell about animals when they don't do what they are expected to do in contemporary social life. More specifically, it examines three case studies where "wild" animals unexpectedly challenge, transgress, or blur socially defined boundaries in public spaces. Drawing on cultural and interactionist studies of animals and environment, I explore popular animal stories written in news media, social media, and enacted *in* situ. Each qualitative case study illustrates a moment in time/space where the surprising movements or presence of wild animals causes the cultural categories of wildness/order to breakdown and destabilize. These "surface breaks" of social expectations provide an occasion to tell "animal stories." Animal stories help people explain how the lives of animals can be allegorical strategies modern people use to communicate and enact moral lessons about the social world.

In the first chapter, I analyze news stories that emerged after Terry Thompson, an eccentric and estranged war veteran, released 54 exotic animals from his private 73-acre farm near Zanesville, Ohio. I suggest that when *wild* things challenge our taken-for-granted reality, people turn to mythical stories of fantasy to distract themselves from the more obvious social issues at hand. In the second chapter, I reconstruct the story of one feral Rhesus Macaque monkey whose adventure through Tampa Bay inspired extensive reporting in both social media and traditional news media. I suggest that the monkey's story was akin to a mythical tale of American heroism. As an emblem of "good ol' American Freedom," his glorified feats of escape inspired a monkey loving populace to elevate his status to a celebrity-hero, with big government as the evil villain hunting him down. In this way, public debate surrounding the monkey's life story beckons us to reflect on the role of liberty and repression in American discourse. Lastly, in the third chapter, I draw on ethnographic field notes to show how

animals are understood and talked about by visitors in a Manatee Viewing Center in central Florida. I examine how animals challenge social expectations in everyday life situations, and how these breaches lead to situational storytelling and coordinated social activity. I suggest that animals can become messengers of a sacred nature, which is celebrated in the social performance of wildlife viewing.

In conclusion, I follow Levi-Strauss (1966) to argue that animals are "good to think with" because they provide people with an "animal mirror" to look at themselves (Haraway 2008). Furthermore, I indicate that hidden meanings in animal stories inform how people think, feel, and act towards animals in different social contexts, and are thereby reinforced through cultural, institutional, organizational, and personal practices. Animal stories have *power* because they are often translated into modes of activity and used to realize people's hopes and fears. In other words, animal stories are alternative forms of wildlife management that act to segregate animals from particular social activities, and designate them to appropriate places in society. Findings from this dissertation are not limited to animals, and may be applied to various cultural logics and socially defined boundaries.

PREFACE: REVEALING THE WILD WITHIN

"The truth will never be complete
In any mind or time. It will never
Be reduced to an explanation.
What you have is only a sack of fragments
Never to be filled: old bones, fossils,
Facts, scraps of writing, sprawls of junk.
You know yourself only poorly and in part,
The best and the worst maybe forgotten.
However you arrange the pieces, however
Authentic, a story is what you'll have,
An artifact, for better or worse.
So go ahead. Gather your findings into
A plausible arrangement. Make a story.
Show how love and joy, beauty and goodness,
Shine out amongst the rubble."
Wendell Berry

"The longest journey someone must make is the 18 inches from the head into the heart."
Unknown

This dissertation is a lifetime in the making, and has evolved from an ongoing curiosity with wild things. For years, I've been interested in how people use stories to understand, yet distance themselves from the natural world. I've witnessed this tendency in myself, and wanted to investigate how it was also happening in the social world. The seed of curiosity began in Brooklyn, New York, an unlikely place to uncover the *wild*.

Raised in New York City, most of the stories I heard reflected the consumer megalopolis humming forever in the background. At an early age, however, my parents introduced me to the wonder of nature through daily excursions to urban parks, and annual adventures into the Catskill

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Mountains in upstate New York. The vastness of nature was magical to my mind, and piqued my youthful curiosity. I would often spend time after school consuming nature stories on TV, digging in the yard, and thumbing through National Geographic. Yet, my fondness of nature had its deepest roots in my relationship with the animal kingdom.

From birth, I was surrounded by *animal stories*, weaved and told by family and friends. I had a brother and sister, mother and father, loving grandparents, and a handful of cousins, aunts, and uncles who helped shape my identity. But, most importantly, there was what my father would call, "the Goddamn zoo!" You see, both of my parents were dog trainers. And my mother, particularly, had a fondness for collecting furry mongrels of all stripes. My father once ran Rottweilers at Madison Square Garden, and my mother studied with reputable trainers throughout the northeastern United States. So, as you might imagine, I had countless experiences with animals of all stripes, especially dogs who were inseparable from my day-to-day life. There was Buster, Alex, Tucker, Juno, and Augustus, the Rottweilers–the crown jewels. Billy, the colossal English Mastiff. Missy, Raizen, and Skye, the boisterous, Australian Shepherds. Albert, the lonely rescue Bull Terrier who my mother brought home one snowy Christmas Eve. And of course there was Max, a scrawny and gentle male Rottweiler, my first and best friend.

Over the years, I watched and learned from my canine companions. I was inspired and awed in their presence. They were performers and I was their audience, and their unpredictable antics routinely inspired me to tell stories about our shared world. But what I valued most about my canine friends was their sense of wildness and vulnerability. Dogs have an uncanny ability to live life with an open heart. They can be joyful and curious, compassionate and kind. Yet, often when I gazed into their eyes I would see a sadness that was infinite in depth. Millions of years of evolution reflected back and forth between us. In these moments, my love for them was most profound and the wild was present and responsive.

I began exploring the social perception of wildness in 2007. At that time, I was attending graduate school in Flagstaff, Arizona. I would pass hours and hours in the surrounding wilderness, contemplating the mystery of nature. I was enamored by how it seemed to ache with tenderness, moving and breathing effortlessly. It was also terrifying at times. The ferocity of the wild was boundless and could consume anything in the space of a moment. My passion for the wild inspired my thesis on public perceptions of wolf reintroduction into the Southwest, and eventually led me to a PhD program in Sociology. I wanted to grasp the wild, and understand it. I held a deep desire to penetrate it with both body and mind. Yet, I was quickly overwhelmed with the rigors of graduate school, and the wild was put into stark contrast with my worldly pursuits. The wonder was gone, and anxiety and angst would take its place. After many failed attempts, and bouts with depression, I slowly realized what I was seeking was not in the outside world. Rather, it was a deeper, more intimate inner landscape that I now call *the wild within*.

The wild within is the raw, open, and vulnerable space of the living heart that is constantly reaching out towards others. Every living being shares this innate *desire to connect* with one another. It is the unfiltered, nonconceptual urge at the core of our common experience. It's what makes life possible. The wild within is the inward expression of this yearning, which seeks relationship with other species, and with the world around us. Whether we are microbial bacteria or a hopeless romantic, we all strive for a sense of belonging. Yet somewhere along the path to the present, we've forgotten this essential principle. As modern people, we want to believe that there's something outside that will save us from our perpetual angst. If only we could deport the illegal immigrants, have sexual prowess, purchase the finest jewelry, or discover the "God particle", only then would we finally relieve our struggle. This view of theism is at the root of all modern institutions, whether religious, scientific, or the economic model of consumerism. In holding these views, we unfortunately suppress and pervert

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the wild within, transmuting its energy into an instrument of possessiveness. In doing so, we mistake the desire to connect with the desire to consume, challenging our drive towards completion.

To be wild means to have space to roam. Boundaries are porous and flexible, or sometimes negotiable and nonexistent. In seeking to grasp the wild, however, we create what Erving Goffman (1971) calls "territories of the self." The territories of the self are established and controlled through the maintenance of symbolic and physical boundaries. It's how we make sense of the world, yet ironically it's also at the root of social division and isolation. Our shared sense of separation is ultimately an act of denial, because we must inevitably exclude others from our experience. The wild within, however, is the innate impulse to *recognize* the other. It's an indestructible desire for connection with our experience. The wild within is a natural insight, and calls us to embrace our inherent wildness.

This dissertation is an exploration of the social perception of wildness, and the boundary work happening at all levels of social life. It's also an expression of my journey to discover the wild within. I believe to be fully human–or animal–is to discover the inherent freedom and compassion at the core of our being. It's a direct and embodied relationship with our surrounding world. To embrace the wild within means to embrace a groundless vulnerability, which is the heritage of our wild heart. Like any venture, there's risk involved, but in a world of frailties we may no longer have a choice. Vulnerability is the sign of a courageous heart. So, I say let the wildness peek through. Perhaps we'll be truly invincible.

CHAPTER ONE: STORIES FROM THE WILD

"Humans are no longer monarchs of being,
but are instead among beings, entangled in beings,
and implicated in other beings."
Levi Bryant

We humans have taken much for granted. Our selves, the natural world, the boundaries between the human and the nonhuman–somewhere along the line we consciously conceptualized these categories in our quest for order. These categories have become embedded in our social lives, over time becoming less obvious, or even unquestionable. Thus, any time this constructed order begins to fall apart, as it will inevitably do, we are flung into a state of uncertainty. In these moments, we have only two choices: we either surrender to the wildness in *wonder*, or (as has most often been the case) we fight ambivalence by imposing more order. Regularly, this "ordering" takes the form of enforcing classifications and boundaries upon the social and natural world. As Zygmunt Bauman (1991) writes, this work of separation has been a key function of modernity.

In recent times, the chronic uncertainty of social categories betrays the instability of the modern conception of boundaries. Our "social facts" do not have enough time to solidify in social institutions, and thus they "decompose and melt faster than the time it takes to cast them" (Bauman 2007:1). As a result, we are undergoing a historical shift towards what Bauman (2007) calls "a liquid modernity" marked by reflexivity and heterogeneity. This is evidence of an emerging "age of uncertainty" (Bauman 2007), in which the mechanisms of order crumble before they have a chance to take hold. The perception of a constant state of chaos is the effect of this inability to stabilize order.

Indeed, the threat of a wild world looms larger than ever. Philosopher and cultural critic Slavoj Zizek (2011) suggests that global capitalist society "is approaching an apocalyptic zero-point" (x). But philosophers and academics aren't the only ones sensing "the end." We need only turn to everyday news to feel that we live in a "risk society" (Beck 1991). Today, the average person is aware of an overwhelming number of alarming problems worldwide–violent ideological divisions, the expansion of global militarism, international terrorism, chronic poverty, the rapid decline of honeybees, malicious viruses, global climate change, and international economic crises, just to name a few. Uncertainty and risk seem to be the only certainties in contemporary social life.

As Bauman (1991) argues, however, chaos is merely the opposite of order, which is of our own construction. In other words, the *wildness* of chaos would not exist without order, as it is simply the negation of order; it appears only when our structural order has failed. To return to the example of capitalism, the sense of an impending end is fueled by the very problems with the capitalist system itself (conflict over natural resources, intellectual property, etc.) (Zizek 2011). The anxiety, then, appears not so much as a reaction to wildness itself, but to the realization that our order is flawed, that we have made mistakes. It's not easy to accept that what we have taken for granted is not ultimate truth, after all.

Yet, walking into the wild presents opportunity. In moments of uncertainty, during which classification and boundaries break down, it is important to interrogate our social categories and structures. One way to do this is to look at language, as it "strives to sustain the order and to deny or suppress randomness and contingency" (Bauman 1991:1). In particular, *narratives* provide a unique look into how we order the world, as they blur reality and fantasy and become a primary sense-making tool (Loseke 2011:252). By exploring the language of stories about *wild animals*, we can uncover the norms we have used to order our lives, and begin to understand our relationship to uncertainty, or "the archetype of all fear" (Bauman 1991:7), in relation to the breakdown of those norms.

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is about the stories people tell about animals. In particular, it's about the stories we tell when wild animals don't do what we expect them to do in public spaces. I am interested in how stories help people maintain social order in uncertain moments, and how stories about wild animals told in public life challenge and perpetuate the dualistic categories of *wildness/order*. To explore these curiosities, I investigate the storytelling moments that arise when 'wild' animals challenge, transgress, or blur socially defined boundaries. What happens when wildness or wild things threaten our shared sense of order? What strategies do people use to negotiate this uncertain territory?

Following Nippert-Eng (1996), I adopt the term "boundary work" to understand how people "repeatedly define and refine the essence of and relationship between the realms" of wildness and social order (79). Boundary work involves adopting "strategies, principles, and practices" in order to "create, maintain, and modify cultural categories" (79). Furthermore, boundary work happens around both physical and imagined borders, yet both act to constrain the uncertainty and ambivalence wild animals pose when in socially defined spaces.

In this dissertation, I see animal storytelling as one form of boundary work. "Storytelling can be placed at the heart of our symbolic interactions" (Plummer 1995:20), and thus is a strategic symbolic and practical tool that provides a moral framework for how to live our lives. Animals have long been entangled in the human symbolic landscape, and people often construct stories to understand and reflect on the boundaries between animals and humans, and wildness and society. I use the term *animal stories* to explain how the lives of animals sometimes become "allegorical devices" employed by modern people to "convey moral lessons" about how to perceive and relate with the natural world (DeMello 2012:327). I argue that storytelling that emerges in moments of uncertainty prompted by wildlife encounters are strategies and practices that enable people to maintain the categories of wildness/order in contemporary public life.

To develop this argument, I explore the following questions:

- What types of stories emerge when wild animals overcome attempts to manage them?

- How do animal stories incorporate images, words, plots, narrative themes, and categories that resonate with cultural anxieties surrounding the modernist discourse about human/nature boundaries?

SURFACE BREAKS AND AN OCCASION TO STORY

Animal stories arise in moments of uncertainty prompted by unexpected or unusual wildlife encounters, where the human/animal boundary is disrupted. I call these disruptive moments *surface breaks*, and the storytelling that follows *an occasion to story*. To further explain these concepts, I draw on the work of Harold Garfinkel (1967) and Erving Goffman (1959, 1963, 1971, 1974), who laid the groundwork for understanding the relationship between everyday social reality and social action.[1] Both theorists were interested in observing and discussing the "unexpected" in social life. More specifically, they observed how studying types of "unexpected" encounters, and people's associated reactions, revealed an underlying social order that gives rise, and structure, to social life. When someone–or something–breaks a socially acceptable rule, it not only provides grounds for social interaction, but it's also a reason to (re)construct our shared reality. In other words, to observe a social situation in distress tells us more about the underlying social structure, and its cultural logics, then when things move along smoothly.

Surface breaks are those occasions, moments, or events in social life where attempts to manage wild things are challenged, transgressed, or blurred. In these instances, human/animal boundaries momentarily break down and open wider spaces for interpretation and reordering. In such cases, people fall back onto common storytelling devices to make sense of the changing situation. *Surface*

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[1] Neither theorist's work was dependent on understanding social order through a universal system of meaning. Nonetheless, I interpret their insights as helpful in understanding how stories arise from a violation of any given social order, whether local or systematic.

breaks are similar to Garfinkel's (1967) "breaching experiments," which set out to violate the underlying social rules in everyday social situations. As Heritage (1984) notes, "the idea here is to experiment with ordinary social interaction in order to highlight the processes that are at work in rendering them 'normal'" (233). Garfinkel's experiments set out to violate the "taken for granted" social order, thus revealing the hidden social and moral norms underlying social interactions (Garfinkel 1967). His famous elevator experiments, for instance, showed how people felt anxious and uneasy when someone stood the wrong way in an elevator, while breaches in everyday conversation between friends evoked frustration and confusion.

In developing his theory of ethnomethodology, Garfinkel (1967) intentionally produced breaches to understand how order emerges through social relations as people organize their actions to remain in accord with others (Smith and Riley 2009). His experiments suggested that people respond to breaks of social rules, and the uncertainty and unease that follow, through remedial methods, such as accounts. Accounts are an attempt to develop frames to make sense of the emergent situation, and to explain away or understand the perceived threat.

Many scholars have used breaching experiments to document taken-for-granted social rules, yet not much research has shown what happens following the breach of such rules (e.g., Berry 2012). As Berry (2012) notes, "(Garfinkel) did not explore, in any great detail, what people do after they notice that the social order has been disturbed" (229). So, then, how do people cope with or move on from such uncertain states? What strategies and practices do they use to repair a shared sense of order? In this dissertation, I do not intentionally produce or manufacture breaches. Rather, I explore three cases where wild animals unexpectedly "breach" human-animal boundaries in public life. In these cases, the unexpected activity of wild animals breaks the social expectations of their human counterparts, and gives rise to what I call an *occasion to story*.

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An *occasion to story* is the ritual storytelling opportunities following uncertain encounters with unknown or 'wild' things. When surface breaks occur, the ambiguity of the situation "will be translated into felt moments of uncertainty and hesitancy" (Goffman 1974:301). To move on from these "felt moments of uncertainty" means to confront failed social expectations, and recover any sense of loss (Berry 2012). Whether managing the experience of sexual trauma (Harvey et. al 2000), encountering a monkey in your backyard (Chapter 3), or learning your child has Down syndrome (Thomas 2014), a break in social expectation leads people to develop strategies to cope with shifting circumstances. I argue that storytelling is one strategy people use to reestablish, reorganize, or revise social order and their shared reality. As Potteiger and Purinton (1998) note, stories order and "configure experience…into meaningful relationships" and offer ways of knowing and shaping the world, and its inhabitants (ix; see also Chapter 2). Furthermore, stories shift our understanding and open possibilities to restore or revise order in any given situation (Harvey et. al 2000).

In this dissertation, I argue that an *occasion to story* arises when the taken for granted social reality is violated. Social reality is contextual, and depends on shifting social and cultural norms in the immediate and historical situation. A social norm is a reference point we use to order our lives. It's a "kind of guide for action which is supported by social sanctions, (with) negative ones providing penalties for infraction, (and) positive ones providing rewards for exemplary compliance…"(Goffman 1971:95). Central to Goffman's (1963, 1971, 1974) work was the argument that the most standard norm in any given situation is for someone to "fit in." In the chapters that follow, I argue that wildness/order boundaries set up social conditions that separate humans from animals. In these conditions, humans and animals are assigned particular roles and behaviors. These types of social expectations act as a script for social interaction, public representation, and engagement with wildlife. When animals unexpectedly enter into socially defined spaces, they defy acceptable behavior for animals, and thus violate particular social expectations.

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In "Relations in Public," Goffman (1971) argues that the "territory-like preserves" of social norms "are the central claim in the study of comingling" (44), and their violation "the central organizing device of public order" (63). Violations are performative rituals, or "conventionalized acts," through which individuals or groups "show respect for and regard for some object of ultimate value…or to it's stand-in" (62). Yet, rituals can be both positive and negative. The positive ritual affirms and supports the social relationship between participants, while the negative rite is a violation. Following this logic, Goffman (1971) suggests that ritual can lead to dialogue. "When an infraction occurs…a dialogue is indicated (with) the offender having to provide remedial accounts and assurances and the offended a sign that these have been received and are sufficient; in brief, a remedial interchange occurs" (64).

I argue that these "remedial interchanges" can, and do, take on the form of storytelling when wild animals break social expectations–through invasion, transgression, surprise, etc. Animals do not communicate through human language, and cannot account for their actions. In return, humans must account for their transgressions, and accommodate them by bringing them into society through storytelling. The stories people tell in these moments reflect the cultural logic of wildness/order, and thus provide clues for how to interpret our relationship with animals, and the natural world, more generally.

In public life, norms are informed by "a set of binary codes that discuss and interrelate (the) dimensions of social-structural reality in a patterned and coherent way" (Alexander 2003:121). Each chapter of this dissertation shows how the logic of wildness/order guides the way norms are "conceived, negotiated, and protected" (Jerolmack 2008). Norms provide participants with the logic necessary to understand, interpret, and act in any given social situation. When the boundaries of a norm are violated, people may react with violence, humor, or wonder. Yet, each type of storytelling device is an alternative mode of controlling and sanctioning wildlife. Thus, what I am interested in are

not *only* the types of stories that arise in these moments, but also the practices that follow the particular narrative logic. Thus, I argue that in these "breaks," people routinely attempt to work through social anxieties through storytelling. Stories can be seen as strategies people use to cope with uncertainty, and thus reestablish any given normative conditions or social order, more generally.

To say stories emerge in uncertain moments is not a novel idea, however. After all, people are "world making" creatures and storytelling in the face of the unknown is the "principal function of the mind" (Bruner 1987:11). What is interesting here, however, is that an occasion to story–and the animal stories that arise from uncertain spaces–help people reconcile an animal's behavior with a shared sense of how these animals are, how they should be, and how they are different from people. Therefore, throughout this dissertation it might be helpful to consider how stories act as useful tools that help people make sense of uncertainty, and collectively manage encroaching wildness, which threatens our modern–and moral–sensibilities.

THE SYMBOLIC DIMENSION OF WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

In contemporary society, wildlife is managed in physical and symbolic dimensions. Traditionally, wildlife management has largely been the domain of the natural sciences (see Krausman and Cain 2013). Yet, how we manage wildlife has a discursive dimension that social scientists have overlooked. Moreover, research on the human dimensions of wildlife management has paid scant attention to the discursive aspects of human-wildlife interactions (e.g., Decker et. al 2012). I believe by investigating 'surprising' stories of wild animals, social scientists may begin to unravel the complexities of human-wildlife conflict and interaction, and reveal the importance of storytelling in human-animal relations. Throughout my project, I adopt a constructionist perspective of nature and animals to understand how wildlife are controlled, managed, and revered in contemporary society (see also Herda-Rapp and Goedeke 2005).

The discursive frames of wildlife management (Brulle and Benford 2012) are represented in the types of stories we tell about animals. Some stories may be monstrous, some heroic, while others might exalt animals to the level of the sacred. Yet, stories are mostly fiction, or representations of reality. They are removed from the actual experiences of animals, and often erase them from our lives (Stibbe 2012). Nonetheless, stories impact how we understand, interact with, and manage wildlife. For this reason, I look to literature on animals and society and cultural sociology to make sense of animal storytelling, the categorization of wildness and order, and the cultural logic of nature/culture boundaries. These theoretical and conceptual tools will help me to outline how wild animals have become entangled in the social and cultural landscape.

In the next section, I review literature in the field of human-animal sociology, and relate my own research interests to the field. I do so through looking at the symbolic role of animals in social life, and outlining the concept of the "sociozoologic scale." I then provide examples of how particular animal types evolve from this socio-categorical scale (Arluke and Sanders 1996).

ANIMALS IN SOCIETY

Seminal theorists in contemporary social thought, such as Jacques Derrida, Donna Haraway, and novelist J.M. Coetzee, have observed the animal turn in the humanities and social sciences (Weil 2012). Sociology, in particular, has welcomed the study of human and nonhuman animal relations. Throughout the history of sociology, many scholars have recognized the importance of animals in social life, yet early musings were unable to establish a substantial research canon on the human-animal boundary. Many famed sociologists, such as George Herbert Mead (1962) and Harriet Martineau ([1865] 2003) mention human-animal relations in their work.

One example is Max Weber (1947) who recognized the potential of looking at animals in sociological research. "It would be theoretically possible to formulate a sociology of the relations of men and animals, both domestic and wild…(M)any animals 'understand' commands, anger, love,

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hostility, and react to them in ways which are evidently often by no means purely instinctive and mechanical and in some sense both consciously meaningful and affected by experience" (104). Though early consideration on animals in sociology laid a foundation for the importance of looking at animals, it was not until Clifton Bryant (1979) called sociologists' attention to the "zoological connection" at the heart of our mixed species society that sociologists began to systematically investigate the human-animal boundary. Since then, human-animal sociology has flourished, with the Society and Animals section of the American Sociological Association now celebrating its 15-year anniversary, and highly regarded sociology journals, such as *Social Problems* (Jerolmack 2008) and *American Sociological Review* (Jerolmack 2007), publishing innovative research on animals in sociology.

Sociologists studying animals most often employ substantive areas to situate and contextualize their inquiries (Arluke and Sanders 2009). The most widely studied areas in human-animal sociology have been work and occupations, social movements, and everyday interactions. Another area ripe for investigation is cultural sociology and the symbolic role of animals in social life. As Sanders (2003) notes, in contemporary society we live in a symbolically and ecologically embedded community of human and nonhuman animals (421), where being an animal "may be less a matter of biology than it is an issue of human culture and consciousness" (Arluke and Sanders 2009:xiii). Furthermore, humans act towards things based on their meanings (Blumer 1969), and when we come into contact with an animal we often see aspects of our social self (Jerolmack and Tavory 2014). In this way, animals are mirrors that aid in human understanding and symbolic interaction (Mullin 1999). To investigate how people think about and interact with animals, then, means to look deeper into our cultural assumptions about the social world.

Most of human culture is founded on the idea that "humans are not like animals" (DeMello 2012:33). Historically, this assumption has led to anthropocentricism, or the view that human interests and needs supersede those of other animals. Therefore, once animals enter into the social world they

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are quickly constructed and categorized along a "sociozoologic scale" (Arluke and Sanders 1996). The sociozoologic scale categorizes and ranks animals based on their ability to help or benefit humans in society (DeMello 2012:51). Good animals provide something considered socially beneficial, while bad animals threaten some humanly respected boundary.

This human-animal divide is not universal to all cultures (Ingold 2012), but it is endemic to Western societies. The borders of the human-animal divide are constantly shifting, in the immediate situation or historically. Today, one way we categorize animals is based on "where they live and whether or not they are part of human culture" (DeMello 2012:47). This logic places wild animals (who live outside human society) on one end of the scale and tame animals (who live inside human society on the other (DeMello 2012). As DeMello (2012) notes, "(t)hese categories involve defining the animal so it fits the category (and) based on the category assigned, we then treat the animal a particular way…The sociozoologic scale classifies and sets out the ways that we will use (and treat) these animals" (52).

One example of a "bad animal" is the pest. Pests are wild animals who have transgressed human spaces, and can be anything from roaches to rodents to coyotes. Pest incursions into homes, farms, or gardens, for instance, are often framed as a public and private nuisance (see Jerolmack 2008; also see Capek 2010:215). These wild animals pose an objective threat to some aspect of society, which can include threats to one's private property, domestic pets, home, and personal identity. Wild animals can also invoke metaphorical threats that incite detestation, revilement, and repugnance in social life. The thought of bed bugs crawling on our mattress, or the sight of a raccoon scurrying from the trash is enough to evoke alarm in any unsuspecting person. Reactions to wild animal incursions, however, are often the result of the cultural and historical context.

Jerolmack (2008) observes that animals are often characterized as problems based on their "natural" characteristics (84). An animal's inclination to defecate in public places, draw blood, and

trespass in private space, are all examples of how a nonhuman animal's natural proclivities draw the ire of individuals, communities, and public memory (Jerolmack 2008:74-75). Some species of wild animals, for instance, are framed as problems when they transgress "imaginative geographies" (Jerolmack 2008:84; see also Philo and Wibert 2000), which are established by social, cultural, and historical conventions. Human/animal boundaries manifest in a number of ways. For instance, the expansion of human populations has generated an "uneasy cohabitation" between animals and humans (Jerolmack 2008:72). Wolves (Brownlow 2000; Scarce 2005; see also Lopez 1978), pigeons (Fine and Christofloredes 1991; Jerolmack 2008), river salmon (Scarce 2000) and cougars (Gullo et al. 1998), are only a few animals that have been framed as problems and have been eradicated, electrocuted, and eliminated from human habitats. Even the smallest of animals, insects, have historically been considered problem species (Baldwin et al. 2008), and are reviled by industrialists (Weise 2011), agriculturalists (Wetterer and Keularts 2008), and homeowners (Baldwin et. al 2008).

As another example of animal pests, let us consider insect incursions into the home. Homeowners often use cultural and historical knowledge of animals (Shapiro 1990) to frame the ordinary troubles of a resident person who is plagued by pests. Environmental narratives are used to talk about animal pests, as well as to "define the situation" of the home (Goffman 1974). Cultural codes used in everyday talk (Loseke 2007), such 'we are under attack,' further frame insects as problematic "matter out of place" (Douglas 1966). Thus, when an unexpected animal encounter occurs in a neighborhood, or in other places where the situation has been defined as "cultural" as opposed to "natural," the ambiguity of the situation "will be translated into *felt* moments of uncertainty and hesitancy (Goffman 1974:301, emphasis added).

In the next section, I review literature in cultural sociology to understand how animals become central figures in human storytelling, and how these stories are informed by modernist discourse surrounding the boundaries of wildness/order.

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SOME CULTURAL ROOTS OF ANIMAL STORIES

In his classic work, *The Interpretation of Cultures,* Clifford Geertz (1973) suggests that culture is the essence of social life. It is the web of meaning that humans weave to engage with the lived world. Here's Geertz:

> Believing, with Max Weber, that man (sic) is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning (p. 5).

How I interpret Geertz here is that social life is inherently meaningful and should be understood through interpretative analysis. This is because the uniqueness of humans is our ability to continuously weave the symbolic networks in which we are embedded (Capra 1996:290). People self-consciously thread culture into a web of related symbols and meanings, thereby producing symbolic environments (Lamont and Molnar 2002), thought communities (Fleck 1981 [1935]; Manheim 2002 [1936]; Zerubavel 1997), or narrative traditions (Bruner 1991). In social life, culture takes on various forms, including collective representations (Durkheim and Mauss 1963 [1903]), discourses (Foucault 1980), frames (Goffman 1974; Benford and Snow 2000), narratives (Bruner 1991; Loseke 2007), and morality (Collins 2004). Culture is the stuff of our minds (Zerubavel 1991), yet culture also has material consequences (Friedland and Mohr 2004; Alexander et al. 2012). Furthermore, from culture, people construct hierarchies and social divisions, but difference is not always inherent in any one person, animal, or thing. Power (Alexander 2012), status discrimination (Lamont 1992), and punishment (Smith 2008), emerge from meaningful relations between people and animals, and people and themselves.

Historically, sociologists have assumed that people act without "full understanding" because of social structures that are 'larger' and more 'powerful' than mere individual human beings" (Alexander 2003:4). Yet, people engage with others and nonhuman others, in a mindful and intentional manner. They are not blindly coerced by social structures. We act when it is meaningful for us to do

so, whether we are aware of the meanings or not. In this way, social life arises within a mass of meaningful interactions between people, animals, plants, and other non-living things. In other words, it is through culture that society is sorted into meaningful patterns that guide us in understanding what is important, what is to be averted, and what is to be ignored and desired.

If social life is meaningful, then it is also poetic. Humans are storytelling animals (Gottschall 2012), and write their own stories, performing them in an ongoing social drama (Turner 1974). Whether the genre is tragic or romantic (Jacobs 1996), stories give meaning to our lives, and enable us to organize and actualize our experience. They help us to divide the world and make sense of things. We categorize reality through our social and cultural stories. This is how we know the world, and how we engage with others.

Yet, human storytelling has not developed in isolation. It has evolved in relationship with animals and the natural world. Animals are the "ecological doorway to symbolic thought" (Shepard 1996:15), and for millennia, and across cultures, humans have imagined "themselves through animal others" (Gross 2012:5). Animals have occupied our intellectual curiosity from primitive people to the present. "(T)he symbolic use of animal forms as narrative," for instance, dates back to the earliest known record of humanity's use of symbols (Shepard 1996:91). Shepard (1996) notes that the use of animals in storytelling can be "witnessed in worldwide rock art whose painted shapes and etched outlines of large animals constitute a 30,000 year tradition" (91). In this way, Shepard (1996) suggests that animals have facilitated the development of human cognition by providing a mythical bridge that has helped people connect the physical and inner landscape (Shepard 1996). In other words, "animals are so deeply enmeshed in human self-conception that if they did not exist we would need to invent them" (Gross 2012:1).

The human imagination is rife with animals, and this includes contemporary social and cultural life. Anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss (1966) has famously commented that animals are "good to

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think with." And, as Donna Haraway (1991) suggests, people "polish an animal mirror to look for ourselves" (21). Animals, and the stories we tell about them, provide a "metasocial commentary" because the "narratives and structures" governing our relations help sort groups of people (and animals) into a normative order rooted in historical and cultural contexts (Jerolmack and Tavory 2014:73). Thus, animals are good to think with because they reveal clues to underlying social and cultural norms, which inform human cognition (Shepard 1996), identity (Irvine 2004), social problems (Jerolmack 2008), or even social change (Cherry 2010). Animals are also important actors in social life, and can play a significant role in the development of the social self and its narrative forms (Jerolmack and Tavory 2014). Wild animals, in particular, are helpful to think with because they often reveal underlying beliefs and feelings about the natural world. Wild animals also helpful to think with because they remind us of the ambiguous and ambivalent things that routinely pop up in social life.

In modern societies, people have very little engagement with wild animals. Wild animals are physically absent from our lives, and more and more species are becoming extinct at an alarming rate (Kolbert 2014). Instead, wild animals have been mostly replaced with abstract and symbolic forms. This remains evident today with the expansion of urbanization endemic to capitalistic societies. Lived engagement with wild animals has mostly been replaced with animal media that has expanded over the last few decades (Chris 2006). As animals and nature become more mediated, however, social life is increasingly enacted at a distance from the natural world. The mediated distance between humans and animals create spaces where animals go missing. "When animals are erased, what we are left with is signs...(and) (a)lthough the signs emerge at first with a connection to real animals, they can take on a life of their own in a simulated world" (Stibbe 2012:2). Thus, rather than directly engaging with wild animals, people increasingly experience them as mediated through nature shows, advertisements, cartoons, books, magazines, zoos, aquariums, and museums. As a result, wild animals are imagined in

stories rather than experienced, thus vanishing from the wild, and becoming "simulacra" (Baudrillard 1994), or "copies without an original" (Stibbe 2012:2).

But what happens when wild animals unexpectedly reappear in spaces humans have come to dominate? How are symbols and images used to make sense of these encounters? And how are stories employed to justify and guide social action? In this dissertation, I understand storytelling about animals as a symbolic practice used to manage the wildness of animals found in public spaces. I follow Wolch (1998) and see both humans and animals as responsible for the construction of social life. Animals exist in a world of their own, and also inform our storytelling and understanding of the world (Jerolmack and Tavory 2014). Yet, the dominant view of animals is that they are opposed to humans along an imagined continuum of wild/tame, or wildness/order (see Gross and Vallely 2012:2). DeMello (2012) notes that "one of the most important categorical distinctions found in the West is that between 'wild' and 'domesticated' animals, which itself mirrors the nature/culture distinction so prominent in many western societies" (64). These categories are informed by modernist notions of dominion and control over the natural world, and are thereby reinforced through cultural, institutional, organizational, and personal practices. These practices are forms of management and act to separate animals from particular social activities, as well as designate animals' to appropriate places in society. Whether it is law enforcement, wildlife control, or entertainment, the management of animals has discursive, and therefore narrative dimensions. But how is the meaning of wildness defined in contemporary society, and how do these social categories, and their cultural logics in civil discourse, inform the stories we tell about animals?

CULTURAL CATEGORIES OF WILDNESS AND ORDER

Classification is at the heart of social order: to classify means to imagine a world consisting of distinctive entities that can be categorized and segregated. Classification lends structure to the world, allows a manipulation of probabilities, and works to eliminate wild and unruly things (Giesen 2012).

It splits the world into two categories: those that answer to the given classification (those who are included in the social structure), and those who do not, and are therefore apart from society (Bauman 1991).

The dichotomy between wildness and order is an important tool for understanding the modernist approach to social organization. Wildness is that unpredictable element of nature, which cannot be ordered. So, when nature or wilderness arises in opposition to what is ordered (human communities, habitat, etc.) confusion threatens the whole system. The focus of this dissertation–the boundaries between wildness, and more specifically wild animals, and social order–is a reflection of the modern binary between wildness and order. The human/nature boundary is constantly threatened by forces outside of human control. But the dichotomy is merely two sides of the same coin. As Bauman (1991) says, "[d]ichotomy is an exercise in power and at the same time its disguise" (14).

Modernity has set itself an impossible task of ordering the natural world. In contemporary society, "wildness" comes to "mean distance and danger" with social order acting as its opposite" (Arluke and Sanders 2009:108). People come to learn what "constitutes a wild or tame animal as a hard and fast (social) fact whose meaning is given" (Arluke and Sanders 2009:108). The modernist impulse to categorize and separate has largely been informed by a desire for control and progress, yet it has time and again locked itself in a hopeless struggle to control the wild and aberrant things. The impulse to order betrays a Sisyphean restlessness, writes Bauman (1991), a constant fight with an uncertain present that has taken on the appearance of historical progress (11). Bauman (1991) argues that wildness[2] is not the oblivion of order, but rather, that wildness cannot exist without order: "Ambivalence is arguably the modern era's most genuine worry and concern, since unlike other

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[2] I use the term wildness here rather than Bauman's original term "chaos." Bauman uses the term similarly to how I define wildness, which is the unpredictable elements of humans and the natural world that create disorder.

enemies, defeated and enslaved, it grows in strength with every success of modern powers. It is its own failure that the tidying-up activity construes as ambivalence" (15). With every movement toward classification and separation, more problems arise.

Order is not conceptualized as the work of nature, but rather, "nature" is anything that has not been problematized in relation to human order (Bauman 1991). Thus, the boundaries that we construct when we order the world function to separate what we have categorized for control (in the human realm) from what we haven't categorized for control (in the natural realm). This leaves social order susceptible to a constant state of uncertainty over what is not under control. Wildness is, therefore, always an opposing possibility to order. Indeed, wildness seems to be a pressing concern of late, because social order does not seem to stand up to the massive pressures that loom on the horizon, including imminent environmental concerns, like pollution, global climate change, and mass species extinction.

Wildness, then, is a state of assumed disorder, but it is inextricably tied to the prevailing order. It is constituted by order because it is only perceived to occur when our established boundaries and means of classification are challenged. Moments of crisis or challenge to the existing order prompt us to reinforce, modify, or revolutionize the boundaries between what is considered wild, and what is considered tame. These ends are frequently achieved through a reorganization of the symbolic order, or simply through changing our stories.

Environmental problems, notably, have turned our attention to a potentially chaotic future, as we do not yet seem to be equipped with the tools to deal with the rapidly changing landscape. Some scientists say that such changes are indicative of a post-Holocene era[3], in which the irreversible reality

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[3] According to assessments done by the World Resources Institute, the World Bank, the United Nations Development Program, and the United Nations Environment Program, ecosystems are in decline virtually everywhere worldwide (Schor 2003; World Resources Institute et al. 2008), while seemingly indestructible meta-ecosystems such as the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans are

of shifting, dramatic, and violent global climate conditions will become a permanent feature of life on earth (Rockstrom 2009; McKibben 2010; Kolbert 2006). These dramatic shifts in the natural order have logically led to a parallel rise in dramatic stories about climate change, many of which bear the mark of the apocalyptic genre (Smith 2012). Thus, in the current moment, some find special energy in retreating to an authoritative order, while others push for a radical shift in the paradigm. It seems that as much as we try to impose order, the encroaching wilderness is always one step away, and just maintaining the status quo is no longer a viable option.

In the next section, I will further explore the cultural logic of the human/nature binary in civil discourse. This is important because it is this logic that informs how these categories become embedded in narrative, and how stories are then created and received in contemporary society.

A CULTURAL LOGIC OF CIVIL DISCOURSE

The cultural logic of human/nature boundaries is drawn from a larger universal socio-cultural process based on the binary structure of civil discourse (Alexander 2003, 2006; Smith 2005). Discourse in contemporary society is "a cultural filter and classification system that operate(s) as a dominant but necessary moral and cognitive frame" (Smith 2005:27). Discourse provides the internal structure for stories, as well as the common sense categories for understanding social phenomena. Thus, discourse guides what ideas and actions are acceptable in public life. It provides the guidelines for how citizenship is constructed. Smith (2005) notes that powerful cultural logics underlie the structuring power of public discourse as well as the global social system.

As a wide-reaching force, the cultural logic of civil discourse codes the moral constitution of

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suddenly in peril of acidification and contamination. Further, a decline in available global freshwater, radical changes in land use, and an increase in extreme weather events is threatening the world's most impoverished and socially vulnerable populations (Rockstrom 2009). Crutzen and Stoermer (2000) note that human activity on earth has become a geological and morphological force. They argue that humanity has entered into a new geological epoch, which they deem the "Anthropocene."

social institutions, and the actions, feelings, and interests of likely participants. Thus, how we think, feel, and act towards stories, characters, and things in public life is closely related to the dominant codes circulating in the global discourse. In these cultural and social environments, those who consider themselves worthy in a particular community will define themselves based upon the positive side of a symbolic set, and unworthy others will be lumped into an opposing negative side (Alexander 2006a:56). If public life is a moral community, then it is in the public sphere where we construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct moral boundaries.

The structure of contemporary civil discourse may be lumped into two major categories; the civil discourse of liberty and the civil discourse of repression (Alexander 2006a). The civil discourse of liberty delineates the sacred and valued, and the civil discourse of repression denotes the profane, evil, and disenfranchised (Smith 2005:27). This binary cultural logic of civil discourse establishes particular cultural codes, which guide interpretations and representations in public life, and structure disputes over policy, inclusion, and exclusion. Furthermore, such logics produce the cultural, moral, and ethical boundaries in public life, rendering some things acceptable and others intolerable. This cultural logic of discourse is pervasive and guides how regulative and communicative institutions are structured and received. In civic life, regulative and communicative institutions regulate our moral compass and provide a public forum where "crises are defined and problems are resolved" (Alexander and Smith 2003).

In short, these cultural logics create a shifting and contextual hierarchy based on likeness and difference. "Liberty" and "repression" have become distinctive symbolic codes (Alexander 2006a) used to categorize humans and nonhumans. These social categories are induced–via analogy, metaphor, narrative, etc.–from this internal cultural logic and can be understood as a preeminent social force of inclusion and exclusion. Thus, humans and animals are lumped into particular moral categories based on their alignment with the dominant codes (Alexander 2006a). With this system of

categorization, deviance is identified, labeled a crisis, and "treated."

Following Jerolmack (2008, 2013), I suggest that animals are included in this process, as they are active members of public, social communities. People ascribe animals' community membership based on their perceived characteristics, actions, and identities. As members of social and cultural communities, animals are represented and interpreted in public life as either lovable or deplorable based on their likeness to or difference from the codes of liberty and repression. Therefore, animals are not a part of nature by our definition, but categorized to fit the human order.

This allows certain animals into society, while simultaneously civilizing and subduing others (Jerolmack 2008). Classifications and cultural representations of animals segregate animals "in a series of abstract places," and these "animal spaces" are removed from time-space contexts and categorized into acceptable realms for "animal lives" (Philo and Wilbert 2000:6-7). When nonhuman animals transgress imagined geographies assumed by cultural lines of demarcation, they are often perceived of as "out of place" (Jerolmack 2008). In this regard, it may be helpful to consider the sociozoologic scale (Arluke and Sanders 1996), which outlines a continuum between inclusion and exclusion with companion animals on the inclusionary extreme, and wild predatory animals on the exclusionary extreme (Philo 1998:66). Thus, animals are thought to exist in particular spaces, with some species remaining proximate (pets, livestock), while others are more remote (wildlife).

I argue that the binary cultural logic of civil discourse has informed the human/nature divide by positioning what we consider "wildness" outside of the realm of orderly social life. People measure wild animals against the binary of liberty and repression, and this ultimately elucidates how people understand and perceive *themselves,* as certain animals enter the realm of human categorization and control. Therefore, "what at one time a group regards as wild can at another time be regarded as tame" (Arluke and Sanders 2009:108). By studying the following three case studies of animal stories, we can begin to understand how lines of membership and exclusion are drawn, and how these categories

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reflect the social order, and the anxiety engendered when these categories break down, and how people cope with the shifting conditions. In this regard, the study of animal stories serves as a window into understanding our unique historical and cultural moment (Mills 1959; Grossberg 2010). Animal stories, then, are not just about animals. Human actors, and social organizations and institutions, must write their stories into public discourse. Ultimately, the stories we tell about wild animals in times of uncertainty are reactions to own anxieties about the instability of social life.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

In this dissertation, I look at three case studies of popular animal stories written in news media, social media, and enacted *in* situ. Each case illustrates a moment in time/space where the unexpected movements or presence of wild animals causes the cultural categories of wildness/order to breakdown and destabilize. Each chapter of this dissertation is an independent research project containing respective research questions, and theoretical and methodological sections. Colloquially called the "sandwich" dissertation, the intention here is to present three standalone projects that resonate with an integrative research statement and question, and general theoretical observations presented in the latter introductory section. I will end with some concluding thoughts and a discussion about potential application for this research.

In the first chapter, I look at stories that emerged after Terry Thompson, an eccentric and estranged war veteran, released 54 exotic animals from his private 73-acre farm near Zanesville, Ohio. After the animals' release, police quickly descended onto the farm and killed 48 animals, and took 6 into custody. I argue that following the event, news media used "monstrous" stories to make sense of the events, and to justify the murder and incarceration of the wild animals. In this chapter, the occasion to story arose in response to the unexpected presence of large, mostly exotic, predatory animals in a rural neighborhood. The surface break here revealed a moral panic in the surrounding communities, and led to a series of monstrous stories in various news outlets.

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In the second chapter, I look at stories that followed the unexpected romp of a wild monkey through Tampa Bay, Florida. I argue that public storytelling shifts depending on the surprising activities of the so-called "Mystery Monkey of Tampa Bay." News media and social media accounts converge to construct shifting identities of the monkey that are used to make sense of his various transgressions of socially defined boundaries. At the outset of the story, the monkey is framed as a public nuisance, yet after years on the run, for some, his story becomes a heroic tale of overcoming authority and adversity. The story emerges from an ongoing public debate between supporters and wildlife authorities on the "right" way to interpret the monkey's identity and livelihood. In this chapter, the occasion to story arises at key turning points in the narrative, where the monkey breaks the social expectations projected on him by converging media interpretations.

Lastly, in the third chapter, I draw on ethnographic field notes to look at how animals are presented and talked about in a Manatee Viewing Center in central Florida. I examine how social interactions between visitors are organized around wildlife activity and a nature-themed space. I argue that people use these spaces as an occasion to story, telling stories, and talking about nature and animals. In this chapter, the occasion to story is dependent on many micro surface breaks, which give visitors the opportunity to "do family" together. In these moments, people relate with one another through discussing and making sense of animal behavior together. I also argue that people socially perform a collective appreciation of wild animals and nature, by drawing on cultural narratives about wildlife conservation and the sacredness of nature. At the Manatee Viewing Center, stories, interactions, and talk emerge when animals break or extend people's collective expectations of the animals', nature, or the social situation.

**CHAPTER TWO: THEY CAME FROM OHIO: ANIMALS, MONSTERS, AND THE
LOGIC OF NATURE/CULTURE BOUNDARIES**

"It's like Noah's Ark wrecking right here in Zanesville, Ohio."
Jack Hanna, TV personality and former director of the Columbus Zoo.

"Sometimes human places create inhuman monsters."
Stephen King, from The Shining

On October 18th, 2011, Terry Thompson, caretaker of Muskingum County Animal Farm, released 56 exotic animals[4] from captivity on his farm in Zanesville, Ohio. The Muskingum incident set off a panic in the surrounding communities, and led police on a hunt for the animals across the surrounding countryside. An all-night search led to the death of 48 animals and the incarceration of 6 others.[5] The Muskingum incident was the largest release of exotic animals in US history, and has since attracted international media attention, elicited concerns about animal rights, and engendered public debate regarding private animal farms and exotic pets.

In the public reaction and news reports following the incident, the story unfolded like a classic monster film narrative. Exotic predators were freed from captivity and set loose upon the landscape. Scattering in multiple directions, the predators stirred a panic in the community. Families retreated to

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[4] According to supplementary case reports by the Muskingum County Sheriff's office, the exotic animal count was as follows: 3 Grizzly Bears, 6 Black Bears, 1 Baboon, 9 Lions, 3 Mountain Lions, 18 Tigers, 2 Wolves, 8 Lionesses, 1 Black Leopard, 1 Spotted Leopard, 1 Leopard, 3 Celebes Macaque Monkeys.
[5] A gray wolf was later found dead, and a monkey allegedly infected with herpes was never found. Police later claimed that a lion ate the monkey.

their homes, schools were closed, and parents were told to protect their children. Deputies armed with automatic weapons and night vision glasses loaded into trucks and rode along evacuated roads under a storm laden, evening sky. The deputies began hunting the animals one by one shooting them in the chest, in the head, and in the back. Sometimes surprised by a charging bear, or lioness, the deputies unloaded hundreds of rounds throughout the night. Finally, after hours of uncertainty and chaos, a scene of carnage emerged. There were bodies of slain animals laid throughout the countryside, and citizens were left shaken and bemused.

Following the incident, journalists, media, and citizens flocked from around the world to the small town. Filmmakers from London and journalists from as far away as Australia wanted to retell the story. Interpretations of the incident also emerged on the Internet as bloggers and social media users narrated their interest in the story. Though some experts justified the killing of the animals, others condemned the killing. The Humane Society and PETA, for instance, criticized the reaction, and called for legislators to reform state law on exotic animals, while citizens and animal rights advocates from around the world condemned the killings.

The Muskingum incident is a unique interaction with wildlife, nature, culture, and human communities. It arose from an unexpected "surface break" of social expectations about where exotic animals belong, how they should be treated in captivity, and how they are controlled in a crisis situation. The incident also portrays how people conceptualize animals on a scale alternating between exclusion and inclusion (Philo 1998:51). It was an "occasion to story" scripted by multiple authors from around the world, which draws from cultural narratives circulating in the larger global discourse (Swidler 2001). The story elicits a localized sense of place informed by universal cultural categories, which are situated in global "discourse rather than individual thought or emotion" (Dove and Carpernter 2008:53). Stories following the Muskingum incident draw from western cultural narratives on the dichotomy of nature and culture, and human and nonhuman, and thus appeal to a global

audience.[6] The nature-culture dichotomy, however, degrades relations between species, perpetuates animal subjugation, and limits possible paths for human and nonhuman interaction.

How does the cultural logic of symbolic nature/culture boundaries define and limit the types of stories that can be told about nature and animals? And how do universal categories of nature/culture lead to human/nature conflict, discrimination, and segregation? In this chapter, I argue that interpretations of the Muskingum incident reflect a cultural anxiety about animals–and nature–who are deemed "out of place" in socially defined human worlds (Jerolmack 2008). More specifically, I argue that news media interpretations portray the incident as a struggle between nature and culture, by situating the animal stories in cultural myths about monsters, and the monstrous (Stymeist 2009). These monstrous stories are written to make sense of a fairly unexpected set of conditions between humans and animals, and also cope with the anxiety engendered by the release and killing of these animals. I conclude that these interpretations limit the types of stories that may be told about animals and nature, and relegate the "natural" to the role of villain.

NARRATIVE, ANIMALS, AND THE LOGIC OF NATURE/CULTURE

In a postmodern world marked by difference (Calhoun 1994), reality and fantasy blur into narrative, where narrative becomes a primary force in sense making (Loseke 2011:252). Stories act as circulating images, or cognitive frames (Zerubavel 1997), and help people make sense of shifting, complex social worlds. These typifications are apparent as cultural objects, such as symbols or stories (Griswold 2008). Stories categorize and classify phenomena (Ellen 1993), shape perception and guide behavior (Spillman 2002), act as interactive resources (Duneier 1999), imbue social practice with cultural meaning (Macnaghten and Urry 2000), are symbolic resources (Lamont and Molnar 2002), and are frames for individual and collective action (Benford and Snow 2000).

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[6] The story was reported in multiple media outlets around the world, including media outlets in Australia, Europe, and the United States, South Korea, and India.

"Stories have an organizational logic" (O'Brien 2011:338). They are culture in action (Swidler 2001). They guide social action, and act as schematic mechanisms that simplify cognition (DiMaggio 1997). Storytelling allows people to make sense of events over time (Gergen 2009:175), transcend the local (Fine 2010), and relate to built, ecological, and social environments (Yanow 1998). Stories are both internal and external phenomena, however. They are simultaneously acting on, and produced by social actors. Stories are constructed from meaning, yet meaning is collected from collective representations (Alexander 2003), and socially circulating codes and metaphors (Loseke 2009).

As storytellers, people construct the world from socially shared conditions (Plummer 1995). Social action is the result of local, embedded practices (Fine 2010), while meaning is derived from a shared cultural and ideological toolkit (Swidler 1986). Individuals select meanings from a "cultural menu" (Schudson 1989:155), or repetoire (Swidler 2001), which resonate in their lives. Meaning is also negotiated in interaction, yet is seldom constructed anew. Interaction emerges from local and group based values (Fine 2010:357), a shared past, and relies on emotional and symbolic codes (Loseke 2009) from which people produce various social performances (Alexander 2006b). Stories, then, are cultural objects (Alexander 2003) that are socially classified (Zerubavel 1996), and allow for possible lives (Bruner 1987). As Alexander (2003) notes, stories allow us to transcend the trivialities of everyday life, simplify communication, experience emotion, and divide the sacred from the profane (3-4). Thus, stories moralize social life and provide varying characters, plots, and settings from multiple lives, objects, and environments.

The content of stories is constrained by cultural norms and conventions. Stories are compiled using cultural codes that define what audiences may know of social life (Loseke 2009). Stories are also strategic. Storytellers tell stories to achieve a goal, or advance an interest (Ewick and Sibley 1995:207). In this regard, stories often invoke cultural symbols and strategies, ideological structures, and hegemonic assumptions (Ewick and Sibley 1995). The structure and content of stories reproduce

existing ideologies and hegemonic relationships of power and inequality, and in turn shape social lives and conduct (Ewick and Sibley 1995:211-212). Stories reify cultural categories, and thus allow for certain meanings to be communicated and particular lives to unfold.

Notions of the natural world are often negotiated in stories. They are produced and reproduced through different social meanings (Fine 1998), interactions (Weigert 2008), practices (Macnaghten and Urry 2001), and performances (Szerszynski et al. 2003). Nature emerges from historical and cultural epochs that design and color available realities (Cronon 1995). For instance, in Paleolithic societies, people lived nomadic lifestyles. Their stories about nature–sometimes in the form rock art–depicted animals and natural phenomena as otherworldly and mysterious. With the transformation to Neolithic societies, people were more sedentary than their forbearers and thus developed complex social organization. This led to a shift in environmental awareness, whereby nature stories became more inclusive of social phenomena. In these conditions, people were no longer tender carnivores in search of sacred game, nor were they shamans obsessing over sacred animal totems (Oelschlaeger 1991). Rather, shamans became priests, and totems were transformed into sacred animal relics, which in ancient Egyptian and Sumerian culture, came to represent fecundity, productivity, the fertility of women, and the unpredictable benevolence of the natural world.

The assumption in contemporary society, however, is that there is no singular nature. Rather there are multiple natures, whose contested spaces align with various definitions, subjectivities, and stories. People engage with nature by employing cultural symbols and stories that imbue their lives with meaning (Fine 1998; Hannigan 2006). This is similar to the process of lumping and splitting of social life (Zerubavel 1996). Natural phenomena are cast from various mental categories (Zerubavel 1996), and the division of reality (Zerubavel 1991), i.e., nature/culture, human/animal, safe/dangerous, etc. Natural creatures, or objects, then, may become characters and settings for storytelling, or may act as stories themselves. The authenticity of nature stories is unimportant,

however. Rather what is important is the discursive and textual persuasion of the stories. Who believes the stories? And what do the stories imply about nature, animals, culture, and social relations?

Though some observers argue that animals are social actors (Arluke and Sanders 1996; Sanders 1999), and subjective others (Alger and Alger 2003; Irvine 2004b), they may also be understood as symbolic representatives of nature, and natural processes. Animals become meaningful to humans through cultural construction and classification (Baker 2000), and people draw from cultural meanings to make sense of animals (Jerolmack 2007). Once configured as cultural objects, animals are sometimes situated opposed to human interests. As Oelschlaeger notes (1991), modernity maintains a binary logic that separates nature and culture (see also Latour 1993), rendering hegemonic symbolic boundaries between the human and nonhuman (Cherry 2010). Further, nature/culture boundary work is one of the hallmarks of modernity (Inglis and Bone 2006; Jerolmack 2008), where cultural lines of demarcation are maintained in various ways.

Over the centuries, animals have been omnipresent in the western cultural landscape (Wolch and Emel 1998), yet the loss of everyday encounters with wild animals has produced a loss of tolerance for them (Jerolmack 2008:88). Furthermore, the over saturation of animal imagery in popular media has distorted the potential for thinking about, and with, animals (Thomson 2007; Chris 2006). Ideas, meanings, and stories of animals have been embedded in culture as symbolic codes. Unpacking these codes requires an understanding of how animals sometimes violate, transgress, and blur nature-culture categories.

The human/animal borderlands are rife with symbolic meanings and storied interest (Bulbeck 2005), and "animals may fuse, refuse, and confuse nature-culture categories and ontologies" (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010:553). Such dichotomies of nature and culture, animal and human "promote mutually exclusive spaces for humans and most animals" (Wolch et al. 2003:195). Animals have been defined categorized, interpreted, praised, criticized, hated, and loved in a diversity of ways that have

commonly had spatial implications (Philo 1998:66). Animals, then, may sometimes temporarily redefine nature by creating alternative spaces "reflective of their own 'beastly' ways, ends, doings, joys and sufferings" (Philo and Wilbert 2000:14).

Modernity follows a binary cultural logic of nature and culture (Alexander and Smith 1993; Chapter 1), which allows certain animals into society, while simultaneously civilizing and subduing others (Jerolmack 2008). It may be helpful to consider a continuum between inclusion and exclusion with companion animals on the inclusionary extreme and wild animals on the exclusionary extreme (Philo 1998:66). In this way, animals are thought to exist in particular spaces, with some species remaining proximate (pets, livestock), while others more remote (wildlife). The classification of animals segregates them "in(to) a series of abstract places," and these "animal spaces" create acceptable realms for *animal lives* (Philo and Wilbert 2000:6-7). When nonhuman animals transgress imagined geographies assumed by cultural lines of demarcation, they are often perceived of as 'out of place' (Jerolmack 2008). For instance, Brownlow (2000) traces the evolution of landscape meanings and the "place of wolves" in the Adirondacks to understand how the wolf experienced a "loss of place" in the northeastern United States (141-143). He shows how "imaginative repertoires" are used to draw lines around both people and wolves, thus creating historical and cultural significant spaces deemed acceptable or 'out of place' (Brownlow 2000:142-143).

NARRATIVE AS METHOD

Herda-Rapp and Goedeke (2005) argue that adopting qualitative methodology in the study of wildlife allows researchers to understand the nuanced, multidimensional, and cultural dimensions of human-wildlife conflict (see also Jerolmack 2008). Such methodological practices help to "identify the critical issues that create conflict and, hopefully, find additional, innovative ways to manage these disagreements" (Herda-Rapp and Goedeke 2005:11). Cultural geographers have further noted the importance of recognizing nature as a text composed of signs and symbols whose reading represents

and reproduces knowledge claims and discourses socially inscribed within them (Wolch, et al. 2003:194). As Wolch et al. (2003) note, textual claims about nature make narrative space for animal others possible, and reveal notions of an external nature where animals might be part, or where they might act (194). Understanding nature means embracing metaphor (Fine 1998:6), and metaphorical and cultural resources–such as stories–should be employed to conceptualize animals and nature. The Muskingum incident is useful for exploring cultural stories of animals and nature, because animals often act as symbolic representations of the nature-culture dichotomy.

News media reflect how people and culture conceptualize and story animals and nature (Jerolmack 2008). Studying local newsprint media is one site to explore how cultural stories of animals emerge from local communities (Loseke 2011), yet resonate with larger international audiences. Fine and Christoforides (1991) use this method to explore how sparrows are temporally and spatially constructed as various immigrant identities, while Jerolmack (2008) uses the method to explore how cultural understandings of nature/culture boundaries are used to construct pigeons as social problems in urban spaces.

I am interested in how wildlife and nature are constructed in the public sphere. To explore these interests, I have chosen to analyze socially circulating stories to understand the cultural meaning of the Muskingum incident. As Loseke (2011) notes, navigating a world of strangers requires a set of expectations (254). These expectations are contained in stories and reveal themselves in predictable characters and plots. However, contemporary life is heterogeneous and audiences interpret characters differently. Some characters have "narrative fidelity" (Benford and Snow 2000) in local contexts, while others resonate more widely in the public sphere.

The expectations surrounding the animals of Muskingum Farm were complex, and rapidly changed during the events that led to their death. The animals were treated as outdoor, private zoo animals. They were not quite pets, yet not left to the wild either. Large exotic animals–such as lions,

tigers, bears, and wolves–were kept in very small cages and fed a subsistence diet. The animals suddenly found themselves loose in the rural landscape, after their caretaker Terry Thompson cut their cages with a boltcutter, and committed suicide on the spot. When locals learned of the escaped animals, the public was set into a panic, and roads and schools were closed. Authorities quickly descended on the area and killed 48 of the 54 animals. The unexpected freedom of the animals', led to a dramatic shift in their status, which quickly transformed from anonymous to unpredictable and dangerous.

To understand the nuances of the story, I have chosen to analyze two news reports from local, Ohio newspapers. Many stories are located in public realms (Loseke 2011:255), and may be found in public documents, organizational literature, and newsprint media. Though hundreds of stories of the incident are available,[7] I chose two that were written 2 weeks following the event (i.e., Jarman 2011 and Sparling 2011).[8] These stories are interpretations of police reports released by Muskingum County Sheriff's Office on November 4th, 2011. The police reports were narrative accounts by Sheriff deputies on their experiences on the night of October, 18th 2011.[9] Police are important authors because they were responsible for patrolling and maintaining the boundaries of human/animal encounters, and

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[7] Out of the 382 international newspaper reports on the incident, I relied on a subsample of 87 newspaper reports. The subsample was selected by narrowing the search to articles only from the *Columbus Dispatch*, and the *Zanesville Times Recorder*, yet much of the international content was also reviewed. I also reviewed general case reports filed by the Muskingum County Sheriff Office on October 18th, 2011, and October 19th, 2011. These reports provided narrative accounts from the deputies who responded to the call of loose, exotic animals on the Muskingum County Animal Farm.

[7] I am aware that the selection of these stories is not random. However, randomness is not the intention. Instead, I have carefully selected data to suit the needs of this study.

[8] In the analysis of stories, heterogeneity is most important, and these particular stories provide a complex lens for generalizing to larger universal themes. *How are these stories heterogeneous and why is that type of heterogeneity productive?*

[9] Deputy stories allow for a first-hand account of the incident. The interpretations, meanings, and emotions are more evident in these accounts. However, using deputy stories limits what stories are told. Deputies are acting on behalf of the county, and their interpretations and accounts are limited by their professional responsibilities.

responsible for upholding the ethical and moral boundaries of the community. The police reports were written in order to document and justify their actions–i.e., killing the animals. The news stories were written by the *Zanesville Times Recorder*, and the *Columbus Dispatch*–two local newspapers, and provide a lens into how news media interpret and understand the event, the animals, and public reaction following the event.

I reviewed the data similarly to how an ethnographer reviews field notes (Jerolmack 2008). I searched for "odd connections" between cultural representations and the news stories rather than making "seamless generalizations" (Tsing 2005:xi). I also employed intuitive and creative approaches to data analysis. Like Charmaz (2006), I approached data analysis like play (Charmaz 2006). There was a process of situating the data in a social context, a close reading, loose coding, searching for emergent themes, and then selective coding. The stories I selected contain particular types of plots and characters that resonate with the genre of the monstrous. To outline data, I selected quotes that reflect the dominant themes found in analysis. Also, while I was selecting quotes, I was mindful of the larger body of data. This allowed me to analyze and write similar to how an ethnographer chooses which notes to include in their narrative (Jerolmack 2008).

THE MONSTERS OF MUSKINGUM FARM

It reads like a made-for-TV movie script. In a small city in southern Ohio, a cadre of armed officers set forth in trucks into the night. They arrive at a fenced compound. It is dark and foreboding, and set back from the road in the rural landscape. The officers approach with hesitancy and concern, aware there are wild beasts loose in the area. Anxiety sits heavy in the air. Earlier in the day, an eccentric hermit living in the compound bathed his body in blood and shot himself in the head. Before his gruesome suicide, he released dozens of vicious, yet weak and malnourished, predators, who have long been his property. The animals are now scattered throughout the area, with many encircling the compound. They are man-eaters, assumed to lack a basis of morality, rationality, and affection. Alien

to the landscape, the creatures lie in wait along a fine line between wild and captive, and nature and culture. Whatever happens, the beasts could not be allowed to remain loose, potentially invading the surrounding countryside and neighborhoods. Night was falling and these animals were like "a bomb ready to go off at any time" (Sparling 2011b).

Narrative interpretations following the animal release at Muskingum farm were authored by local newspapers, which used metaphors of monster stories to make sense of the incident. As Baker (2001) suggests these metaphorical speculations take us to the realm of animal stories. In such stories, the animal is given human characteristics and anthropomorphic imagery. Monster stories portray natural creatures as a threat that humans must defend against and distance themselves from (Alaimo 2001:291). Monster stories also explore boundary work by disassociating humans from creatures, and distinguishing nature from culture (Alaimo 2001:280). Similar to teratological narratives of monsters (Palencia-Roth 1996), the animals of Muskingum farm defied easy categorization and lied at the edge of culture's "conceptual field where alien others (are) dealt with" (Arnold 1996:9). Wildlife, in particular, are not clearly classifiable. They are borderline animals who are often the object of hatred "creating excitement, thoughtful deliberation, and a rich mine of metaphorical ore" (Shepard 1996:60). Living at the borderlands of civilization (wilderness/city, home/outdoors), wildlife emerge from the mystery and danger of the natural world. In the following passage, the animals of Muskingum farm are portrayed as creatures of the borderlands. Their presence defies categorization, and threatens the order of civil life.

> Sgt. Steve Blake, one of the first officers to respond to calls of wild animals on the loose at 270 Kopchak Rd., said that when he got to the property just after 5 p.m., he immediately noticed several animals-including a black bear and at least two African lions-pacing the property's fence line. (Jarman 2011)

In a similar passage in the *Zanesville Times Recorder*, animals defied not only physical boundaries, like the property's fenceline, but also cultural and temporal boundaries.

'As we made our way up the driveway I could already see that some animals had made it

toward the fence line and had to be put down,' Lawhorne wrote. Realizing that there was approximate one hour of daylight left and that tranquilizers were not on hand and were not a possibility at this time, the threat of these exotic animals getting out of Terry Thompson's fence line was imminent. (Sparling 2011a)

Boundaries play a central role in both passages. People tend to be frightened of things lacking clear lines of definition, and are psychologically restless at times of ambiguity (Zerubavel 1991). Monster narratives play on these ambiguities and are often met with fear and anxiety by audiences. In the latter passages, the authors illustrate how boundaries between human spaces and animal spaces are managed and maintained, yet transgressed and blurred. By running loose on the farm, and threatening to transgress physical and cultural lines of demarcation, the animals "forge their own spaces, countering the proper places stipulated for them by humans, thus creating their own 'beastly places' reflective of their own 'beastly ways'" (Philo and Wibert 2000:14). In the latter passage, the animals pace the fence line, and figuratively threaten to cross spatio-cultural boundaries. As a result, "the animals had to be put down" (Sparling 2011a). As Alaimo (2001) notes, humans erect literal and imagined boundaries when they encounter dangerous creatures. This is akin to monster stories, which "dramatize the impossibility of demarcating protected places and thus serve as potent counterpoints to prevalent kill-the-beast plots, vertical visions, and transcendent conclusions" (Alaimo 2001:289).

In the latter news excerpt, Sparling (2011a) also emphasizes temporal boundaries by referring to the "approximate one hour of daylight left." Authorities reported concern about the animals remaining loose after dark. Police and township leaders could not leave anything to chance. Finding them after dark would prove difficult, and could pose increased danger for the small town. Authorities were, therefore, adamant about eliminating the possibility of an all-night hunt, and the animals had to be killed before nightfall. The precarious conflict between the animals and police mirrored monster folklore. The imagery of monsters at twilight is omnipresent in folklore, e.g., vampires from Western lore, giant serpents from the Far East. Monsters often become stronger after dark, gaining increased power and stealth. As Arnold (1996) notes, the power of the monster can do great evil and "must

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therefore be incorporated within the culture and somehow restricted to a certain area of activity that the culture can accommodate" (10). In this case, police attempted to limit the animals to the farm compound, and control them through organized violence.

The liminality and ambiguity of the conflict also proved a useful tool for the monster metaphor. Superstitions surround twilight because it blurs the rigid categories of night and day (Zerubavel 1991). People fear such "twilight persons," "ambiguous creatures," or "fence riders" because they straddle the boundaries between wilderness and civilization, and threaten to blur supposed "insular mental entities" (Zerubavel 1991:34-36). Animals in ambiguous spaces are codes for different parts of human experience. They are images of duality and multiplicity, and life and death (Shepard 1978:112). Monsters, too, are shrouded in mystery (Evans 1992:464), and challenge the ambiguities and mysteries of nature. They represent threatening others that wish to challenge and take away the order and sanctity of everyday life (Evans 1992).

Boundary transgression is described in passages where the animals of Muskingum farm are accused as crossing and crashing through boundaries, and threatening the lives of deputies:

> Deputy Wade Kanavel had been on Terry Thompson's property only a few minutes when he saw a large lion burst through a fence, making a beeline toward Kopchak Road. "Without hesitation I then started firing rounds into the animal to keep it from attacking and getting away from my location." The deputy then walked two houses down from Thompson's property, where he stumbled upon a mountain lion "that began hissing and showing his teeth at me." Kanavel shot the mountain lion as well, and then another lion that was racing toward a pen full of horses. (Sparling 2011a)

In the latter passage, a lion bursts through a fence, and threatens to cross into the road. Soon after, another lion was shot when he approached a pen of horses. These actions signal how animobility (Michael 2004) may be "visibly at odds with human trajectories" and interests (Jerolmack 2008:89). The next passage, however, suggests that deputies were attacked while they were attempting to maintain order, and reestablish human spaces.

> Over the course of the next few minutes, deputies shot and killed an African lion and a tiger that charged them in separate incidents as they were trying to secure the cages. The deputies

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protecting the detectives were charged by a black bear before it, too, was killed. (Jarman 2011)

In both latter passages, animals are described as intentionally bursting through boundaries, and charging deputies. The imagery of these explicit attacks is reminiscent of monster stories wherein monsters crash through human habitations, and overcome built structures (Stymeist 2009). Monsters are conceptualized as unpredictable and volatile. Films like King Kong and Godzilla portray giant animals invading and destroying human habitations. These monsters trudge through cities and kill innocent people, while demolishing or dominating human-made, built structures. As Stymeist (2009) notes monsters "blur established categories of existence (and) break through boundaries to impose themselves in inappropriate times and contexts" (403). In this way, monster stories present a threat to the structure and order of contemporary life, where "the monster's anger is directed toward civilization itself" (402).

Monster stories "insist on the solid divisions between nature and culture" (Alaimo 2002:280). Stymeist (2009) proposes that monsters collectively represent a threat to human society, and their elimination suggests the supremacy of technology and civilization over nature and animal. The use of modern machines and weapons in the elimination of monsters also maintains nature/culture boundaries by villainizing nature. In contemporary monster stories, death by gunfire is a common end for the monster (Beal 1999). Consider the following passages where both technology and weaponry are used to ward off animal attacks, and to eliminate animal threats:

> Several of the sheriff's special-response team members had arrived, and (Sherriff) Lutz ordered (Officer) Blake to drive one of the deputies' personal vehicles, a pickup truck, back onto the property with officers armed with assault rifles in the bed. They were ordered to try to rescue Thompson, if he was still alive, and to shoot any animals that were in danger of escaping the property. (Jarman 2011)

> Deputy Adam Swope had just unloaded several rounds into a tiger when he heard officers yelling that a bear was headed his way. Swope heard crashing noises coming from a fenced-in area, then he saw a huge brown bear about 50 feet away running toward him. 'I feared that the bear was charging in my direction. At that time I did deliver numerous rounds at this bear before it went down approximately 20 feet from where I was standing.' (Sparling 2011a)

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The latter passages juxtapose modern technology with the "bodily natures" of animal lives (Alaimo 2010). The flesh of large cats, bears, and wolves are met repeatedly with refined machines, such as armored weapons and vehicles. This comparison further validates the rigid boundaries between nature and culture because it emphasizes the power that human technology has to rationalize, marginalize, and subjugate animals and natural phenomena (Oelschaeger 1991). The underlying narrative in these passages also suggests a hostile arrangement between nature and culture, where culture must be saved from nature (Dove and Carpenter 2008). This cultural distinction between nature and culture "prepares the path for a purging organizational response, for trials of transgressors, for expulsion, and for incarceration" (Alexander 2003:117). As Gilmore (2003) notes, monsters are sources for identification and mixed emotions, and often serve as a sources of the expiation of aggression (4). The latter passages situate human and animal lives in opposition, and in turn present nature and culture as "discrete, totalizing antimonies, (where) the realm of culture, although threatened by nature, is prioritized and given the final victory" (2009:401).

CONCLUSION

In "Modernity at Large," Appadurai (1996) suggests that the local is critical ground for studying ideological, ecological, and cultural global processes (33-36). Local stories often reflect the collective imagination, play out in transnational media representations, and have a unique role in everyday life. Drawing from myth, ritual, and situated social action, stories enter "the logic of ordinary life" where they are "exemplified in the mutual contextualizing of motion and mediation" (Appadurai 1996:5). Stories, however, also produce particular moral economies, which fuel social action and form distinct divisions (Appadurai 1996:5-7).

The Muskingum incident was a local conflict between human and nonhumans, yet the story had global resonance because it reflected socially circulating cultural narratives about the dichotomy of nature/culture. The Muskingum incident was enacted in the public sphere by situated social actors,

and dramatized by international media outlets. Stories of the event were informed by the western cultural logic of nature and culture, where culture is ordered and predictable and nature is hysterical and uncertain (Alexander 2003). The animal release led to ensuing moral panic in the community (Cohen 2002), which uncovered a weakness of in-group boundaries and drew a distinct line between good and evil (Alexander 2003:116-117). The ensuing chaos produced by the event was eventually ordered through the animals' elimination, incarceration, and management (Nash 2001).

But who is to blame for the tragedy? Is it exaggerated cultural imagery? The deputies? The community? Terry Thompson, the estranged and suicidal caretaker? There is no singular cause to this tragedy, yet "monstrous" stories of animals do have lived consequences. Animal lives are interpreted through situated action (Sanders 2003), but are also written into cultural texts (Baker 2001). Unraveling the cultural logic of animal stories helps reveal the "symbolically mediated communicative activity" of public discourse, which drives public deliberation on moral standards, discrimination, and prejudice (Smith 2006:7-8).

The release and slaughter of the Muskingum Farm animals was a surface break of normative expectations of exotic animals who through their unexpected release became wild animals. As wild animals "out of place" in this small, rural town, the animals were swiftly depicted as monstrous. Monsters are logical projections of Otherness, and the monstrous depiction of these animals was a further reflection of their owner Terry Thompson. Following the event, news media investigated and also portrayed Thompson's personal biography as monstrous. Living as an outcast in his dilapidated farm, Thompson was an ex-Vietnam War on anti-depressants, and reviled by his ex-wife. He was a strange individual whose eccentric traits, along with his neglected animals, were depicted as monstrous by news media to help justify the massacre.

Monstrous traits are often exaggerated or projected onto those who are enemies of the norm. For instance, Palencia-Roth (1996) shows how Spanish Conquistadors often portrayed Native

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Americans as monstrous. Furthermore, "(w)hen Native Americans turned out not to have monstrous or inhuman features, monstrous or inhuman behavior was attributed to them by Europeans, truthfully or not, in order to redefine their nature, and…justify European actions in the Americas" (24). In this way, the Muskingum incident was an occasion to story that portrayed animals as monsters, and therefore criminals, as a way to cope with the mass killing of animals by public authorities. It was an overzealous reaction to the release of exotic animals in a small town, therefore leading various types interpretive work needed to understand the unexpected and dramatic conditions.

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how monster stories exploit nature/culture boundaries by distancing humans from animals (Alaimo 2001:280). The hyperbolic makeup of monster stories offer insights into how arguments, images, and rhetoric of animals are conceptualized (Alaimo 2001:279-280). Furthermore, monster stories shape responses to environmental issues, and may also vilify nature and animals by drawing rigid distinctions between nature and culture (Stymeist 2009). I have also suggested that multiple authors scripted the Muskingum incident as a conflict between the unruly vagrancies of animal lives, and the civility of public life. The stories following the Muskingum incident had global resonance because they reflected the universal category of nature/culture in Western thought, which holds multiple meanings for and about people, animals, and nature (Carey 2007). Furthermore, the stories of the Muskingum incident exploit symbolic boundaries traced around animal identities (Cherry 2010), wherein animals exist along a continuum of wild and tame. Animal lives are defined by culturally demarcated spaces, and related interactions with human communities. Stories of the Muskingum incident reveal how certain types of wild animals "out of place" are imagined and controlled in contemporary social life. When animals physically, and metaphorically, defy culturally demarcated boundaries they blur categorical understandings of nature and culture, and challenge our shared sense of reality.

CHAPTER THREE: FROM WILD TO TAME, AND BACK AGAIN; THE MYSTERY MONKEY AND THE MAKING OF AN AMERICAN LEGEND

"Whatever is sacred,
Whatever is to remain sacred,
Must be clothed in mystery."
Stephane Mallarme

"Mystery is a form of power."
Linda Hogan

After a year on the lam, moving through three different counties (Pinellas, Pasco, and Hillsborough), romps in Hudson, Temple Terrace, Tampa, Town and Country, Clearwater, Gulfport, and St. Petersburg, and various appearances in newspapers across Florida, the Mystery Monkey of Tampa Bay (MMTB), was running wild in a busy neighborhood in St. Petersburg.

A local had spotted the monkey sometime in the afternoon, and wildlife workers soon arrived in the area. By early March 2010, curiosity about the monkey began to elevate, and he was trailed by a large pack of spectators, paparazzi, wildlife control, firefighters, police officers, and media helicopters (Stanley 2010b).

The monkey passed through a bustling intersection, hid close to a nearby building, then took cover in a small clump of trees, near a fire station (Stanley 2010b). The gaggle of authorities chasing the monkey thought they had him cornered. That's when the first shot was fired.

The monkey was shot once with a tranquilizer dart. But he quickly removed the dart and kept moving. A few minutes later, he was shot again, but removed the dart and *still* kept running. He sat unmoved, steady, and stoic, atop the Lakewood United Church of Christ. He was hit with the first

dart while sitting on this church. Yet, after the dart struck, no movement was seen from the animal. He was like a statue sitting atop this human testament to faith.

The monkey would soon take off again, escaping deeper into the suburban wilderness. "At one point the monkey was in the middle of the street," said a crossing guard interviewed by the *Tampa Bay Times* (Stanley 2009). He ran up a tree, darted into nearby woods, and was once again followed by authorities, holding their guns and eyes to the sky. "Go, monkey, Go!" online fans raved, quickly speculating on his next move. Could this monkey be stopped? Was he indestructible? Not quite, as we will see.

INTRODUCTION

"It seems to me that it is possible to make fiction work inside of truth."
Michel Foucault

How did a monkey come to live amongst the suburban landscape of Tampa Bay? And how did media and audience interpretations of his activities inspire transformations in his public identity over time? In the following chapter, I recollect the story of one feral Rhesus Macaque monkey who's adventure through Tampa Bay inspired extensive reporting in both social media and traditional news media from 2009-2015. In retelling his story, I intermittently pause for analysis, providing sociological clues for how we might interpret and understand "the social experience" of this curious monkey (Jerolmack 2013).

When I first tuned into the monkey's story in 2012, he'd already been captured, and was being passed around from one housing unit to the next. Since following him *in situ* would be impossible, I decided to follow him online. Like Jerolmack's (2013) method of "following the pigeon" (19), I was following the monkey through various social contexts, albeit online. As Appadurai (1986:5) notes "we have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories…it is things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context" (see also Jerolmack 2013).

From 2009-2015, local, national, and international media outlets had reported hundreds of stories about the monkey, and fans on social media made comments and discussed his daily life. Over time I began to see that a coherent story was emerging from this unique confluence of narratives. In this hybrid media space, "the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact(ed) in unpredictable ways" (Jenkins 2008:2). This media convergence did not happen in the media machines, but rather was created in the minds of participants, through interaction with one another (Jenkins 2008:3). The "collective intelligence" of this convergent storytelling process could be seen "as an alternative source of media power," (Jenkins 2008:4) which expressed itself as a process of collective meaning making that connected a public fanbase, wildlife control organizations, and larger cultural narratives about freedom and repression.

Over the course of 2012 and 2013, I combed through stories, regularly searched for the monkey on Google, watched videos of him on YouTube, and followed him on Twitter and Facebook. As I became acquainted with the story, I noticed that unique identities of the monkey had been collectively constructed at different points in the story. These identities would shift at key points in the narrative where social expectations of his identity were challenged. What was interesting to me was that his shifting public persona was created through reflexive relationships between different types of identities throughout the storytelling. Loseke (2007) notes how narrative creates identity at all levels of social life (661), with cultural, institutional, organizational, and personal levels of identity construction. While it is common for most research to emphasize one type of identity, analysis of this story suggested "reflexive relationships among different types of identities" (Loseke 2007:662).

In my research, I noticed that public storytelling of the Mystery Monkey, however, created only three types of identities, which included cultural, institutional, and personal identities. At crucial turning points in the story–or "surface breaks"–a new identity would emerge that interacted with previous interpretations, and thus established new conditions for how the monkey was understood to

exist, how he should exist, and how he was different–or similar–to people. As his identities interacted, and become entangled, what emerged was not only a story about what it means to be an animal living in urban and suburban spaces, but also a story about coming of age in America in an age of uncertainty.

The Mystery Monkey story begins with *cultural* and *institutional* narratives that combine to create an identity of a "problem" animal. Following the first surface break, however, a new cultural identity of celebrity-hero is created, which interacts with the problem animal identity through public debate. Throughout the story, a third *personal* narrative emerges on social media and newspaper editorials, combining with the other two to create a third "lonely, stressed out, and afraid" identity. I argue that this "lonely monkey" identity inspires public sympathy for the animal, leading to the mythologizing of his livelihood and uncustomary treatment following his capture.

To make sense of the monkey's unexpected actions, I believe public storytelling situates the monkey's actions in socially constructed personas, which reflect traditional and nontraditional American values, such as freedom, coming of age, and resistance to authority. As one *Tampa Bay Times* story notes, this "swinger dad" was "like a lot of men. He resisted settling down. Embracing the wandering life, he prowled Tampa Bay, finding adventure and evading authority. But it was a lonely existence. What's life without a family (Levesque 2015)?" In this chapter, I therefore consistently return to the question: *how did media interpretations appropriate core American values to tell the monkey's story?*

Stories in American society often contrast opposing binaries, particularly morality and reason or passion and logic (D'Andrade 1995). These binaries are informed by a distinct cultural logic in American civil discourse (Chapter 1), which moves between the poles of liberty and repression (Alexander 2006a). These logics color moral sentiments in storytelling, and thus imbue certain identities with moral significance. Amid the unfolding drama, I noticed how news media and public commentary turned to controversial debates centered on these opposing binaries, which included wildness/order, freedom/security, and autonomy/community. In this case, I believe public debate

helped people further interpret the monkey's shifting identities, and negotiate social expectations surrounding his livelihood.

For instance, on August 22, 2012, the *New York Times* reported a story titled "What's a Monkey to do in Tampa?" It featured a drawing of a neighborhood with rows of modest modular homes, its residents spilling out into the streets, pointing in unison to the sky. The article reports the opposing positions framing the MMTB's story. On one side you have the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission and Vernon Yates, the trapper who is called to capture the monkey. On the other side you have a pro-monkey populace, fans who watch and cheer as the monkey skirts authorities time and time again.

> Everyone's shouting, 'It's gotta be free, it's gotta be free,' Yates told me. 'Well, go find the guy who's living on the street with his family and ask him how it feels to be free.' Yates seemed to be arguing that sometimes we need a hand to reach down and nudge us, however forcefully, back into place. 'Sometimes, freedom isn't necessarily a good idea.' (Mooallem 2012)

Statements such as these are at the center of the MMTB's story and its sociological implications. Throughout the spectacle of the monkey drama, identity construction, and the authorities' botched attempts at capture, the public engaged in conversation about what it means to be free and civilized in America. The study of such a popular culture discourse allows the sociologist to look into the lives of popular audiences, and understand what motivates them, and fuses their shared understanding of these events. I believe this caught national and international media attention because when most experiences of nature are controlled and scheduled (Chapter 2 and Chapter 4 respectively), catching sight of a monkey in an ordered suburban neighborhood challenges our socially constructed boundaries of who and what belongs in the social world. Thus, it was the monkey's "inbetweeness" that turned our minds towards oppositional meanings (Giesen 2012), and the *mystery* of the monkey that pointed to power structures, and inspired us to remember what's important and sacred as Americans.

METHOD OF INQUIRY

This chapter is the result of an extensive textual and narrative analysis of the story of a feral

rhesus macaque monkey who was loose in the Tampa Bay area for nearly four years. Throughout the chapter, *I am interested in how the public identity of the MMTB was constructed over time, and how these transformations reveal underlying public debates over cultural values.* I explore, recreate, and analyze the MMTB story through various media sources, such as social media, video, images, music, online commentary, and news reporting. I reviewed evidence collected from different sources individually, located reoccurring patterns in the storytelling, and looked for connections between the different media sources. I then reconstructed fragments of the story into a coherent narrative in order to show its unique twists and turns, while concurrently providing sociological analysis.

Similar to the media narratives I draw from, this research is a recreation a unique animal story. Animal stories provide a communicative, visual, and tangible (Griswold 2008:11) record of social and cultural meaning in varying social contexts (Ramirrez-Valles 1999; Quinn 2005). Studying narratives of wild animals is useful in understanding cultural representations of nature, and how these representations are employed to make sense of the uncertainty posed by animal transgressions of human spaces (Philo and Wibert 2000). Through unraveling the codes and patterns embedded in media stories of the MMTB, we can begin to understand the norms and social expectations embedded in socially circulating stories that make up contemporary social reality. As Wolch et al. (2003) note, textual claims about nature make narrative space for animal others possible, and reveal notions of an external nature where animals might be part, or where they might act (194).

Media reflect how people and culture conceptualize and story animals and nature (Jerolmack 2008). Local newsprint media is one helpful site to explore how cultural stories of animals emerge from local communities, yet resonate with larger international audiences. Many stories are located in the public sphere, and can be found in public documents, social media, and newsprint media. TV and online media are also useful mediums to investigate and understand how wild animals are represented in stories (Chris 2006). Knowledge of animals is taken from wildlife media and often employed in

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storytelling and script writing (Chris 2006). Furthermore, with the rise of popular shows on niched channels, such as Animal Planet, Discovery Channel, and National Geographic, the portrayal and juxtaposition of animals and humans (Chris 2012) is often seen in the emergence of animal celebrities, e.g., Cecil the Elephant. The convergence of such media, such as entertainment, television, and news provide the grounds for investigating how animals are portrayed and understood in diverse ways (Chris 2012).

Though I draw from multiple media sources, the majority of analysis comes from two major data sets: 50 print articles in the *Tampa Bay Times* (TBT) and social media commentary on Facebook. I chose to use the *Tampa Bay Times* because of their extensive coverage of the story. I chose 50 stories that included new information or interpretations of the monkey's story, as it evolved in reporting. These stories are traditional news reports and editorials, which report and comment on the ongoing drama following a wild monkey in Tampa Bay. The TBT included a host of interpretive and editorial stories, which identified with its audience and took perspective in favor of the MMTB's livelihood. This made it unique as compared to the other media sources, which used more traditional reporting to tell the story. I did not ignore other media sources (TV, YouTube, magazines), but rather reviewed them and incorporated their content only if it added something unique to the data set. These included such sources as the *Tampa Bay Tribune*, the *New York Times*, the Associated Press, CNN, Bay News 9, *National Geographic,* The Colbert Report, and other media sources.[10]

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[10] I originally considered using traditional news archives, such as Lexis Nexis and World Access News, but I later decided to abandon this idea. These search engines were not of much help because they did not contain news stories with original, public commentary. Reviewing commentary was important because public commentary offers a view into how the public responded to the story and the monkey's activity. I later found online commentary on TBT.com, which was important to understanding how old and new media converge to tell the story of the monkey. News archives also made it difficult to reference related digital material, which could easily be done through TBT and social media. Furthermore, news archives are integral to more traditional textual analysis, which focus specifically on the content of stories, whereas I am more interested in how stories and media content relate over various media spaces.

To deepen my review of the public construction of the story, I also decided to review social media, i.e., Facebook, where loyal fans created profiles devoted to the MMTB.[11] These social media outlets are important forums for public discourse, and became prime sites for discussing the monkey, his whereabouts, speculations on his demeanor and emotions, and his potential endeavors. I casually reviewed these social media sites, recording any significant posts or plot details. Social media became central for obtaining unique photos and videos of the monkey's persona. It was also an important source for understanding how grassroots media content drove corporate reporting and interpretation of the MMTB events.

After organizing data in digital archives, I began coding to find themes and patterns in the story. Data were initially arranged into broad categories, or open codes. To ^{derive} codes, I printed all *Tampa Bay Times* articles–and corresponding public commentary–on the MMTB beginning in January, 2009.[12] I organized them by date and theme in a spiral binder. I marked the physical copies of the articles with different colored markers and stickers for different emerging categories. I ended with over 40 open codes, or categories. These general categories allowed me to look into the themes of the story.

Once codes were organized and sorted, I thumbed through data with careful attention to detail and lumped codes together to form axial codes. These codes were more specific and offered insight into the story. For example, early codes represented broad categories, like "criminalization," while axial codes were more narrative oriented, such as "fugitive status gives rise to trope, 'monkey on the run.'" Axial codes were helpful when addressing my research questions. Finally, selective codes were

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[11] I reviewed two major Facebook pages, 1.) Mystery Monkey of Tampa Bay and Mystery Monkey Fan Club. An anonymous third party manages both pages, respectively. I only draw from profile updates, not public commentary.

[12] The first story reported in TBT on the monkey was January 14, 2009, though he was first spotted in the area in late 2008.

drawn from data to pinpoint specific themes, such as moral norms in American life. This led to my major argument that the MMTB story reveals an oppositional moral debate about American civil life, including on the one hand, the heralding of freedom and autonomy, and on the other hand, the upholding of order in the name of security and community.

This main theme informed the organization of data into different narrative scenes, through which I (re)present the story. In each scene, I pinpoint crucial parts of the story at which traditional news media and social media overlap. I dub these turns in the story "surface breaks" because they indicate crucial points in the story where the identity of the monkey shifts from one "persona" to another, e.g., nuisance to celebrity, celebrity to victim, etc. It is during these surface breaks that social expectations of the monkey's public identity are revealed, leading to turns in the storytelling and therefore shifting public interpretations of the unfolding events.

In the initial steps of the methodological process, I collected data and used coding to organize and sort ideas and concepts. I next devised a strategy to reconstruct the narrative. I recreate the story as a means to represent data, similar to how an ethnographer recreates a scene from *in situ* observations. As a researcher and interpreter of texts, I interpret events, public opinion, and reports, then reconstruct the narrative from these observations. The process is similar to a virtual observation of the unfolding of the story. I am a participant and creator in the story, and thus I must assume responsibility for how much I interpret the story. By exploring stories of the MMTB and investigating public commentary on social media, I enter into sites where people emergently negotiate the meaning of the MMTB story. I'm an observer tuning into the story in the virtual spaces of the Internet, similar to how one would observe people and animals interacting in a public setting at a zoo, park, or public square. I can sit back and take in a larger scope of the scene as it unfolds in the stories and fan sites.

After soaking myself "in the scene," rather than writing about what I observed, I decided to interpretively speak portions of the story into a microphone, similar to free writing. When I speak, I

connect to the story in a unique way. I can speak slowly, fluidly, and intuitively interpret the narrative. The timing and speed of the recitation is different than the writing process, and allowed for me to gain insight into the story. During this period, I was also reviewing literature on animal studies and narrative, which aided the storytelling and analysis. I began by reciting ideas and thoughts of one portion of story into a microphone. I noted four major parts–or themes–of the story, beginning with Part 1, "A Monkey on the Lam." The major four parts of the story also correlate with three "surface breaks." These surface breaks are the transitional periods in the monkey's public life marked by specific events between each theme.

Next, I would read the articles in these parts multiple times, contemplate their meaning, and then begin to recite my interpretation and understanding of the narrative. I did this in 5-15 minute intervals. Afterwards, I would listen to the recording and reflect on what was said, take notes, then rewind the recording and transcribe the entirety of the recording. The transcription of the recording was not always verbatim. Rather, I used this as an opportunity to revise ideas and enrich the storytelling process. Earlier codes informed my understanding of the data. After transcription, I organized the story into four sections or scenes: "A Monkey on the Lam," "Making Friend with the Public," "Lonely, Stressed Out, and Afraid," and "And He Lived Happily Ever After…" Finally, I re-read each section, with the intention to fill in theoretical details, pulling data from my sources: direct quotes, dates, other facts, etc.

The narrative reconstruction in this chapter is not merely an exercise in creative expression, but rather should be understood as a template for sociological analysis and inquiry, which draws data from multiple sources. Many stories of the monkey have been written over the years, and this chapter is an attempt to add to this universe of stories. This story is unique, however, because I am making a conscious effort to account for many of the stories that have been told about the monkey. In doing so, this chapter provides a meta-commentary on the story of the Mystery Monkey, outlines his

emergent identities, and thus reveals underlying social and cultural themes present throughout the story.

A MONKEY ON THE LAM

"Why would anyone, even a monkey, choose to live in Tampa?"
Stephen Colbert

The Mystery Monkey story was unique to Tampa Bay, and possibly could not have happened anywhere else but here in South Florida. First, Tampa Bay is a large, metropolitan area marked by social, racial, and ethnic diversity. It is in the heart of Florida's "I-4 corridor" and often cited by political commentators for its polarized political affiliation. In 2012, for instance, the Republican National Convention was held in Tampa Bay, with the hopes of swaying the politically fractious state to the Republican right. Barak Obama won the state by a fraction, nonetheless. Florida is also home to more wildlife preserves than any other state on the eastern seaboard, and is known as a popular tourist destination for people worldwide. In particular, Tampa Bay, like many other regions in the United States, is marked by abundant surburan sprawl. You can travel anywhere in the region and most likely find rows of strip malls and gated communities lining the roadways. But what makes Tampa Bay's suburbia unique is it's subtropical weather, allowing for abundant flora and wildlife to thrive within the city. Where else could a feral monkey live amongst such a diverse population of people and inspire a lively debate over American values?

The Rhesus Macaque is not native to Florida. It was first introduced in 1930, when a band of monkeys escaped a tourist attraction in Marion, Lake, and Seminole counties. In the early 20th century, many Rhesus Macaque monkeys were imported from South Asia for tourist attractions. The colony of monkeys in Silver Springs State Park, for instance, are thought to have originated from a band of monkeys released by tour boat operator, Colonel Tooey, who had monkeys on his tour "jungle cruise" rides in Central Florida (Mooallem 2012). Other Rhesus Macaques colonies were established after animals escaped captivity following storms, most notably Hurricane Andrew (Bilger 2009). As of

today, however, over 1000 wild Rhesus Macaques live in the state of Florida, and state officials report 700 of these monkeys have been caught in the past decade (O'Neill 2013).

The Mystery Monkey was first thought to be a baboon, which raises alarms in the wildlife community. Florida state law lists baboons as Class I animals, which are considered very dangerous to the public. Exotic and dangerous wildlife, such as baboons, leopards, tigers, and bears, can legally be acquired and owned in the state of Florida. When loose in public spaces, however, these types of animals are considered a public nuisance, or threat, and are quickly captured or killed by animal control officers. Bystander photos later revealed that this particular monkey was in fact a Rhesus Macaque, a Class II animal, indigenous to South Asia. Though not considered as dangerous as a baboon, Rhesus Macaques remain a threat to the public, and are understood and treated through this logic of state wildlife law.

In addition to institutional narratives about wildlife, reports drew on cultural narratives about animal pests and warned the public of the dangers of the monkey.[13] They suggested that the monkey's social behavior might be "pretty lewd." Watch out for the monkeys who "are infamous for throwing feces at things they don't like" (Abel 2009), said one news report. These types of exaggerated early stories indicate the hyperbole surrounding wild animals in public spaces. Not only did a wild monkey pose a threat to public health, it also seemed to transgress social norms of civility. St. Petersburg resident, Jim Swartz, noticed that the bird feeder outside his screened patio was broken. The monkey had been traveling in his area, and was suspected to be the culprit. Swartz repaired the bird feeder, but

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[13] The *Tampa Bay Times* reports that in 2007, there was close to 9000 macaques living under private hands in Florida, including three facilities that breed and sell them for research. In Immokalee, Florida one of these facilities reported 6000 macaques. Their roaming range, or territory, can be anywhere from 100-300 miles. They can move very fast, upwards towards 30 miles per hour. Even in Tampa's heavily populated landscape, where they can use trees, buildings, cars, and telephone poles to move from one place to another. He was spotted in 60-ft. oak trees, on tops of buildings, cars, and churches, jumping from telephone pole to telephone pole, even looking both ways before crossing the street (Anton 2009).

a few days later, while he and his wife ate lunch on the patio, the monkey made another appearance. He sat nearby and ate birdseed, littering the ground. 'The problem is that they are not indigenous to this area,' Swartz said. 'He's not in (our) community" (Morel 2012b). "When people chose to feed wildlife in their neighborhood, very often it's the neighbors that end up suffering the consequences" (Morel 2012b).

Wild and exotic animals in public spaces are not uncommon in the United States. Much of the country is rural and suburban, and human settlements often abut to natural lands. Private zoos and exotic animal ownership are also not uncommon, leading to many unwarranted conflicts and encounters between humans and animals (see Herda-Rapp and Goedeke 2005). Many stories in local and national news have reported events of wild animal encounters in human spaces. In 2011, for instance, retired war veteran Terry Thompson freed 48 exotic animals into the suburban countryside of Zanesville, Ohio, leading to their incarceration and execution (Chapter 2). While in 2012 and 2015, after massive floods in Duluth, Minnesota and Tbilisi, Georgia, dozens of exotic animals were left roaming the streets, including white tigers, seals, and polar bears (Baran and Wurzer 2012; Hutcherson and Melvin 2015). These types of animal stories are often reported as human-interest stories,[14] yet have profound meaning about the latent boundaries underlying human/animal and nature/society relations. Wolch, et. al (2000) note that nature-society relationships often emerge in diverse metropolitan areas, where "nature-society relations play a discernible role in precipitating urban social conflict" (72). Such relations "are critical to forging pathways towards human-animal coexistence and strategies for sharing space in an era of rapid urbanization and related habitat loss/fragmentation, species endangerment and escalating conflicts along human-animal borderlands.

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[14] Early reports on the MMTB were deemed human interest stories in the TBT, though later stories were listed as headlines, general news, and editorials.

The "mystery" moniker was a major aspect of identity construction and the storytelling surrounding the monkey. It emerged almost as soon as the MMTB's first sighting in 2009, as the news media and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FFWC) speculated about his origins. Historically, primates have occupied remote border areas between wilderness and civilization, and primates are considered "strange and unusual" beasts, who because of their likeness to humans, have the "remarkable capacity to move back and forth" between human and animal worlds (Nappi 2012). Nappi (2012) notes that the contemplation of such wild beasts in contemporary America provides a medium for working out social and cultural anxieties…(and) also a study of the idea of humanity itself" (58). It wasn't a surprise, then, that this monkey would evoke both curiosity and fear in the public imagination for the next few years.

The mystery moniker was also provoked by the monkey's unknown genesis, and to date, no one can pinpoint his origin. From the very beginning of the story, wildlife authorities and news media made many assumptions regarding the origins of the monkey, yet no one could pinpoint exactly where this monkey came from. Though feral Rhesus Macaques are common to Florida, there are also many privately owned Macaques. Furthermore, facilities breed monkeys throughout the state of Florida, which are sold at laboratories and universities, [15] and monkeys go missing all the time. Whether released by researchers, private owners, or zoos, Rhesus Macaques living in the wild quickly become feral, and either die alone or reunite with other feral monkey colonies. Perhaps this monkey was a member of a feral colony, or someone's pet. He might have also been an escapee of the many industrial research facilities throughout the state. No one really knows.

Early sightings of the monkey didn't reveal much information either. Locals and bystanders reported seeing a monkey in trees and alongside the road, and local resident Dan McBride was one of

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[15] One facility, Primate Products, Inc. is currently under investigation by the US Department of Agriculture for animal neglect and abuse (Associated Press 2015).

the first people to catch sight of the monkey. "I was in the family room, early on a Sunday morning, and I opened up the blinds and he was on the birdfeeder taking out some nuts and birdseed. He looked back through the window at me. I was kind of startled" (The Colbert Report 2013).

McBride's January 13th, 2009 meeting was one of the earliest sightings, though rumors suggested a monkey was loose in the area as early as November 2008. Early in the story, the monkey was constantly on the move, not stopping for more than a couple of days. The monkey, like most wildlife, lived in "spaces of motion" and led a mobile life (Whatmore 1999). His movements were relational achievements and happened in a network of people, highways, ecosystems, and neighborhoods. Though this first reported sighting of the monkey was in Clearwater, he was later seen climbing high trees and startling neighbors in east Tampa, near Rowlett's Park, 40 miles east of his first location. Wildlife authorities confirmed that the Tampa monkey was the same one spotted in Clearwater. Yet, the effort to capture the monkey was beginning to seem fruitless, as he continued to evade local wildlife authorities. Later in that same week, the monkey was spotted two more times in Hillsborough County, though this time moving west towards the Gulf of Mexico. Two days later, and to everyone's surprise, the runaway monkey was seen in an Oldsmar apartment complex, 16 miles west of Tampa. He was seen "swinging from treetops to rooftops at the Sabald Palm at Bootranch Apartments, near Bay Harbor Drive" (Harwell 2009). How did this monkey move so quickly back and forth across 16 miles of the suburban landscape?

The monkey next moved towards the Gulf of Mexico, diagonal towards Oldsmar, and then to Pinellas County. He travelled across a highly populated area of highways, buildings, and nearly 3 million people.[16] As the monkey continued to move west, and his story was more widely reported, anxieties arose about public safety with officials warning people to be cautious. It was assumed the

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[16] The estimated population of the Tampa Bay area (including Tampa, St. Petersburg, and Clearwater) is 2,793, 814.

monkey was dangerous, and could act aggressively if provoked. Jerolmack (2008) notes that Westerners have less of a tolerance for urban wildlife. While some wild animals are "celebrated because they are beautiful, rare, or useful," many are interpreted and treated as pests (Jerolmack 2008:74). Urban wildlife are often seen as "problem animals" and evoke anxieties in the public imagination when they "transgress the boundary between civilization and nature," entering streets, backyards, and buildings (Griffiths, Poulter, and Sibley 2000:60). Their presence in human spaces raises fears of violence, disease, and pollution through defecation and vandalism (Philo and Wilbert 2000). This monkey was no different, and news reports drew on both institutional and cultural narratives of wildlife and pestilence to label him as a "problem animal."

Throughout 2009, news media continued to report on the monkey's mysterious movements in the area. At one point, he was spotted for a *fifth* time on Highlands Blvd near US highway 19. Somehow the monkey had crossed US 19, a very busy and dangerous highway running up Florida's Gulf coast.[17] Lost in the suburban sprawl of Pinellas County, the monkey went unnoticed for two months, until a Pinellas county couple watched him walk along their backyard fence. "You expect to see the birds, you expect to see the squirrels, but we sure didn't expect to see a monkey" (Stanley 2010).

This is an interesting and important point. The monkey is an unexpected character. Certainly, wildlife is common to the sub-tropical environs of south Florida,[18] but a wild Macaque evading the

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[17] The stretch of US-19 on Florida's Gulf Coast is the deadliest road in the United States for pedestrians, with over 100 deaths in a 5-year period (Mankiewicz 2005).

[18] According to the FFWCC, there are over 500 nonnative animal species living in Florida. Florida's temperate and subtropical climate, and diverse flora and ecosystems, allow for nonnative species to flourish. The Rhesus Macaque is one of many animal species, including primate species, found throughout the state. From FFWCC's website: "Most nonnatives are introduced species, meaning they have been brought to Florida by humans. A few of Florida's exotics arrived by natural range expansions, like cattle egrets, which are native to Africa and Asia but flew across the Atlantic Ocean and arrived in Florida in the 1950's. Several common nonnative species, like coyotes, armadillos and red foxes, were not only introduced by humans, but also spread into Florida by natural range

authorities for almost a year? This was rare, indeed. Furthermore, his presence and whereabouts were constantly shifting, from one location to the next, always uncertain and surprising. Yet, by March 2010, he was beginning to attract a lot of attention from fans and wildlife control experts. Ambiguous things attract attention, and drive social communication (Giesen 2012). In this case, early reports of the monkey demonstrate how his surprising movements were surface breaks of normal social expectations for wildlife, which are usually easily controlled. Furthermore, the mystery of the monkey was beginning to bring awareness to hidden social rules about public safety and belonging, and about the fine line between wilderness and civilization. Our normal expectation in everyday life is a social world that is "neatly ordered" with wild things on one side (Giesen 2012:793), and the civilized on the other. Unless it's an occasional raccoon or squirrel scurrying through the backyard, or the rare coyote scavenging through the neighborhood, exotic wildlife is something we watch on TV (Chris 2006), or visit at the local zoo. In other words, it's something under *our* control. Yet, here was a monkey in suburban Florida, who couldn't be captured. How might the public respond next?

MAKING FRIENDS WITH THE PUBLIC

"It is almost banal to say so yet it needs to be stressed continually: all is creation, all is change, all is flux, all is metamorphosis."
Henry Miller

At 5:35 pm on March 2nd 2010, St. Petersburg's Fire and Rescue team arrived on the scene of a sighting of the monkey. He was now in Pinellas County and surrounded by helicopters, police officers, wildlife authorities, press, and a large group of bystanders. Authorities got into position, and shot a dart at the monkey. It struck him in the torso. It was the second hit of the day, but the monkey

expansion. Examples of exotic or nonnative species include the many different parrot species in peninsular Florida that escaped bird owners, African cichlid fish in the south Florida canals that were released from aquaria, squirrel monkeys (and Rhesus Macaques) that were released or escaped from tourist attractions in central Florida, and red-eared sliders, which are popular 'baby turtles' sold in the pet trade and which are now found throughout much of the state."

remained unfazed. After removing the dart, the monkey quickly took off into a parking lot where a group of camera operators, firefighters, and spectators were waiting for him.

Darkness was closing in, and there was "a desperate fugitive on the lam (MSNBC 2010)." It was time to bring this monkey into custody, remarked one TV evening news report. "He went in right there," yelled a bulky and balding Vernon Yates (MSNBC 2010). Yates owned a local wildlife rescue agency in nearby Seminole. Working in partnership with Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission (FFWC), Yates would spend nearly three years chasing the monkey through Tampa Bay.

Vernon stood alone now, and moved his hand across his chin, wiping sweat from his face. He seemed tired and beaten, and his gaze turned upwards towards the sky, his gun following his eye line. The sky was growing dark, and the treeline provided a nebulous view of the scampering monkey, who quickly moved through the trees.

A small posse of authority figures set on capturing the monkey, gathered alongside Vernon. There were local firefighters, police officers, wildlife officials, and local emergency workers. The team walked in squads of 3-5, and roamed the parking lot looking for the monkey. One large, male firefighter with a handlebar mustache gazed towards the trees, while another hopped a broken fence, meeting two other firefighters on the other side, who were discussing strategy.

Like their online counterparts, dozens of interested bystanders stood on the fringes of the confrontation. Some laughing, some alarmed, and others astonished that this monkey took two darts and kept running. They held cell phones, took pictures, talked with one another, and looked towards the tree line. People have an insatiable desire to point and observe at wild things (Milstein 2011). It's the fundamental way we socially understand and categorize the wildness of nature. Like hunting, animal spectatorship is a form of exerting power and control over nature and animals. As Malamud (1998) notes, "spectators opportunity to watch everything animals do resembles on some level the power and pleasure that characterizes the disorder of voyeurism" (221).

"That thing is fast," quipped a local reporter. "Oh!" Vernon responded, and quickly looked at the camera a few feet from his face. "I give this about a one and a million," Vernon jokes, as he pointed his gun towards the trees (MSNBC 2010)."

The night was drawing to a close, and the sun was setting in the distance. It was dusk, the time of mischief and mystery, and the monkey was now nowhere to be seen.

This encounter—what I call the Great Escape—would become the monkey's most notorious surface break. This time not only did he evade authorities, but he also took two darts and kept running. Additionally, the "monkey's latest escape act was performed before dozens of spectators, trappers, police officers, and news media helicopters" (Stanley 2010b), giving rise to a flurry of storytelling in news media and online. Notwithstanding ongoing scare tactics presented by wildlife authorities, the monkey was now attracting a wider audience. "Comedy Central's Steven Colbert had drawn hoots and applause by poking fun at St. Petersburg and its 'junkie monkey' on the lam. The Today Show, Fox News, and news outlets as far away as Asia and Europe picked up the story delighting an international audience with tales of the slippery simian…" (Nipps 2010a). Social media audiences also joined the list of spectators, and by March 4th, 2010 at least three Facebook pages and a couple Twitter pages were created. The most widely followed site was "Mystery Monkey of Tampa Bay" on Facebook, which currently has more than 80,000 fans (Nipps 2010a).

From 2010-2011, this slippery Macaque went from wild animal to local legend. His once 'problem animal' identity had transformed overnight into the identity of a celebrity-hero. He was now known internationally as the Mystery Monkey of Tampa Bay. A persona had been born, and he began to take on a life of his own. Yet, "whether it resembled the life of the real monkey or not…(t)ens of thousands of fans around the world bought into it" (Nipps 2010b).

In this stage of the story, public interpretations played with the binary oppositions of wildness and order, with the monkey spanning both of these extremes, having the incredible capacity to move

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back and forth between them (Superle 2012:175), depending on the audience. After the Great Escape, the monkey became a hero to his adoring fans for his ability to defy death, resist authority, and exert his personal freedom. Some people had been rooting for the monkey since 2009, and in finally escaping, he had proven his right to be free. As Giesen (2012) notes, the hero is "exempted from the regular social order. He or she defies death, and common reasoning…and crushes the existing order to construct a new one" (797). Time and time again, the monkey seemed to transcend conventional logic, and the public began to script his new life story in response.

Superle (2012) has shown how an animal's status is sometimes elevated to mythical hero in order to act as a subversive force against hegemonic forces and values. She demonstrates how canines in contemporary children's literature often become "transforming substances" that enable children to undermine the power of parental control (Superle 2012:174). In doing so, animals become both an agent and catalyst that enable people to achieve a fuller sense of humanity (Superle 2012:174- 202). In early 2010, news stories and social media fans began depicting the monkey as a legendary persona, with superhuman abilities to outwit authorities. Here was a monkey "smart enough to run somewhere to sleep off the (tranquilizer) darts effect," said one story (Nipps and Karas 2010) "(The dart) could have taken down a Tampa Bay Bucceneer" (Morel 2012b), said veterinarian Dan Woodsman. "What a crazy day," said the Mystery Monkey of Tampa Bay Facebook page. "(U)p 15,000 fans in one day thanks to all of the news media…(and) thanks to all of our FREEDOM loving friends...Let the FREEDOM BELL ring loud!!!!" (Mystery Monkey of Tampa Bay 2010b).

The monkey's persona was dramatically captured especially well in comments and photos created for the Mystery Monkey of Tampa Bay Facebook page. Here, updates were written in the first person, as if written by the monkey himself. With the advent of social media commentary, a new dimension of community building was born, with the monkey's heroic identity at the center. This new dimension of storytelling also helped fill metaphorical and interpretive gaps, where traditional news

media had previously come up short. It allowed audiences to participate in the storytelling process, and therefore contribute to the monkey's periodic transformations, which would continue throughout the story, Social media commentary also added a playful quality to the story that enabled interpretation of the monkey to rise to a super human status, with values such as freedom and prosperity at its core.

Local entrepreneur Bill McArdle managed the monkey's online persona, and asked his followers to keep the monkey's shifting location secret. "Go easy on giving away the location, if you don't mind." The monkey would like to continue to enjoy the Florida "sun, fun, and freedom," said McArdle (Nipps 2011). On his Facebook page, the monkey expressed feelings, and also a desire to remain free and independent. "Oww, I smell weekend!! Gotta Go, Zoom-Zoom..." said one Facebook post (Mystery Monkey of Tampa Bay 2011). "Thanks to all of my new friends and fans, I love the attention almost as much as I love my freedom...and fresh fruit, warm sunshine, and trees with lots of branches" (Mystery Monkey of Tampa Bay 2010c). By 2010, the monkey was no longer an ordinary animal. He had somehow transcended his animality to become a celebrity-hero persona.

The public's construction[19] of the monkey as a defiant, intelligent, and freedom-loving adversary to wildlife authorities, played with the wildness/order duality by switching the role of the monkey from public nuisance to celebrity-hero. Rather than posing a threat to the public, the monkey was now assisting them in "achieving a fuller sense of humanity" (Superle 2012:175), while also helping people connect with pervading cultural values, such as freedom and prosperity. Alexander (2010) suggests that celebrities are the most powerful icons in contemporary social life (324). They are meaningful symbols through which we talk about society and ourselves in the public sphere (Breese

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[19] From March–May 2010, the majority of news media, online commentators, social media supported the monkey's freedom, and enjoyed his consistent escape from capture. His antics were hailed as feats of, strength, wonder and courage. By May 2010, however, news media reports began to shift to more cautious reporting reminding the public of the monkey as a "wild" animal. Some news reporting and social media continued to construct the monkey's heroic persona.

2010:341). The public sphere is a site of symbolic creation and contestation, where the imaginary is introduced into the lifeworlds of the audience (Jacobs 2012:319-320). Participants rely on "existing cultural styles, traditional narrative forms, and well-known character types to express and authorize their arguments" (Jacobs 2012:319).

Following the Great Escape, images of the monkey draped in the American flag began appearing on Facebook. One photo depicted a cartoon monkey with an American flag bandana, with the caption "Good ol' American Freedom." These photos received hundreds of likes on Facebook, and inspired conversation among social media fans. Like totems, animal celebrities invoke attachment to group identity (Jerolmack and Tavory 2014), elicit collective values, and draw on deeper, archetypal dualistic meanings (in this case wildness and order, and liberty and repression). Furthermore, celebrity-heroes help people navigate moral boundaries and expectations of the collective good, which are narrated and negotiated by interpreting and judging the actions of celebrities as portrayed in media (Breese 2010:338).

A distinct schism in the public debate over the monkey emerged at this point in the story, with wildlife authorities on one side, and admiring (and amused) fans on the other. Wildlife authorities argued that a wild monkey loose in a suburban area was a fundamental threat to human safety, with threats ranging from nuisance to deadly. "This is a serious situation. Think infectious diseases like Herpes or Hepatitis B, attacks on native animals, and the possibility that this lonely rhesus Macaque could end up dead on the side of the interstate" (Nipps 2010a). Gary Morse, spokesman for the FFWC also commented on the situation saying, "there is a distinct possibility that this could have a bad ending. It's gotten way beyond the point where the jokes are undermining the important messages we need to get out there" (Nipps 2010a).

Responses from wildlife authorities were innately paternalistic, and subjected the monkey and public supporters into a subordinate position. They consistently rejected the monkey's elusiveness,

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and portrayed his wildness as a public safety concern. Arguments from wildlife authorities seemed to suggest that the public should be protected from the threat of the wild, and thus be free *from* danger. They objected to the public's personification of the monkey, which heralded the monkey's right to be free *to* roam. Public statements from wildlife authorities claimed that supporters were ignorant of the true dangers a monkey posed to society and the Florida ecosystem.

> …(Y)eah, wait until someone snaps a photo of the monkey eating a baby bald eagle. We'll see how people feel then. No one really seems to see the public health risk this monkey poses. Or realize how much danger the monkey is in. For all those cheering on the monkey's plight, look at it this way: this monkey was most likely kicked out of the only known Florida group of such monkeys, in Silver Springs. Monkeys are social creatures that need the company of other monkeys. And that's not going to happen in St. Petersburg. Imagine someone putting you on an island where you could never be with your own kind. How would you feel? (Nipps 2010a)

This parental like attitude of wildlife authorities set up a hierarchical relationship between a public in favor of the monkey's freedom and livelihood and the power and control of public safety.

This starkly contrasted with the public's response of joyful reverie. The monkey's ability to resist authority, and his surprising activities, inspired the public imagination and opened possibilities for transcendence of his animality. These "counter discourses" advocated for the monkey's welfare and rights (Stibbe 2012), while also calling for his personal liberation. This was well represented in a TBT story by Emily Nipps who cites Bill McArdle on the public significance of the monkey. "For many, the monkey represents good, old-fashioned American freedom, or they just want a laugh," McArdle said (Nipps 2011a). "Go, monkey, go" and "celebrate freedom" became the prominent rallying cries for the monkey's online persona. Wright and Rogers (2011) note that people in American society seek their sense of identity through affirming five core social values: freedom, prosperity, efficiency, fairness, and democracy. Most Americans judge institutions, organizations, and other citizens on their ability to achieve these values. While social and cultural debates arise from disagreements on how to affirm these values (Wright and Rogers 2011:6-7).

In related Facebook posts, images were created depicting the monkey with Photoshopped Tampa Bay Rays baseball caps, or a Tampa Bay Lightning hockey jersey. On Christmas, he was seen with a Santa Claus beard, and on Halloween a Mr. T costume. "Catch me if you can, suckas!!!" (Mystery Monkey of Tampa Bay 2010a), read one post. On other days, he would talk about drinking banana daiquiris on the beach, because "he just wants to be free." This American value-laden persona is further represented in MMTB Facebook posts where the monkey's online persona responds to current events, such as the deaths of Joan Rivers and Florida native Macho Man Randy Savage, the terrorist bombings of the Boston Marathon, and a call for peace and prosperity to the American public on holidays. Through appropriating mainstream values, the monkey's online persona seemed to heckle the authorities who struggled to capture him. "Who would've thought this would be the thing to drive all this Internet traffic," McArdle said to the *Tampa Bay Times*. "I just have to sit back and laugh. It's just more or less people having a good time." (Nipps 2010a)

At this point in the story, the emerging status of the monkey as a celebrity-hero rested on his ability to bridge the natural and social world. He was neither human nor animal, yet his ambivalent and mysterious status, and escape from death, catapulted him to stardom. His actions defied conventional logic, and like the charismatic hero he mediated between the worlds of an ordinary public and authoritative structures (Giesen 2012). Celebrity-heroes are not gods, however. They may maintain that status for a time, but eventually, they must return to an ordinary realm. How could a renegade monkey maintain the high social expectations he was awarded?

LONELY, STRESSED OUT, AND AFRAID

A few months after the monkey's launch to fame, Emily Nipps, TBT reporter, wrote a story that described the monkey as an animal in search of a soul. A photographer living in Pinellas County had noticed the elusive monkey staring into a large, 4'x4' cube with mirrors on all sides. The photograph of the young macaque showed him gazing into the mirror as if looking at himself. "The

monkey looked around the corner of the cube…as if he was looking for another monkey. Then he slowly backed off from it, gently sliding his monkey hand along the mirrored image of himself before turning away" (Nipps 2010b). Had the monkey "finally found a friend?" Nipps asked. Earlier in the month, the monkey was seen staring into the same large mirrored cube. He had now returned to this place, as if attracted to his own image, or perhaps the promise of meeting another monkey. "Though once a symbol of free, frolicking monkey fun, the latest captured images suggest that sadly the monkey is desperately lonely" (Nipps 2010b)

The photos of the mirror gazing monkey quickly inspired a lively debate over his emotional and spiritual well-being, and led to a shift in the public's treatment of the monkey. Once again a surface break was emerging in the social expectations surrounding the monkey. Was he happy to be a heroic symbol of freedom and prosperity, or was he actually frustrated and lonely? For some observers, the loneliness logic was used to tamper down public enthusiasm and manage and control the monkey's public image. News media reports, especially, pointed to the monkey as "lonely, stressed out, and afraid" (Kruse 2010), rather than enjoying the virtues of "sun, fun, and freedom" (Nipps 2011). Illouz (2008) suggests that "the language of therapy" is often used to institutionalize, and exert control over the emotional self in public discourse. It is an alternative way the state and dominant institutions exercise power over the individual, whether human or nonhuman. In this case, the mainstream media was now framing the Mystery monkey's situation as an emotional crisis, rather than a celebration of freedom and prosperity. Perhaps freedom was not all what it was cracked up to be?

TBT reporter Michael Kruse further confirmed the loneliness logic by arguing that the Pinellas monkey was "lonely, stressed, and frustrated" (Kruse 2010). In his article, Kruse attempts to get "inside the mind of the Pinellas monkey" by citing scientific facts on the species (Kruse 2010) "Total freedom is social isolation. And 'it's a cruel punishment for any primate to be alone'" (Kruse 2010). Why would a monkey be lonely, the article suggested? Isn't loneliness only for people? Well, yes.

Maybe loneliness is for people, but the monkey *was* travelling alone. "No matter the animal, the sensation of isolation sends an actual, age-old signal–like, hunger, thirst, or pain–that tells that animal to change its behavior in order to survive" (Kruse 2010). Were the monkey's movements a signal of his need to survive, or something more, like a thirst for personal freedom as his public persona implied?

Kruse suggested that monkey was not seeking freedom or banana daiquiris, as his Facebook might imply. Rather he was seeking three things: "Food by night. Sleep by day. And always, always, one of his own kind (Kruse 2010)."

> The more we learn about the monkey, the less idyllic his life begins to look. And the more we realize that maybe we were wrong about a couple of things. We thought the monkey would keep moving from city to city, constantly in search of a mate. He spent more than a year on the move, defying numerous efforts to capture him across four counties. Yet he's been in the same area of St. Petersburg for at least six months, either tired of roaming or out of hope. We also created the rally cry, "Go, monkey, go," hoping he'd never be captured by the mean trappers trying to capture him. Turns out that might be the best thing for the little guy. (Kruse 2010)

At this stage of the story, media interpretations of the monkey portrayed him in a particular "emotional style." Illouz (2008) states that an "emotional style" is the "combination of the ways a culture becomes 'preoccupied' with certain emotions and devises specific 'techniques'–linguistic, scientific, ritual–to apprehend them. An emotional style is established when a new 'interpersonal imagination' is formulated, that is, a new way of thinking about the relationship of self to others, imagining it potentialities and implementing them in practice" (14). Here, news stories adopted particular scientific "techniques" of speech to insist that the monkey was not an exalted being, but rather a simple and ordinary monkey lost in the big city.

Supporters had a different response to the monkey's shifting identity, however. "Thank God I am free!" read his Facebook page, for instance. People wanted to protect their hero, and keep him safe on his journey towards freedom. Following the incident with the mirrored cube, the monkey disappeared for months. It turned out, however, the monkey did not go missing, but was rather

comfortably sharing the quiet space of a St. Petersburg neighborhood. The media just weren't reporting his whereabouts, nor were wildlife authorities looking to take him into custody. Authorities knew where he was hiding. They just weren't actively pursuing him. "It seems no one wants (Yates) to do anything about it. In fact, many insist he stay away (from the monkey)" (Nipps 2011).

The monkey's mythical celebrity-hero status seemed to have real consequences in the lived experiences of people in Tampa Bay, as locals continued to protect him from authorities and kept his location secret. Reacting to stories of the lonely monkey, locals left offerings of food and stuffed animals in their yards, on the curbside, and under trees, which they hoped would fulfill his longing for friendship. "Some think he should stay and some think he should go, but no one wants to see him hurting. He's an enigma (Nipps 2010b)." The monkey had been living in St. Petersburg for months surviving on the kindness of his neighbors. He was "settling in" and had "picked a neighborhood to call home" (FOX News 2012) with "a family in the woods" (Nipps 2012). The monkey had stopped running from authorities, and for the moment suspended his endless wandering. He was enjoying a "comfortable setting" of lush mango trees in a suburban neighborhood in south St. Pete (Nipps 2012), while his public persona continued to thrive. Like Superman in the Fortress of Solitude, or Batman in the Batcave, this monkey hero had retreated to some "nice woods" in St. Petersburg to mingle as "a member of their tribe" (Nipps 2012).

> …(T)hese days he just goes by Mr. Monk. And he appears very much at home in one quiet spot. Behind a secluded south Pinellas County home of a retired couple, their elderly mother and an aging cat named Koko, the rhesus macaque has found his comfort zone. Here he has remained for over six months. He waits on the firewood pile for his morning banana and walks ahead of the elderly woman, as if to protect her, as she walks up a long driveway to get the newspaper. The monkey loves to peer into the large windows surrounding the home and often follows the wife as she moves from room to room. He watches her fix dinner and listens to the husband when he speaks. They hear him running on the roof. He swings from the trees and washes his sticky hands in a nearby stream. Sometimes he shows up with a strange banana or cookie, and he occasionally disappears for a day or two at a time. But he always comes back. To protect the family, the *Tampa Bay Times* is not revealing identities, location or other details. After months of correspondence, the couple agreed to let a reporter come to their home to confirm some extraordinary details. 'It has been a constant progression of trust,' the husband said. 'But time has passed and Monk has realized that we mean no harm and, in fact, welcome

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him to our little piece of paradise. (Nipps 2012)

Neighborhood locals defended the monkey and kept their relationship with him secret, not reporting their relationship to authorities. At times, locals would fervently protect their new friend, occasionally reporting a monkey sighting to Vernon Yates, but only to mock him. "A couple of weeks ago, some guy called Yates to say he saw the monkey crossing the street. Yates asked for the address. The guy balked. He said, 'I'm not giving you my address.' 'Then why did you call me?' Yates asked. (I) just wanted to let you know that the monkey was crossing the street'" (Nipps 2011). Yates at this point was beginning to feel quite frustrated and annoyed by not only the monkey but also the endless calls coming in, taunting him and his efforts to do his job. "There's no end to it," Yates said. So, why did wildlife authorities bear such criticism and ignore standard protocol, choosing not to pursue the monkey?

During 2010-2011 the monkey had become a world-renowned celebrity-hero. To the public, he was no longer an ordinary animal, and standard protocol would not apply. Furthermore, wildlife authorities responsible for taking him into custody had temporarily sustained their efforts. Alexander (2010) notes celebrities occupy a radically separate world that defies the laws of social reality that usually tends to apply to others (329). The monkey was now a member of the neighborhood, and his new persona was helping to heal tensions in the surrounding human community. "He is such a sweetheart," said one woman. The monkey even made friends with local animals.

> The monkey is gentle with the sickly, old cat, sometimes picking her up and moving her to a sunnier spot on the patio. He loves Oreo cookies, twisting the tops off and licking the frosting…He tolerates squirrels and raccoons who come after his fruit and nut dinners, softly back-handing them if they get too close. (Nipps 2012)

Jerolmack and Tavory (2014) suggest that "one of the most mundane yet crucial ways in which nonhumans play into the construction of the social self is by setting up interactions" between people, communities, and different social groups (67). Jerolmack (2009), for instance, shows how pigeons allow aging white, Italian men to "forge new social ties with…(younger) men of color" in their New

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York City neighborhood (437). He also demonstrates how pigeon keeping in New York City fosters the formation of an enduring primary group that cuts across the ethnic divisions that mark other aspects of these men's lives" (438). Likewise, the monkey's presence in the St. Petersburg neighborhood, along with his socially circulating heroic identity, provided residents with reasons to change their patterns of activity, and social affiliations. In this way, the monkey helped people "forge community," and become aware of what they share in common (Jerolmack and Tavory 2014:71; see also Bell 1994). Additionally, the monkey helped people fuse social ties with an online "community 'in absentia'" (Jerolmack and Tavory 2014:72), who challenged the power of wildlife authorities and advocated for the monkey's freedom and prosperity. Here in a quiet, neighborhood in St. Petersburg, animals and humans were beginning to emerge as collaborative agents of a suburban territory with the monkey shaping the territorial practices of the people, and the people shaping the territorial practices of the monkey (Ogden 2011:32).

AND HE LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER…

For nearly two years, the Mystery Monkey's surprising activities challenged the social expectations of normative relations between humans and animals, nature and society, and wildness and order. To some he was a hero, who invoked core social and cultural values. Yet, to others he was a wild animal who should to be captured through force, if necessary. Wildlife authorities argued for more traditional forms of control, such as law enforcement, while media reports began calling for subtler forms of control through establishing a particular "therapeutic discourse" portraying the monkey as out-of-sorts in a human world (Illouz 2008). Nonetheless, the Mystery monkey continued to challenge the everyday, social order of Tampa Bay, and beyond. Few people, including his St. Petersburg neighbors, or his online fan base wanted to see a violent end to such a remarkable story. People had bonded with the monkey, and learned to see one another in his shadow. As one resident had said, "Mr. Monk has a home with (our) family for as long as he wishes" (Nipps 2012).

The monkey's life as a friendly neighbor, however, would not last long. In October 2012, reports came in about a monkey biting a woman in St. Petersburg. There was no doubt this was the Mystery Monkey, as the incident happened in the same neighborhood he'd been living for months. Following the bite, wildlife authorities descended on the neighborhood, and after a two week hunt, "(t)he most celebrated fugitive monkey in the country" was finally captured (ABC News 2012). "Today my freedom has been taken away from me…" said the Mystery Monkey on his Facebook page (Mystery Monkey of Tampa Bay 2012b). The monkey's nearly four-year run from wildlife officials was over. Wildlife authorities had won. But how had "one of the smartest monkeys, and fugitives, expert's had ever seen" get caught? What was his Achilles paw" (ABC News 2012)?

Wildlife authorities used an assortment of tactics to capture the monkey, including fruit, nets, sandwiches, darts, and even another monkey. They had learned from their past mistakes, and chose to use traps to entice the monkey, who'd been habituated to look for food by local residents. The chase would go on day by day for two weeks, but would finally end when Vernon Yates and Dan Woodsman captured the monkey after shooting him with tranquilizer darts (Morel 2012b).

The bite incident indicated another major surface break with the monkey defying the social expectations of his neighbors and fans. Following the bite, the narrative once again shifted from public safety, to public empathy, and back to public safety. The monkey had performed an "unprovoked attack" and had now "become a public safety threat" (Sullivan 2012) said Gary Morse of FWCC. Wildlife officials continued to reiterate the argument they'd made again and again, which stated that a wild monkey on the loose was dangerous to the public. "The public was warned about the dangers of feeding this animal," Gary Morse said (Sullivan 2012). "It is a shame it has come to this. Human kindness and food cannot overcome millions of years of genetic evolution (Sullivan 2012)." Vernon Yates was regretful about the incident, but also used it as an opportunity to prove his line of reasoning, which argued that the spaces of suburbia were no place for a wild animal. "It's basically done exactly

what I said it was going to do," Yates said. "I just hope we can find a way around it so the monkey doesn't have to die" (Sullivan 2012).

Along with a change in the narrative, the monkey's identity had also once again shifted from public nuisance, to local hero, and now to public victim. "Not only disabled and disfigured humans but also wild animals are discovered as victims. What was a dangerous beast before is now an endangered species…" (Giesen 2012:796). The shift took place following an encounter between the monkey and Elizabeth Fowler, a local resident of the monkey's St. Petersburg neighborhood.

> The 60-year-old woman sat in a chair in her front yard on Monday evening, planning to talk on the phone with her daughter from Tennessee. For nearly two years, the monkey has been paying her family visits. Perching on trees near the house. Sitting on a nearby fence. Resting on windowsills and peering inside. On Monday, the woman had her back turned to the woods where the monkey lives. She felt something jump on her back and wrap an arm around her waist. She screamed. She tried to shoo away the monkey, but he pulled down the collar of her shirt and bit and scratched her. Then he was gone. (Morel 2010a)

Though initially shaken by the incident, Fowler responded to media interviews with bittersweet sentiment. "I never thought it would attack me like that" (Morel 2012a), she said in one interview. She knew the monkey had to be captured, "but like many neighbors, she had grown fond of him, and she was sad to see him go. 'I feel kind of guilty,' Fowler said through tears." Fowler's granddaughter, like other neighbors, was also sad to see him go, and reminisced to reporters that she will always remember him as a neighborhood friend. "He would sit back in the bushes, and he would just eat a banana. He'd come up to the window, come over here, and stuff" (Morel 2012c). Other residents also recalled their encounters with the monkey, who was like "a neighbor who drops by unexpected." "He's been on our roof a couple of times," said Jeffrey Bishop. "He was on our lanai a couple of times (and) he's been in the backyard" (Morel 2012c).

Though the public was sympathetic to the plight of the monkey, the bite once again revealed his wildness as a topic of concern, and even his online persona began to call into question the status of the Pinellas monkey. From his Facebook page:

> With the sad turn of events that have happened, I just want to say to the humans in the neighborhood to which we call home. DON'T FEED ME!!! I know you have protected my location very well and it is much appreciated (I love my freedom) but monkeys don't understand the difference between which human has food for me, and which one doesn't. As much fun as we have with this Facebook page remember, monkeys are wild, they are strong, and they can be mean when provoked. Just like dogs, alligators, raccoons, and bears "oh my"... Had to do it... Okay! Hope everyone enjoys their freedom as mine seems to be waning... and now, back to your regular scheduled Mystery Monkey business…Gotta Go, Zoom-Zoom…(Mystery Monkey of Tampa Bay 2012a)

No matter how elusive the monkey was to authorities, or charismatic his persona became, it seemed this hero could not "continuously work miracles" (Giesen 2012:797), and he was finally taken into custody. Heroes, whether human or animal, inevitably make mistakes, and their "(f)ailure and misfortune result(s) in a dwindling belief among the hero's followers; doubts may be raised, questions asked, and the extraordinary hero is finally revealed as an…ordinary…being" (Giesen 2012:798).

That night, Yates and veterinarian Bob Woodman brought the monkey out for a press conference. The primate was stoned on sedatives, and could barely hold himself up on the bars of his small metal cage. Woodsman had named him Cornelius after the intelligent and cunning simian leader in the Planet of the Apes film series, yet now the once indestructible monkey could barely keep his eyes open. There would be no more midnight sauntering for this wily monkey, and a cage would become his permanent residence. He'd been checked for microchips, tattoos, and anything else that might prove ownership, and would be held in quarantine for nearly 30 days at a local animal hospital, where Woodman administered tests to evaluate the his health. So, what would happen next for Cornelius?

Though neighborhood people enjoyed being close to the monkey, they remained uneasy with his wildness. He never fully assimilated into the human community, yet he was still offered provisional membership. Furthermore, the public was sympathetic to the monkey and did not want to see him suffer. They wanted him have a 'good life.' The monkey had become a victim of his liminal status, moving back and forth between the two worlds of animal and human. Victims are "embodiments of

a special ambivalence between human beings and profane things (Giesen 2012:796). "They are denied a proper place in the community (and) they are expelled and displaced in camps in the outlands at the fringe of human communities" (Giesen 2012:796). Cornelius no longer could live in the suburban landscape. He had to be put under human control and taken away, where he would spend the rest of his days in a rural and remote animal sanctuary.

By late-November 2012, Cornelius was one step closer "to finding a permanent home, possibly with a mate" (Morel 2012e). Dade City Wild Things, a 22-acre wildlife sanctuary in central Florida, agreed to adopt Cornelius. News that he had the Herpes-B virus did not change much for Kathy Stearns, Wild Things director. "At this point, I fear that no one is going to want him now," Stearns said (Morel 2012d). Following public sentiment, Stearns was adamant about finding Cornelius a mate. However, Stearns would not house him with a Herpes-free monkey, so over the next few months a national search was conducted to find a fertile female Macaque with the Herpes B virus to be Cornelius's companion in his new home in Dade City. Yet, the public did not end the storytelling here. Like other public victims, people tried to reverse his expulsion from the civil community by remembering his name and story, compensating for his handicaps, and supporting his new, emerging reality (Giesen 2012:796). Public sympathy saved this Rhesus Macaque from certain death, and was now establishing him as a homemaker, husband, and father.

> Cornelius is like a lot of men. He resisted settling down. Embracing the wandering life, he prowled Tampa Bay, finding adventure and evading authority. But it was a lonely existence. What's life without family? A year or so ago, Cornelius found a mate. And late Friday or early Saturday, the Mystery Monkey of Tampa Bay became a daddy… "Cornelius is a proud daddy, that's for sure," said Kathy Stearns, the zoo's director. "The renegade monkey has settled down. We all have to eventually… Cornelius is sticking close by, being protective and apparently basking in fatherhood," Stearns said. If zoo employees approach too closely, she said, Cornelius bares his teeth and lets out a threatening grunt. "He's being a good dad," Stearns said. (TBT, April 4th 2015)

With most animal bite cases, the story would've likely ended with testing and animal euthanasia. But the interest in Cornelius extended beyond merely fear and danger. Cornelius was

established as a personality, and people were interested in, and demanded, his well-being. As bite victim Elizabeth Fowler said, "I hope the authorities do right by him…Hopefully, it will have a happy ending."

CONCLUSION

The Mystery Monkey of Tampa Bay was a pop cultural story written at the convergence of news media and social media, where different audiences collectively constructed and narrated the evolution of a feral Rhesus Macaque's journey through the suburban landscape of Tampa Bay. The study of popular culture discourse allows the sociologist to look into the lives of popular audiences, and understand what motivates them, and fuses their shared understanding of public events. Drawing on cultural, institutional, and personal narratives, media and public commentators scripted shifting identities for the monkey, which then interacted and shaped one another. For instance, when defying multiple attempts at capture, the monkey's actions set up a surface break of social expectations of the rightful place and normal behavior for wildlife in public life. To understand this odd phenomenon people interpreted the monkey's actions in a way that transformed his identity from problem-animal to celebrity-hero. Future research might further explore how under what circumstances, and in what ways, particular narratives migrate from one realm of social life to another. And also what types of identities are implicated in the process.

Throughout the story, interpretations of the monkey were situated in a narrative structure that produced and reproduced popular interpretations and images of the monkey. Popular images, such as the monkey draped in the American flag, narrative themes, such as the hero tale, and dominant narrative genres, such as the American Dream, helped audience members fuse a shared experience. "Because of their familiarity, narratives in popular genres are sufficiently 'open' for interpretation by different groups and relatively easily accessible. It is not uncommon for audience members to draw upon their own expert knowledge, participating alongside…(media) producers" (Bielby and Bielby

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2004:301). In this way, news media and online public commentary converged to tell an evolving life story of a runaway monkey that drew upon, common narrative structures, themes, and genres.

Like other animal stories, the Mystery Monkey's evolving narrative was a story people "tell themselves about themselves" (Geertz 1973:448). It was a "metasocial commentary" about what it means to live in America in an age of uncertainty (Geertz 1973:448). In participating in Cornelius's life story, we anxiously ask ourselves if our freedom could also be taken away. We are confronted with the uncomfortable notion that if we are not careful, we may too lose our freedom to oppressive authoritative structures. Through storytelling we recognize our shared vulnerability, and therefore look to "preexisting images" that resonate with our common understanding and the collective conscience. In this way, the monkey's unpredictable activities, and his evocative life story, inspired "an awareness of, and deep feelings of attachment to" a shared group identity. In particular, the monkey acted as an animal totem (Jerolmack and Tavory 2014) inspiring news media and public commentators to connect with a prototypical American identity over space and time, and through social difference.

Whereas traditional institutions, such as animal control and wildlife management, routinely attempted to degrade the monkey, members of Tampa Bay neighborhoods and public commentators worked to invite the animal into the human community. Whether as a social media persona, or amongst friends in a St. Petersburg neighborhood, the monkey "provided the foundation upon (which) a loosely knit array of people could forge community by becoming aware of what they shared in common" (Jerolmack and Tavory 2014:71). Here was a monkey, lost in the city, traversing the landscapes between wildness and order, yet acting as a mythical celebrity-hero inspiring public spectators to transcend the status quo. Like a "spiritual savior" for people disillusioned with the uncertainty pervasive in contemporary social life (Superle 2012), the monkey's association with nature and, in particular, his "liminal status between the domestic and the wild, made him an ideal meditator" for those seeking a better American story (Valley 2012:116). In the end, Cornelius reminded us of our

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origins, and compelled us to reconnect with our shared values. Likewise, his life inspired a public

debate about what it means to be American in a shifting social, cultural, and ecological landscape.

CHAPTER FOUR: SACRED NATURE AND THE SOCIAL PERFORMANCE OF WILDLIFE VIEWING

Figure 1: Entrance Road to TECO Manatee Viewing Center, Apollo Beach, Florida

This chapter is about the leisurely, local, mundane practice of wildlife viewing. It explores how wildlife viewing is practiced in local contexts, yet draws on socially circulating narratives about nature and animals. In previous chapters, I reviewed traditional news media and social media to explore the animal stories that arise I moments of uncertainty prompted by unexpected or unusual wildlife encounters, where the wildness/order boundary is disrupted. I have called these disruptive moments surface breaks. I argued that stories followed surface breaks of social expectations where some human-animal boundary was challenged, transgressed, or blurred. In each subsequent chapter, surface breaks increase in number and therefore storytelling–and the practices that follow–becomes more complex. In the second chapter, for instance, there is the singular surface break of an exotic animal release in a

small rural town. Monstrous stories were used to make sense and justify the subsequent killing of the animals. In the third chapter on the Mystery Monkey of Tampa Bay, there were three major surface breaks, with each break creating a moment where the public persona of the wild Rhesus Macaque was renegotiated by spectators. In this final chapter, however, multiple surface breaks occur, with each one providing building blocks for a more complex social performance.

Additionally, in previous chapters, storytelling was written in abstract media spaces, where meanings about animals were interpreted and negotiated in a variety of ways. In this chapter, however, I wanted to explore how these abstract stories are sometimes "performed" in the experiences of everyday life. How do animals challenge people's social expectations in everyday life situations, and in what ways do surface breaks of these expectations lead to social activity? Furthermore, how does the presence of multiple surface breaks lead to a more complex social performance of wildlife viewing?

I suggest that in our contemporary age of uncertainty, where global climate change and mass extinction have produced the compensatory need for a "culture of enchantment" (Gibson 2009), the mundane practice of wildlife viewing has become a ritual-like, dramatic social performance. The "culture of enchantment" values the direct experience of nature, promotes sustainable practices, and seeks a moral value in the natural world. It reinvests nature with spirit, and "attempts to make nature sacred again" (Gibson 2009:11). I argue that cultural narratives of enchantment inform people's situated actions towards animals, and are also reflected in their ordinary talk and social interactions, what I call "the social performance of wildlife viewing."

The social performance of wildlife viewing is achieved through human and nonhuman interaction, and takes place in outdoor venues, where people gather 'outside in the fresh air.' This "out-in-nature frame" organizes social action towards nature and wildlife and provides a "natural frame" for interpreting the lives of animals (Goffman 1974; Brewster and Bell 2009). The social performance of wildlife viewing is also a social process of relationship work, shared experience, and

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knowledge sharing. It is a "ritual-like" (Alexander 2006b), dramatic practice achieved through various techniques, such as looking, pointing, naming, and dramatic spectacle. People don't tell stories exactly, but rather talk about and try to describe nature and animals. The social performance of wildlife viewing depends on "authentic" experiences of nature, wherein people express emotional and moral evaluations of animals and nature (Bell 2008:32-33). Thus, I suggest that social performances are less likely achieved in culturally mediated nature-like spaces, such zoos, theme parks, or aquariums where "authentic" nature is absent. Furthermore, observations reveal that the industrial setting of the TECO Manatee Viewing Center does not discourage people's experience of nature. Rather, people see the viewing center as a natural space where "nature meets technology." The authenticity of people's experience of industry, nature, and wildlife enhances performances, and elicits drama and emotional uplift.

PERFORMING NATURE

Goffman (1959) was one of the first sociologists to bring performance into the study of social life. Following Burke ([1941] 1973), Goffman's dramaturgy was interactional, situational, and practical, and emphasized how people express their public image in face-to-face encounters. He proposed performance as an activity accessible and inaccessible to "a given participant on a given occasion" (15). Performers frame a situation through considered, symbolic action, and actors participate in the grounded construction of meaning (Goffman 1959:1-16). Thus, audiences are asked to believe the actions of an actor performing a role. Though Goffman's approach to performance had broad interdisciplinary appeal, and was adopted by the emerging field of performance studies (see Schechner 2003; Bell 2008), it was limited in its sociological application. His dramaturgy was intrinsically pragmatic and cut the actor off from the cultural texts that inform action with meaning. Instead, Goffman's dramaturgy conceptualized the individual as an instrumental and calculating actor whose actions were direct and conscious.

Emerging literature in the social sciences on symbolic action and social performance points to a performative turn in sociology (Alexander 2004, 2006a, 2006b 2010, 2011; Alexander and Mast 2006; Alexander et al. 2006, Giesen 2006; Jacobs 2010; Mast 2012). Following theories of symbolic action (Geertz 1973), social drama (Turner 1974), and signification (Austin 1957; Derrida 1988), this new movement in contemporary sociology suggests that performance be understood as intertwined with elements of both pragmatism and cultural meaning structures (Alexander et al. 2006; Mast 2012). Social performance takes seriously the importance of meaning in social life (Alexander 2003; Alexander and Mast 2006). As Mast (2012) notes "(social) performance theory pays attention to the background structures of meaning, but takes a pragmatic approach to whether actors can effectively embody them" (639). In short, social performance is culture in action, where culture is the "storybook" (Alexander 2006b:80). It is the collective symbolic activity of flesh and blood people–or things–who enact cultural meanings on a stage of interrelations.

A performative approach to sociology suggests social action be read as a text or story, where social life is saturated with meaning (Alexander and Mast 2006). Everyday activities are informed by cultural scripts, codes, and narratives, which circulate throughout society and reflect social structures (Loseke 2007). Social practices are transformed into performances because they are expressions of cultural and social meaning. Thus, social performance is understood not only as an instrumental means to present oneself to others (Goffman 1959), but also as a form of symbolic action (Geertz 1973), and a method of cultural pragmatics (Alexander 2004, 2006a; Alexander and Mast 2006).

If meaning is central to social life (Alexander 2003), then how does culture inform the everyday experience of nature and nonhuman animals? Can nature perform alongside social actors? Do animals have the capacity to express and perform? Emerging literature in environment and animal studies suggests that nonhuman animals and nature are interactive and meaningful partners in social life (Arluke and Sanders 1996, 2009; Weigert 1997, 2008; Alger and Alger 2003; Sanders 2003; Irvine

2004a; Irvine 2004b; Capek 2006; see Cerulo 2009 for review). Animals and nature act within human cultural systems, and "affect the world that is there, as well as the social life process within which it…operates" (Weigert 1997:24). In return, people perceive and act towards animals and nature in a meaningful way (Arluke 2009). The meaningfulness of animals and nature is not intrinsic, however. People draw from socially circulating narratives (Swidler 2001; Loseke 2007), which are produced by symbolic means of production and collective representations. Thus, animals and nature are in a constant state of being and becoming, (Haraway 2008; Ogden 2011), entangled in the stories we tell about them. They are made meaningful in particular social contexts (Fine 2003), understood through habitus (Bourdieu 1977), and interpreted through the lens of culture, history, and discourse (Greider and Garkovich 1994).

People also make sense of nature through various social practices (Crouch 2003), where nature and animals are physically encountered. Social practices become performances when informed by meaning-making and cultural forces, such as discourse and narrative (Stibbe 2012). Social performances transform notions of animals and nature in face-to-face encounters, and affect perceptions and interactions with nature and animals. Thus, animals and nature are socially and symbolically constituted in the arbitrary relation between meaningful, stylized, and repeated acts (Butler 1988:519), and are further produced through–and between–human and nonhuman relations, and the multiple identities these relations produce.

Nature and animals are not passive vessels for human interpretation, however. They are active and performative, yet not always aware of their performances (Schechner 1990:28). They "advance the movements" of their bodies, but do not necessarily express themselves "in a way that is dramatized and pre-formed in (their) repertoire of actions" (Goffman 1959:74-75). Rather, animals become meaningful through a "process of endless exchange and interactivity between the human and the other-than-human. In this sense (nonhuman) nature is always performed and can only be appropriated

by means of performance" (Giannachi and Stewart 2005:19-20). Performances are concerned with presence, and whether ritual or dramatic, they make present realities vivid enough to captivate, amuse, or terrify. Performances "alter moods, social relations, bodily dispositions, and states of mind" (Schieffelin 1998:194). Animals, in particular, perform as they move, evolve, change, and interact with human societies (Hogan et al. 2010), and are thus brought into human practices and performances (Crouch 2003; Marvin 2003).

If people, nature, and animals are participating in a co-performance, what is the stage for action? Where do performances take place, and what is the social and spatial context? Social performances are enacted in a scene. They require a temporal and spatial dimension (see Schechner 1990:19-23). A setting is needed to provide context for social performance. Zoos, theme parks, and protected natural areas are spaces of, and for, human and nonhuman interaction, and act as a scene for human and nonhuman performance. These culturally mediated spaces can be found in cities, on the periphery of urban landscapes, or in an untouched wilderness. Human and nonhuman performances are especially manifest in culturally mediated spaces, such as zoos, nature centers, and theme parks. Though culturally mediated spaces may promote an "activity of spectatorship" (Malamud 2007:220), they are nonetheless stages for a coperformance between humans and nonhumans. Ritual-like performances, such as wildlife viewing, animal feedings, or staged events are evident in these spaces. These performances (re)produce particular notions of the natural world, and include both humans and nonhumans in the production of culture. Zoos, for instance, reinforce subversive notions of animals and nature (Acampora 2005), while national parks promote notions of nature as "Edenic" (Slater 1996). Wildlife viewing is another common performance and is enacted in various settings (e.g., zoos and aquariums, nature tours, theme parks, protected areas, and nature centers). Wildlife viewing, then, becomes an important part of understanding the practice and performance of human and nonhuman relations, and the cultural meanings that inform these relations.

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Figure 2: Visitors Entering TECO Manatee Viewing Center Viewing Dock

This chapter is based on ethnographic observations of public interactions at a wildlife viewing center in central Florida. For this chapter, I sought to observe the collective activity of people engaged in wildlife viewing. Nature tourism is a multi-billion dollar industry (Bulbeck 2005), and wildlife viewing on virtual media outlets has greatly expanded over the last 20 years (Chris 2006). I was interested in how "actual" and "virtual" wildlife viewing come together, how people view wildlife in face-to-face encounters, and how cultural narratives about wildlife and nature inform people's experiences.

Farber and Hall (2007) note that wildlife viewing has the capacity to bring meaning to people's lives, arouse emotion and excitement, and elicit intrigue and drama. I, too, see wildlife viewing as reflective of these intersections, and wanted to look at how these processes unfold through grounded, collective activity. I also wanted to know how people create stories about how animals are, and the ways they should be. What expectations do people have about animals in their everyday lives, and how these expectations allude to shared values? In this way, I follow Duneier (1999) in seeking to understand how people live "in accordance with standards of 'moral worth'" (341). Do people assign

a moral value to nature? And is this visible in public interactions and social practices, such as wildlife viewing? I was sensitive to these ideas in exploring my site. I wanted a space where the public met with the activity of nonhuman others. Where and how do people and nonhumans interact in public? And what do these interactions suggest about people's moral connection to the natural world?

Following Emel and Urbanik (2010), I suggest that the space and place of human-animal encounters is an important ground for social research. There are many likely places in contemporary society one might research public, human-nonhuman encounters (e.g., zoos, theme parks, nature "tours"). Most spaces and places for such encounters are culturally mediated and demarcated with cultural boundaries (i.e., fences, cages, fees, rules). I wanted to observe a place where culture and nature intersected, and where cultural narratives of nature and wildlife met with the "natural" behaviors of nonhuman animals. I was not, however, interested in observing a space where people's experience was engineered or directed. Therefore, I was careful to avoid public arenas (e.g., zoos, theme parks, aquariums) that frame visitor experience through staged events or creative design.

I chose the TECO Manatee Viewing Center as my observation site because it is designed for viewing animals in their "natural habitat." As one visitor suggested, "there are no cages or glass between us. This is their natural habitat!" The TECO Manatee Viewing Center is owned and operated by the Tampa Electric and Coal Company. It is located on the bank of a mangrove canal, alongside an industrial park in central Florida. The center is a federally and state protected sanctuary for the Florida manatee, and serves as a nature center, a butterfly garden, a hiking trail, and an educational center. The sanctuary is located along a canal adjacent to TECO's Big Bend Power Station, which is situated between two major bay areas along the Gulf Coast, 15 miles south of a major city. The power station is a coal fired power plant that produces energy for 4 large counties, and a metropolis.

In the winter months, hundreds of manatees migrate to the canal to avoid the cool waters of the bay. The manatees are attracted to the warm water of the canal. This "manatee hot tub" is

produced from hot water discharge that is recycled into the bay during the coal refining process. There are approximately 10 power plants throughout the state of Florida that provide similar conditions for 60% of Florida's manatees. Visitors to the TECO Manatee Viewing Center gather on a 50' x 10' x 10' platform dock made of artificial wood product to observe manatees swimming in the canal water below. Various other species, such as shark, tarpon, pelican, blue heron, and fiddler crabs also frequent the canal and provide an array of ecological attractions.

The Big Bender Power Station sits 100 hundred yards to the north of the viewing center and serves as a backdrop to visitors' purview. The plant is an intricate array of blue and gray steel, and emits a loud, monotonous metallic hum. Four large, cylindrical tan and bronze flume stacks stretch into the sky and emit a continuous stream of water vapor, which resembles thick, grey smoke. Trailer trucks sometimes pass in the distance, and workers can be seen in the facility.

The TECO Manatee Viewing Center is a self-scripted environmentally friendly organization. It uses the curious ecological arrangement between nature and industry to promote a narrative of environmental conservation and sustainability. This cultural narrative (Loseke 2007) is similar to the larger ecotourism industry, which promotes minimum environmental impact and maximum recreational benefit (Bulbeck 2005:5). The center uses solar power to run the environmental center, and advertises the energy efficient use of "clean" coal. The environmental education center contains literature that demonstrates the "sustainable" relationship between TECO's industrial practices and surrounding ecosystems. This "symbolic infrastructure" displays a number of facts and stories promoting the cultural narrative of sustainability and conservation (Bulbeck 2005:4). The plant further promotes the narrative of sustainability through the environmental friendly design of the viewing center, which is constructed primarily with recycled materials produced in the coal refining process.

METHOD

In this chapter, I have chosen an ethnographic approach to data collection. Willis and

Trondsman (2000) define ethnography as "a family of methods involving the direct and sustained social contact with agents, and of richly writing up an encounter, respecting, recording, representing at least partly *in its own terms,* the irreducibility of human experience" (5:italics in the original). Much widely revered sociological ethnography follows this line of reason and emphasizes the production and negotiation of social relations over time (see Liebow 1967; Anderson 1999; Duneier 1999). Ethnographies provide a rich, detailed analysis of culture, and describe social life as an emergent process of collective activity. As Fine (2010) notes, ethnography has "advantages for exploring culture as group practice" (361) because it is local, and is a practice of discovering, writing, and making culture. I too draw from a "family of methods" (Willis and Trondsman 2000:5), and employ participant observation (Emerson et al. 2011), interactive interviewing (Lofland et al. 2006), and visual methods (Becker 1996; Prosser 2011), in order to explore the *in situ* practice of wildlife viewing.

This research is based on naturalistic observations of people at an outdoor, public manatee-viewing center in Central Florida. Observational data are supplemented with photographs recorded on site. In the field, I also elicited information from visitors through "focused" and "unfocused interactions" (Goffman 1961). Though I engaged mostly in "unfocused interactions" with visitors, I also engaged in sustained, "focused" interactions when possible. The "interview by comment" method was used with visitors to elicit specific information from visitors, such as intentions, opinions, experiences at the center, and personal history (Snow et al. 1982). Interviews were conducted with randomly selected individuals, with the exception of one informal interview. The informal interview was conducted with "Lenny," an educational volunteer. I asked Lenny a number of questions regarding the Viewing Center, visitor interest and demographics, and the biology of the manatee, and the ecology of the canal.

In this chapter, I also use photography as a "visual presentation" of the TECO Manatee Viewing Center (Prosser 2011:480). The TECO is a unique wildlife attraction, and nature/culture

paradox was often quite visual. Though I could capture people and animals interacting in unique ways through written description, the landscape and visitors' viewing practices warranted another method of representation. Photographs display a selected vision of the setting (Becker 1995), and act to accentuate written text. Following Banks (2007), I also see photographs as text that may elaborate on– or act as a substitute for–fieldnotes and interview data. In this way, my photography of the center adds a visual context to the scene, and helps to interpret visitor's activity.

I observed people at the viewing center 2-3 hours per week during the 2011-2012 winter season for a total of ten weeks and 25 hours. Observations were unstructured, but were informed by the coordination of people's movements, direction, and interest. On some occasions, I wandered the nature center and followed people who seemed most engaged with attractions, animals, and landscape. These were people who were looking at attractions, pointing at animals, and discussing wildlife with their acquaintances. I would sometimes follow one group for a prolonged period of time. In these instances, I emphasized my role as visitor to remain inconspicuous. To do so, I would mimic the actions of others, and respond to crowd excitement, which was often caused by animal activities in the water.

I made most of my observations on the main viewing area dock. I also made observations in the butterfly garden, along the tidal walkway, and at the environmental center. During my observations, I performed the role of a tourist, and looked into the water, asked questions, and gravitated towards heightened activity. People mostly gathered along the rail, peered into the water, snapped photos, engaged in small talk, and stood quietly. Large groups would gather when manatees were sighted in the water. I saw groups, and their activity, as important occasions for data collection. Like DeVault (2000) I did not attempt to determine whether groups were families, though throughout the chapter, I often refer to groups as families, or "family like." There were also many couples who visited the center, and there were very few lone visitors.

During my observations, I mingled in active groups in order to gather information on what people see, say, and do. People would engage in small talk, and would often point towards the water. They would also gather along the rail when looking at animals in the canal. When groups were large in size, I would use a technique of negotiating interactions I term *rail vacancies*. Rail vacancies are open spaces along the rail with views of the water. I negotiated vacancies to gain access to and partake in people's interactions. I define these activities as emergent "ritual-like" performances that express group interest (Alexander 2006b). To participate in these interactions, I would move into a vacancy for a few moments, look out towards the water, take note of conversations and activity, and then back away allowing others to partake. I would then return to the rail after a few minutes and begin the process again. These rituals would sometimes go on for 20-25 minutes, and would depend on animal activity in the canal. On a couple of visits to the viewing center, there were fewer people on the dock, which made viewing easier. The rituals of rail vacancies were absent on these days.

I took jotted notes once my observations for the day were complete. Sometimes I would also take jotted notes on site when I encountered a unique interaction. On these occasions, I would walk to the bathroom, sit on a bench, or retreat to a reclusive location to take notes. This was done in order to record verbatim comments and detailed descriptions of interactions. I would always record full-length detailed notes within 24 hours of observations. Once observations at the center were complete, I employed a grounded theory approach to analyzing data (Charmaz 2006). Like Charmaz (2006), I see grounded theory as a set of guidelines and practices, not prescriptions (17). Thus, I reviewed field notes in a systematic, yet open and creative manner. I separated, categorized, and coded recurring themes, and wrote analytic memos in order to build theory from data. Finally, I revisited theoretical texts in order to contextualize and understand what was happening on the ground at the viewing center.

Figure 3: Visitors on Dock Viewing Animal Activity in TECO Canal

Nature is understood through practice (Crouch 2003), and ideas, discourses, and relationships inform social practices of nature. Wildlife viewing is a social practice because it is a form of "leisured embodiment" (Macnaghten and Urry 2001:2), where people directly engage with nature and wildlife. As an expressive social practice, wildlife viewing is also a social performance. It is a coordinated expression of nature-related experiences, which are coproduced with human and nonhuman others (Szerszynski et al. 2003). Social performance is the active process of showing others through social action the meanings of a social situation. As Alexander (2004) notes:

> This meaning may or may not be one to which they themselves consciously adhere; it is meanings that they as social actors, consciously or unconsciously wish to have others believe. In order for their display to be effective, actors must offer a plausible performance, one that leads those to whom their actions and gestures are directed to accept their motives and explanations as a reasonable account. (529)

Thus, social performances may be understood as coordinated and ritualized shared experiences that define and express the current situation, and produce new notions or stories of the situation through collective activity.

The social performance of wildlife viewing is marked by different social gestures and actions.

It also evolves from multiple, *minor surface breaks*. Minor surface breaks are moments of surprise or uncertainty caused by wildlife in any given situation. They are minor because they produce short, momentary shifts in visitors' perceptions. In my observations, I found 4 recurring patterns that mark the social performance of wildlife viewing, which all evolve from minor-surface breaks. These were coordinated looking, pointing, naming, and dramatizing. These gestures and actions are performed on a stage (i.e., the viewing dock) with other people and nonhuman others (i.e., manatees, fish, sharks, birds, etc.). These ritual-like performances connect people with nature, and with one another. They are also informed by the "culture of enchantment" (Gibson 2009), which provided people with an "out-in-nature" frame from which to organize their shared experience (Goffman 1974; Brewster and Bell 2009).

Prominent throughout my observations were the ways in which people coordinated their activity. Katz (2001) notes that people produce "mutual understanding" through language, gesturing, and coordinated movement. On the dock, people would often achieve mutual understanding by coordinating their gaze, pointing towards the canal, photographing animal activity, or identifying animals in conversation. These activities produced shared experiences that provided some of the characteristics of a social performance. Furthermore, coordinated activity often followed breaks in people's expectations of animals, and therefore suggested that people held a shared understanding of nature and animals.

The most noticeable and frequent gestures I observed were the pointing to and naming of animals. People used these gestures to gather information or call attention to animal activity. People would often point to the water to signify an approaching manatee, or an active school of fish. They were also attracted to birds or sharks who hunted prey in the canal. Pointing was the primary gesture used to direct attention, "define the situation" for other participants (Goffman 1959), and communicate with others. It was a way of expressing to others that something was important or

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valuable. In the following passage, I describe the routine activity of wildlife viewing on the dock, which includes looking and pointing.

> People travel to and interact on the dock in small groups of two to five. When they arrive on the dock they intermingle in larger groups, which form along the long, grey colored rails. People stand side-by-side facing the water, and lean their bodies on the rail. They look towards the water in search of animals. Some people lean on their elbows, with their chin in their hands. Some turn their heads for a moment to look for a friend, or loved one. When animal activity is evident in the canal, people gesture towards the water. They outstretch their arms, point their fingers, and turn their heads to friends and family. This activity sometimes results in a group of people pointing their fingers towards the water. (Fieldnotes February 18th 2012)

In the preceding passage, the coordination of activity, and the practice of looking and pointing are important gestures in the social order of wildlife viewing. It demonstrates a collective definition of the situation, where animal activity in the canal becomes the primary focus of attention. In this example, animal activity breaks the 'nothing is happening' frame, and allows people to coordinate and connect through shared action. In the next passage, however, looking and pointing is coupled with talk and interpersonal communication that allows a couple to mutually define the situation as important. The talk and interpersonal communication follows the activity of a manatee breaking the surface of the water, providing a shift in the women's attention.

> Two women stand along the southern rail and gaze into the canal. They peer towards the shoreline, and engage in small talk with one another. They point and comment on a school of fish gathered in the water. One woman, who is wearing a red jacket, points to a cardinal perched in a scrub bush along the bank of the canal. Her friend turns to look and then reverts back to the canal. The woman in the red jacket then turns her attention back to the water, and points to a manatee wading in the water. The manatee lifts its head from the water. This event elicits a response from the two women, who comment on the incident and engage in small talk. (Fieldnotes, February 26th 2012)

Nature identification, or naming, was also an important characteristic of the social performance of wildlife viewing. It inspired social relations, talk, and interpersonal storytelling through the production of mutual activity, whereby people engaged in "relationship work" with one another (DeVault 2000). Relationships between people were built "through ritualized moments of social exchange and interaction" often centered around human and nonhuman others (Hallman and Benbow

2007:873). Milstein (2011) notes that pointing and naming animals is a symbolic act that mediates perceptions of animals as "unique, complex, and intrinsically valued subjects" (4). The acts of pointing and naming are basic entries into "socially discerning and categorizing parts of nature. In this way, acts of pointing and naming generate certain kinds of ecocultural knowledge that constitute aspects of nature as considered, unique, sorted, or marked" (Milstein 2011:4).

Visitors seemed interested in constructing and exchanging ecological knowledge. Some would use names and pronouns to identify animals, while others would use lay knowledge to discuss species characteristics. Some people would ask questions, inquire for knowledge, make knowledge claims, or engage in guesswork. This happened between parents and their young children, and also between peers. They would categorize, draw boundaries, and make distinctions between species, and ecological arrangements. Below I describe two related incidents, where couples engage in looking, pointing, and naming. In both cases, gestures and coordinated activity promote a shared experience.

> A middle-aged man is leaning over the western rail. He is looking towards the water, and calls to his father who stands a few steps behind to his right. The middle-aged man calls attention to a group of manatees gathered in the shallow water. The manatees are close to the dock, and their features are easily visible. "Oh look! They're here. Over here, Dad." The man says to his father. 'Yup!' What do they eat," the father replies? The man pauses for a moment and lifts his hand to his head. He seems to be thinking. After a moment he replies, "I think they are plant eaters." (Fieldnotes February 18th 2012)

> I return to the main viewing area. I approach a couple of men. One is holding a video camera. He is wearing a gray sweatshirt, and his blue and purple baseball cap is crowned with sporty orange sunglasses. He leans on the rail with his elbows, and looks out towards the canal. He talks with an older man, who is also looking towards the water. They are watching a pair of manatees who are wading in the water. The man with the camera is doing most of the talking. His father responds with an occasional nod. The man with the camera makes a number of knowledge claims. He is talking with his father, and may also be narrating his video recording. His thoughts come out in rapid succession, one after the other, and he does not wait for a response: "That one breached right there. He has a bunch of colors on him. I think there are more (manatees) out here today than normal. See the cuts on their backs? The white lines? Those are boat cuts. I'm waiting for them to pick up their heads. C'mon show your faces." (Fieldnotes February 26th 2012)

In examining family interaction at the zoo, DeVault (2000) refers to the shared "coordination of looking" (491). DeVault notes that people look, point, and name a "viewable nonhuman landscape"

(491), which orient the interaction order. She also suggests that people orient interaction and talk around the landscape, and the animals who inhabit it. People engage in banal talk about what they are seeing. Seemingly simple actions, however, contain complex patterns of interaction. The acts of "generic pointing talk" and "species naming" (DeVault 2000:493) are a collective accomplishment that is mediated by knowledge. Yet, knowledge is an important tool for interaction, because it not only coordinates social activity it also brings animals into the conversation. Thus, the social gestures of looking, pointing, and naming are not intended only for human audiences. They are an attempt to bring animals into the conversation. In the following passage, a mother and her young child coordinate gestures, and achieve a mutual understanding about the activity of animals in the canal. The mother also uses the occurrence as an opportunity to produce family time–or "do family"–and bond with her daughter (DeVault 2000:496-499). Their interaction was typical of how parents interacted with children at the viewing center.

> A tall, thin woman in her mid-thirties is standing along the northern rail of the observation dock. Her 5-year-old daughter accompanies her. The mother directs her daughter's attention by pointing her finger towards the water. The young girl mimics her mother and also points her finger towards the water. "Look, honey. There is a fish." The mother says. The young girl responds enthusiastically, "Look at the fish...yeah!" The mother then shifts her attention to a group of manatees wading in the water, and points her finger at the manatees. "See the manatees?" She asks. "Yeah, Mommy!" The child pauses for a moment and then responds with a query. "Mommy, what do the manatees eat?" "They are vegetarians." The mother responds. The child then asks another question about the animals. "Are fish vegetarians?" The mother responds by saying "No, some fish eat other fish." (Fieldnotes February 18th, 2012)

Alexander (2004) argues that meaning has not been lost in contemporary societies. There continues to be a "symbolic intensity" that is based on "repeated and simplified cognitive and moral frames" that resonate in the visible interactions of everyday life (528). "Moderns still have their myths and meaning; they are still sustained by narratives that move toward an idealized telos, that motivate rather than simply determine, that inspire and not only cause" (Alexander 2011:2). Meanings are embedded in the social world, and "cultural truth is moral and aesthetic" (Alexander 2011:3). Nature, too, is cultural (Greider and Garkovich 1994). It has a moral and aesthetic value (Bell 1994), and is

produced in local contexts (Fine 2003). People welcome the purity and sanctity of nature (Jerolmack 2009), and perform any number of ritual-like performances that express their appreciation of nature and natural phenomena, i.e., hiking, climbing, bird watching, hunting, mushrooming, etc. In these rituals, nature is mobilized as a partner in interaction, "rather than simply being there for observation" (Crouch 2003:23).

Postmodern societies are marked by artificiality, heterogeneity, and hyperreality, and people are increasingly viewing nature and wildlife in virtual media spaces (Chris 2006). The TECO Manatee Viewing Center, however, offers visitors an "authentic" wildlife experience, where visitors are invited to "come for the full experience" and explore a "unique slice of Florida." On this peculiar, yet distinctive stage, visitors engage in ritual-like social performances that express their mutual appreciation of nature. The coordinated activity of looking, pointing, and naming situates visitors, and allows them to define the situation as distinct and important. Once a situation is defined, people engage in "relationship work" and produce "family time," which further promotes shared experiences. These activities set the scene for the dramatic, ritual-like social performance of wildlife viewing. The TECO viewing dock becomes a metaphorical stage where people express their appreciation of nature through social activities, i.e., pointing, naming, cheering, etc. These social performances are expressions of moral and aesthetic values, and people attach their meanings on the authenticity of nature-related experiences, such as viewing wildlife activity. Social performances at the TECO Manatee Viewing Center are natural, non-scripted, and situational, and they produce meaningful and emotional connections between audience (visitors) and performer (wildlife).

In my observations at the TECO Manatee Viewing Center, visitors often expressed their appreciation of the "naturalness" of the setting. The ecosystem of the canal was perceived as authentic nature. It was "not like a zoo," like one visitor suggested. Animals were not displayed in cages, staged in events, or "behind glass, like a zoo." Nor did the TECO center provide placards describing animal

characteristics. People were left to experience nature "as is." Thus, manatees were perceived as living "in their natural habitat." This setting was quite different from the prison like conditions of the zoo break in Zanesville, and also distinct from the monkey on the loose in Tampa. At TECO, the goal was not to control the manatees. Rather, the center provided an environment that appealed enough to the manatees so they would use the water, yet persist in the 'wild.' This sentiment was evident in informal talk I overheard between visitors. Talk revealed a collective appreciation for the nature-centered emphasis of the TECO Manatee Viewing Center. In the following excerpt, one couple expressed their appreciation for the authenticity of the natural setting:

> Two women approach the eastern rail. They stop 3 steps to my right, and they peer over the edge of the rail into the canal. They notice a lone manatee wading in the shallow water below. Both women are in their mid-60's. They both have fluffy, curly hair. One woman has parted, blond hair, and the other is a brunette. They speak with one another, and ask questions, as they look towards the water. The brunette comments on the landscape, and a manatee who is surrounded by a school of fish. "This is nice natural. Not like an aquarium. Real nature. Look at those fish on there. What are they doing?" "I don't know," her friend replies. The brunette continues, "They are eating stuff off its back. Poor manatee. What do manatees eat? Do they eat fish?" Her friend does not respond, and the women stand silent for a moment. The brunette breaks the silence by asking about the manatee's mating habits. "I wonder if they lay eggs." Her friend turns to look and responds with laughter, "Wow! You are like sea smart!" (Fieldnotes February 18th 2012)

People also commented on the immersive experience of the viewing center. They were intrigued by the closeness of the manatees, and the "unscripted" actions of the manatees. These features of the center heightened visitor's "authentic" experience. Manatees would often approach or swim under the dock, and engage in playful behavior with one another. These surface breaks were instances when an aquatic animal–manatee, shark, or fish–would break the surface of the water, and therefore challenge social expectations. On some occasions fish would leap into the air, or manatees would surface a part of their body, such as their nose, fin, back, or head. In these moments, people expressed excitement, and also an appreciation of the animal's behavior. In the following excerpt, people react to a surface break with talk and reverie:

> There is a small crowd of 6-8 people along the western rail. They watch a shark hunt a school

of fish. The crowd is hoping the shark will catch a fish. They are talking with one another, and cheering for the shark. The shark moves closer to the school of fish, but does not risk a kill. A moment later, a fish leaps from the water. This performance elicits a reaction from the crowd. A few people straighten their bodies, and extend their arms to point towards the water. The crowd responds with excitement. There are a number of vocalizations, such as "ooooo," "ahhhh," and yayyy!" Talk amongst the crowd is elevated for a moment. (Fieldnotes March 11th 2012)

Surface breaks often elicited excitement from visitors. They produced emotional uplift and expressive behavior. The emotional efficacy of animal activity resulted from the level of perceived authenticity of the activity. If breaks transcended mundane expectations, then people would respond with shared appreciation or interest. As Alexander (2006a) notes "action will be viewed as real if it appears *sui generis*, the product of a self-generating actor who is not pulled like a puppet by the strings of society" (55). Furthermore, a "successful performance seems natural, not contrived, not a performance but an effortless expression, true to life" (4).

Wildlife viewing in "natural settings" is a dramatic practice and the "natural setting" of the TECO plant informs perceptions of authenticity and enhances the experience of wildlife viewing. Furthermore, people expect to see wildlife perform "natural behaviors," such as hunting, swimming, eating, and playing. Yet, animals sometimes exceed social expectations, which adds an additional dramatic feature to the performance of wildlife viewing. Suspense builds in moments when animal activity is uncertain, and people respond to uncertainty through looking, pointing, naming, dramatizing. A shark hunting another fish is a compelling scene because it provides action, suspense, and surprise, for instance. These dramatic features excite visitors and further enhance the experience of wildlife viewing. In the following excerpt, people experience an emotional uplift from a manatee's uncertain movement and unscripted behavior, then express feelings of curiosity, suspense, and surprise:

I turn to the northern rail. There is a bustle of activity, and perhaps 15 people engaging in informal interactions. I turn to look. I see people pointing at the water and talking with one another. I see a lone manatee swimming in the shallow water. For a moment, her head surfaces, and breaks the surface of the water. When the manatee nose reaches for air, the

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crowd let's off a resounding "ooo" and "ahhh." The manatee returns underwater. People continue to make elated comments. They comment on her potential direction. When will the manatee surface again? Where will she go next? Will she move closer to the deck? A few people discuss the manatees need to breathe. A few minutes later the manatee lifts her head again. The crowd responds with excitement. Fingers and arms are outstretched. Attention is directed to the water. People smile and talk about the movement of the manatee. There is a sense of achievement in the crowd. (Fieldnotes, March 11th 2012)

Above, visitors expressed their appreciation of animal activity through a performance of excitement and emotional uplift. Encounters with wildlife at the TECO Manatee Viewing Center were expressed as meaningful because they took place in a perceived "real nature." Unlike wildlife encounters at the zoo, Sea World, or other staged attractions (Davis 1997), animal activity was perceived as unscripted and improvised. Thus, routine and mundane social actions, such as pointing, naming, and expressive vocalizations are imbued with meaning, and elevated to a dramatic spectacle. In other words, animal performances are met with human "counterperformances" (Alexander 2006c), which are expressions of appreciation of nature and wildlife.

CONCLUSION: FINDING NATURE AT A COAL FACTORY

The TECO is a setting for a social performance between nature, wildlife, and people. The viewing dock is a stage for ritual-like performances, and performances are coproduced between humans and nonhumans. Animals "perform" natural behaviors, sometimes exceeding social expectations, and people respond with patterned activity, such as looking, pointing, naming, and dramatizing. Together, these features make up the social performance of wildlife viewing. The social performance of wildlife viewing is not only produced and enacted in local settings, however. It is also informed and imbued by cultural narratives of nature and culture (Hogan et al. 2010). These cultural narratives consciously and unconsciously guide social performances (Swidler 2001), and render social performances meaningful. Scripts pre-exist enactment and provide structure and interpersonal and intercultural meaning to the interaction order of social life (Schechner [1988] 2003:68). But what scripts are visitors to the TECO performing? How do they interact with narratives promoted by the

TECO Manatee Viewing Center? And in what ways do these cultural scripts inform the social performance of wildlife viewing?

In an age marked by environmental degradation, uncertainty, and global climate change, the meaningfulness of nature has undergone a renaissance. The story of nature has been rewritten to reflect an emerging "culture of enchantment" (Gibson 2009). The culture of enchantment has a powerful relationship to social practices, rituals, and performances. It is evident in people's manner of talk, activities, and the way they commune with nature and nonhuman animals (Colomy and Granfield 2010). It reinvests nature with spirit, and "attempts to make nature sacred again" (Gibson 2009:11). The culture of enchantment provides a background from which people render their experiences with nature meaningful. Encountering wildlife in natural settings contextualizes interactions and experience. People perform their own knowledge of, and closeness to, nature and in turn "do family" together. Yet, visitors also perform a *sacred nature* through drawing on socially circulating narratives of conservation and sustainability.

People perceive a moral good in the purity and sanctity of nature (Jerolmack 2009:169). They see nature as a moral preserve, and an alternative to the failings of social life. This "natural conscience" is intimately tied to community and a person's sense of self (Bell 1994). Thus, experiencing nature as sacred offers a glimpse of a distinct world beyond society. Yet, it also opens a realm of possibilities for relating with other people, while looking, pointing, and communing with nonhuman others. A sacred nature exists on its own terms and gathers value from just "being there" (Gibson 2009:12). As Gibson notes (2009) if nature is to remain sacred it must remain autonomous and authentically 'natural.' People must recognize nature as separate from cultural influence. All spaces have the potential to be reenchanted. Whether it is Old Faithful, a polluted landscape, or in the shadow of a coal-fired electric power plant, people find value in what they believe is natural.

Like the culture of enchantment, the social performance of wildlife viewing produces moral

and spiritual reasons for reconceiving society's relationship to nature. Social performances reflect the "structures of feeling" and cultures of their historically situated societies (Schein 1999), and the social performance of wildlife viewing is an expression of the culture of enchantment. It rekindles "people's interest in other creatures, helps them empathize with animals, and compels them to want to see lands and oceans preserved" (Gibson 2009:253). The social performance of wildlife viewing emerges as a recursive process between a local culture (Fine 2010) of wildlife viewing and a global culture of enchantment (Gibson 2009). It is at once a grounded production of meaning, and an expression of cultural narratives regarding environmental values. Though the TECO Manatee Viewing Center is a peculiar setting for the communion with the natural world, it nonetheless remains a stage for the production and performance of a *sacred nature*.

CHAPTER FIVE: CLOSING THOUGHTS ON TELLING ANIMAL STORIES

"We need another and wiser and perhaps a more mystical concept of animals. Remote from universal nature, and living by complicated artifice, man (sic) in civilization surveys the creature through the glass of his knowledge and sees thereby a feather magnified and the whole image in distortion. We patronize them for their incompleteness, for their tragic fate of having taken form so far below ourselves. And therein we err, and greatly err. For the animal shall not be measured by man (sic). In a world older and more complete than ours they move finished and complete, gifted with extensions of the senses we have lost or never attained, living by voices we shall never hear. They are not brethren, they are not underlings; they are other nations, caught with ourselves in the net of life and time, fellow prisoners of the splendor and travail of the earth."
Henry Beston, from The Outermost House

In this dissertation, I have looked at the stories people tell when wild animals don't do what they are expected to do. In particular, I have outlined the concepts of *surface breaks* and an *occasion to story* to understand how wild animals breach social expectations in social life. When wild animals transgress, challenge, or blur the taken for granted expectations of the wildness/order boundary, storytelling is employed to revise those expectations, and more likely, re-establish social expectations in the face of this surprise. These *animal stories* enable people to explain incidents away as freakish, humorous, or atypical. Additionally, what is said in these stories is an account of what happened, but also an attempt to restore the local, situational, or global social order. Or, in other cases, stories are an attempt to retell what happened in order to revise a new reality.

For instance, in Chapter 2 I looked at traditional news media reports that told monstrous stories about the escape and death of 48 animals in Zanesville, Ohio. The Muskingum Incident was a freakish event in which many exotic, and sometimes deadly, animals were released into a small rural town causing social panic and the eventual slaughter of the animals. This unique surface break of

normative nature-society relations led to vivid and dramatic storytelling. I argue that this storytelling was used to justify the violent actions of local authorities, and reestablish the social order in face of the killing.

In Chapter 3, I retold the story of the Mystery Monkey, whose surprising activities throughout Tampa Bay inspired a lively debate about what it means to be free in contemporary America. The Mystery Monkey story evolved from a series of events mediated by traditional institutions, such as wildlife control and news media, and a grassroots fanbase located on social media. The storytelling of these groups converged to create shifting identities that ranged from wild (problem-animal) to domestic (celebrity-hero), then back to wild (public victim) and domestic (monkey Dad). I argue that these identities challenge normative expectations of the human-animal boundary, and help people explain away the uncertainty posed by the monkey's activities.

Lastly, in Chapter 4, I draw on ethnographic field notes to show how interactions between people and nature at a wildlife-viewing center become a coordinated activity, which I call the "social performance of wildlife viewing." The social performance of wildlife viewing is composed from four distinct activities (looking, pointing, naming, dramatizing), which together help people elevate mundane human-animal engagements into the realm of sacred ritual. In each performance, the human-animal boundary is blurred and people transform atypical situations into opportunities to celebrate nature, or form bonds with other people.

In each instance, when a surface break occurs people react in two ways. First, people react to a breach by writing stories, scripting identities, or talking amongst themselves. The introduction of uncertainty into our shared experience inspires people to work with language to sort things out. As Bauman (1991) notes, language "strives to sustain the order and to deny or suppress randomness and contingency" (1). It helps us to repair the solid categories that previously imbued our lives with meaning. When they are challenged, anxiety fills the void, and people seek resolve through storytelling.

In other words, animals are "good to think with" specifically in moments of uncertainty (Levi-Strauss 1966). Wild animals, in particular, afford people an alternative lens to understand how the shifting social and ecological landscapes of the 21st century are entangled with social life. Therefore, I see wild animals as especially "good to think with" because they are akin to a "looking glass" where people see the natural world in themselves, or reflect on the social categories that make up our lives.

Like the 'monsters' of Zanesville, wild animals remind us of the things and places we cannot control. It is inevitable that the world will present us with outrageous situations. But what will we do when our ordinary expectations of the world are challenged? Will we fight and destroy those things that frighten us? Or will we explain them away in dramatic and fantastical storytelling? Whether it is the atrocities of ISIS, or the unbelievable fate of global communities with the advent of global climate change, sometimes people simply cannot cope with the new reality posed by emergent social problems. When *wild* things challenge our taken-for-granted reality, people turn to mythical stories of fantasy to distract themselves from the more obvious story we remain silent about.

While monsters usually represent the chaotic nature of the unknown, the themes of monster stories are almost often linked to the prevailing social order and known social structures. Stymeist (2009), for example, has demonstrated how the 1933 film King Kong, set in Depression Era New York City (and the fictional Skull Island), established a new myth of the industrial age, where monsters (or nature) threaten the material infrastructure of modern life. Similar films, like Godzilla (1954) and Rodan (1957), evoke cultural anxieties of an emerging nuclear age, where the nuclear devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki loomed large in the Japanese national imagination. Similarly, the release of dozens of low-budget monster films in Cold War America, such as Them (1954), may have reflected the looming militaristic and socio- political threats of the Soviet Union and the red scare (Stymeist 2009).

The monstrous stories of the Muskingum incident happened in small rural town in southern

Ohio during the Great Recession. Like most areas of America, wild animals have gone missing. Instead, urbanization and suburban sprawl have "reinvented" the meaning of the landscape, converting uninhabitable wild spaces into "lands of great prosperity and endless possibility" (Schipper 2008:4). The invasion of the rural landscape by 54 exotic animals was a surface break of our normal expectations for where wildness should be and what it should do. It revealed not only the lurking wildness lying just beyond the boundary of civilization, but it also hinted at the shared vulnerability of our social and economic world. Therefore, the monstrous stories of Zanesville point to our tendency to deny uncertainty at any cost. Like global climate change, or endemic poverty lurking in every American inner city, we often deny overwhelming problems, or shut them down with force. In this way, storytelling can be understood simply as an attempt to repair a rift in the collective conscience. Yet, how do animal stories enable us to feel the world is ordered and predictable once again? And how do they help us further manage the wildness of animals?

Wild animals are also good to think with because they beckon us to enter into mysterious and unknown realms with courage and curiosity. Like the Mystery Monkey of Tampa Bay, animals inspire creativity and social connection. Yet, they can also arouse social division and public debate. What types of people–or identities–do we turn to when our taken-for-granted boundaries are transgressed? Do we incite a populist uprising, and turn to demagogues who fuel our sense of righteousness? Or do we turn to governmental institutions to provide the comfort of safety and security? When wild animals transgress our shared sense of "how things should be", storytelling helps us re-work our expectations in the face of this surprise. The monkey's story was a mythical tale of American heroism. He thread "traffic like a running back" (Mooalem 2012), was shot with tranquilizer darts nearly a dozen times, and escaped near death on several occasions. As an emblem of "good ol' American Freedom," his glorified feats of escape inspired a monkey loving populace to elevate his status to a celebrity-hero, with big government as the evil villain hunting him down.

The romantic storytelling of this peculiar monkey, however, overlooks the public issues underlying this unique human-animal encounter. Like a rebel without a cause, the monkey's story is akin to outlaw mythology, which essentializes peoples' lives, or–in this case–animal lives. The outlaw mythology also "blinds us to a critical appreciation of how oppositional culture and social class operate" in our understandings of wilderness and liberty in the United States (Ogden 2011:2). Like moonshiners or the Black Lives Matter movement, the displacement of populations due to their "unsettled social class positions" often leads to oppositional cultures (Ogden 2011:3). These groups, then, strive to reestablish their social position in response to dominant structures. In a playful and poetic way, the monkey's story beckons us to reflect on the role of liberty and repression in American discourse. His activities compelled the public to recognize that *Animal Lives Matter*, also. What is the role of political institutions in managing the lives of its citizens–whether human or nonhuman? And how much liberty can be afforded to corporations–such as Oil and Natural Gas companies–without threatening the sanctity of wild things or the rights of ordinary citizens?

Finally, wild animals are good to think with because they remind us of our shared vulnerability in a rapidly changing world. Like the coal dwelling manatees, wild animals remind us that nature can be sacred once again. They invite us into the wild through a sometimes mutual and shared arrangement. How do social relations evolve when the lines between nature and society are blurred? Do we reinforce our sense of solidarity with our human community? Or do we refine our expectations about nature and animals in order to celebrate our likeness? When wild animals blur 'the way that things are,' storytelling acts to revise our expectations, and produce something new and refreshing.

The seemingly mutual interactions between people and animals at the TECO power plant were akin to a form of play. When entering onto the dock, visitors experience was at the mercy of animals' behavior, and the uncertainty of the outdoor, natural landscape. In this open and negotiable space, people sought out animal activity. While in other times, animals "invited" people to engage in

their movement or behavior. So, when manatees broke the surface of the water, or a shark unexpectedly caught a fish, animals breached social expectations, setting up interactions for people to engage with one another. In return, visitors would look, point, and name their experiences, talk with one another, and co-create a ritualized dramatization of "authentic nature." Even if animals did not share in a similar "play frame" (Jerolmack 2009b), people nonetheless interpreted the situation as magical and jubilant. In this way, people expressed an appreciation of the natural world, which had become sacred once again.

John Berger (1980) writes that animals enter the human imagination as "messengers and promises" (252), and sometimes play a magical function in peoples' lives. Furthermore, the choice "of a given species as magical, tameable, or alimentary" depends on "the habits, proximity, and 'invitation' of the animal in question" (Berger 1980:252). Here on the dock, animals were messengers of a sacred nature, which people celebrated in the social performance of wildlife viewing. Animals' free choice led them to the viewing center, exactly the place where people wanted them to become visible performers of their animality. Yet, the social performance of wildlife viewing was not only about connecting with nature, as it was also about taming it. With the *in situ* creation of knowledge systems, people developed "an image of a good and worthy" performance based on shared "ways of thinking" about nature and animals. When animals exceeded social expectations, people's linguistic and emotional expressions provided a means to self-manage, create "good" relationships, and become "worthy" moral subjects. Similar to neoliberal governmentality, people "translate and incorporate the rationalities" of a sacred nature "into methods for conducting themselves" in public (Binkley 2009:62).

When we begin to unravel the cultural logic of animal stories, we illuminate the intricacies of social life. Animal stories are often assembled using social categories, such as "the heroic" "the monstrous," or "the sacred." Moreover, in each case, people conceptualize animals on a scale between inclusion and exclusion. These invisible cultural categories inform how people think, feel, and act

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towards animals in different social situations. These categories are informed by modernist notions of dominion and control over the natural world, and are thereby reinforced through cultural, institutional, organizational, and personal practices. Animal stories, then, have the power to destroy or elevate the reality of animal lives in the social world. They are translated into modes of organized activity and used to realize people's fears or dreams. In other words, animal stories are symbolic forms of wildlife management and act to separate animals from particular social activities, as well segregate animals to appropriate places in society. Whether it is law enforcement, wildlife conservation, or entertainment, the management of animals has a discursive and therefore narrative dimension.

In the case of the Muskingum incident, a type of *authoritative storytelling* establishes power over animals in the form of species discrimination, violence, and imprisonment. Authoritative storytelling is a traditional mode of managing animals that remains acceptable when particular types of animals are categorized as unwanted or dangerous. With the Mystery Monkey, a type of *accommodating storytelling* invites animals into the social world through constructing an acceptable identity. The animal is tamed into new habits that do not violate social expectations. Therefore, an animal's presence is accommodated as long as they don't transgress the dominant norms guiding their public status. Finally, a type of *permissive storytelling* elevates manatees, and other animals, into the realm of the sacred. Permissive storytelling is the least severe form of discursive management, and is aligned with an appreciation of the aesthetic and intrinsic value of nature. In these stories, animals are permitted "in their natural habitat" because they are self-managed, and help people seek out ways to manage their own behavior in accord with the animals and society's preferred lines.

SURFACE BREAKS IN PERSPECTIVE

Surface breaks are not only limited to animals lives. They also can be used to understand a variety of social situations. Most normative symbolic boundaries in contemporary social life can produce a surface break, which will thus lead to an occasion to story. Like the animal stories reviewed

in this dissertation, these stories can be mythical, inspire public debate, or reveal hidden meaning behind our interaction and desires.

The borderlands of symbolic boundaries are zones of "intense social anxiety" and a "generative space" (Seidman 2013: 16) where "hybrid" identities, stories, and social interactions are born and negotiated (Seidman 2013:16). With the Muskingum incident we are compelled to ask "How could this happen?" and "Who would do this?" Though the incident involved many complex causes, it's interesting to consider how limited state regulations surrounding exotic animal ownership in Ohio[20] allowed a mentally unstable individual with a criminal record to exploit the lives of 54 animals. Like Victor Frankenstein, Terry Thompson's "obsessive, amoral curiosity" with housing large mammal species on his property led him to "trespass in forbidden areas of inquiry" and "disturb nature's equilibrium" (Graham 2002:63).

Perhaps the animals' release could also be understood as a "sign of the dangerous powers unleashed" by the hidden problems of mental illness in the United States (Graham 2002:64). Furthermore, Thompson's secret life, and suicidal release of the animals, revealed a morbid personality reminiscent of the surface breaks caused by suicidal gunmen, who have become a tragic staple of contemporary America. These suicides confuse the boundaries of what a normal and civil America looks like. Yet, stories in mainstream reporting characterize "mentally unstable individuals" rather than examining the underlying social context, which often includes depression, drug and alcohol abuse, poor economic prospects, family violence, and high accessibility of firearms.

Surface breaks not only evoke anxiety and fear but also disgust (Seidman 2013:10). A refugee of Florida's wild landscape, the Mystery Monkey's story reminds us of the defiled status of immigrant

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[20] At the time of the Muskingum Incident, Ohio was amongst 10 states in the nation to have no laws regulating wild-animal ownership. Since January 2013, a new state law has been enacted that bans the sale, ownership, and breeding of exotic animals in the state. Other states, such as Virginia, have also changed their laws as a result of the Muskingum Incident.

and refugee populations in the United States. Thousands of Latin American immigrants, for instance, cross the US border each year. They seek employment or refuge from volatile political and economic conditions in their home countries. Yet, their presence disrupts normative boundaries generating a surface break of the civility/defilement symbolic divide.

Like the wildness/order boundaries, stories arise from these uncertain spaces that reflect the pervading moral order. In regards to Latin American immigrants, stories and accusations arise in public discourse about the ungovernable hordes of undocumented laborers that tip the economic order. These stories inspire public debate over the rightful place for immigrants in American Society. Similar to the Mystery Monkey's constantly shifting identities, the defiled status of immigrants in public life "assumes a fundamentally unstable and ungovernable self" (Seidman 2013:8). To some, therefore, they are immoral people driven by extreme dispositions and impulses to steal our jobs, threatening "to unleash waves of (economic) disorder and destruction" (Seidman 2013:8). Like animal stories, these immigrant stories limit our capacity to understand the social, political, and economic complexity underlying immigration in contemporary American society. They also ignore the historical legacy of immigration in the United States, which has supported the rise to economic and political supremacy in the 20th century.

Finally, at the TECO Manatee Viewing Center, a series of micro surface breaks evolves into the social performance of wildlife viewing. In this routine, ritual of entertainment, people seek out animal activity to transcend the mundane. In these performances, people self-regulate what it means to be a good and moral person aligned with nature. The animals' natural proclivities seduce people into a ceremonial dance, while the hybrid landscape of the viewing center allows visitors to enjoy intimacy with animals without becoming too close.

Like the sex industry, the TECO Manatee Viewing Center exploits people's natural desires and impulsive drives for the sake of entertainment and personal pleasure. In this case, the defiled

"endangers the pure and the innocent less through coercion and violence than seduction and the manipulative betrayal of the good will and trusting sincerity of the victim" (Seidman 2013:9). Rather, the wold lures people into it's sphere of influence, but in moving too close to these staged and artificial worlds, people risk contamination of their everyday lives. In both examples, people attempt to compartmentalize their experience and deny its implications. We might enjoy the sex industry at a distance, through strip clubs and pornography, but only at the risk of recognizing that our position is actually one of power and dominance. And, as the dominant group, we may begin to experience an underlying shame and guilt for the unintended suffering we cause in satisfying our desires. Our denial, then, is a result of the inability to recognize those who've been abused, displaced, or deeply hurt by a system responsible for the destruction of lives.

A WORLD IN WONDER

wonder (v.)

• desire to know something; feel curious

• feel puzzlement or logical perplexity

• feel admiration and amazement; marvel

Environmental sociologist, Kari Marie Noorgard (2016) argues that climate change poses the most profound social dislocation since the founding of sociology as a discipline. It challenges our modern sensibilities and demands we look at the natural world differently, and with fresh eyes. In an age of global climate change, therefore, I believe stories about wild animals might help us to understand how modern people think *with* unknown and uncertain things, such as ecological crises and shifting social and political landscapes. Stories help people shift their shared perception, and inspire us to think beyond our petty materialistic concerns. Stories have the ability to empower because they organize the public imagination, and shift our perception towards new possibilities. Stories are

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also a primary factor in social activity, and we turn to stories in moments of uncertainty, and in times of crisis, to make sense of our changing situation.

Yet, stories can also be seen as an alternative form of domestication. Tuan (1984) argues that the domestication of animals is the fundamental way people exert dominion over the natural world. Stories are an exercise in fantasy and an attempt to bend nature to human needs and collective moods (Tuan 1984:143) Though seemingly playful, stories are a form of aesthetic exploitation (Tuan 1984), and transform the livelihood and experience of animals into typical characters and predictable plots. In this way, stories are paradoxical because they bring us closer to animals, yet distance us from a direct experience with them.

As I have argued, stories can inspire the imagination and open new possibilities for interpretation and social action. Yet, they can also be used to further manage, control, and order the wildness of animals and the natural world. How, then, do we move beyond the limitations of storytelling? And how can we learn to *open* in the face of destabilization and uncertainty, rather than attempt to reestablish order? Stories, like culture, are a mirror. They necessitate reflection. A mirror is a woolly device, however. Its representation of the world is two-dimensional. When thinking culturally, we only engage with metaphor and *speculate* on truth (Bogost 2012). We never comprehend 'the real' because we are always looking at ourselves, and the meanings we create. Stories distort, sometimes dramatically, and other times ever so slightly. In other words, stories transform the world into something else entirely.

One way we might surrender into wildness, however, is through the practice of *wonder*. Wonder asks us to routinely "transcend" our understanding of the world. In moments of uncertainty, we can learn to open and remain flexible, rather than collapse onto fixed categories. Therefore, to wonder is to *contemplate*, and let go of our preconceived notions – even for a moment – about how things should be, or the way that things are. To wonder is to "suspend all trust in one's own logics, be they religion,

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science, philosophy, custom, or opinion, and to become subsumed entirely in the uniqueness of an object's native logics" (Bogost 2012:124). The practice of wonder is about "radical openness" (Morton 2010:81), because it challenges us to experience the world differently (Bogost 2012), as if enchanted, where we might explore the profound openness and intimacy between human and nonhuman beings (Morton 2010:104).

Most of all, wonder compels us to be aware of our entanglement with other beings. It is about understanding our place in the lives of others. But ironically we often come to wonder through uncomfortable experiences. It arises in moments of disconnection when the "Other" is entirely mysterious to us. How can we learn to settle into a sense of ambiguity and not understanding, or not knowing? Our entanglement with others is ultimately an embodied experience, and I believe it requires empathy.

Empathy is the innate ability to feel with others, and embody their struggles. It's is a vestige of our evolutionary past, and remains with us in all our engagements, reminding us that all things are interdependent and exist equally. As Morton (2010) notes "evolution is not linear" and the natural world, and everything in it, "is not bigger than the sum of its parts…(E)verything depends upon everything else," and this is a "very powerful argument for caring about (all) things" (35). In other words, to wonder is to practice sociological empathy, which is simply another way to say compassion. It's about recognizing how our personal, local, or global struggles are inextricably linked with the Other. To recognize suffering is an uncomfortable acknowledgement, however, because we are inevitably confronted with our shared vulnerability. But this doesn't have to be threatening. It can be an invitation. Thus, to wonder is to regard the world as a friendly place – a place where people, animals, and nature share responsibility, existing and feeling *together*.

What we need in this era of ecological apocalypse is compassion, but what we have is madness. How have we become so lost in ourselves? Since the enlightenment, people have believed that

salvation would be found in separation. *Individualism*, for instance, is a moral idea about how to live our life. The best life is one of *self*-development, *self*-fulfillment, and *self*-realization. We succeed only when we separate from others and measure ourselves against others. With individualism, *instrumental rationality* is also drawn into the process. But instrumental rationality is self-centered. With instrumentalism, everything becomes a resource, not a partner. So, in contemporary society there is a *moral* obligation to live life to its fullest potential. I see this as myopic thinking. We are not separate beings. We have to let go of this limited view. All things exist in relationship to other things. In recognizing the other, we see ourselves. If we contemplate these things, we might recognize that without nonhuman others, our social world could not exist. This is good news, because if we learn to help others, we might also help ourselves. As his Holiness the Dalai Lama (2002) has said, we must learn to become "*wisely* selfish" (81). Perhaps this is where we could begin our shared practice of *wonder*?

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