

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE GAZE OF ANIMALS

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I.

I'm looking at a tiger, but she's not looking at me. I'm in London's Regent's Park Zoo, so of course there is heavy wire mesh between me and the big cat. She's surrounded by human visitors: the Sumatran tigers' enclosure is roughly circular and they can be seen from any point on its circumference. Indeed my snapshot captures the face of a woman peering through a window on the opposite side. But it's the animal's own gaze that gives me pause for thought. She is looking out of her cage, but not directly at me or any of her other observers. Within this animal's gaze but not the focus of it, I feel uncomfortable, guilty, ashamed. This feeling returns whenever I look at the photograph.

How should I theorize this experience? The word theory comes from the Greek *theōrein*, to gaze upon: our theories about things are intimately related to how we look at them. So what does it mean if what we are trying to theorize can look back at us? Or if it (or *she?*) can look back, but refuses to?¹

My experience with the tiger seems to confirm John Berger's argument about human-animal relations in modernity, which has had a significant impact on recent scholars and theorists.² According to Berger, industrial capitalism has ruptured the once-intimate relationship between humans and other animals: the intensification of agri-

¹ For a thoughtful and recent study of "the ways an animal looks at a human and how a human responds to such a gaze", see Wendy Woodward, *The Animal Gaze: Animal Subjectivities in Southern African Narratives* (2008).

² See for example Jutta Ittner's essay on the animal gaze, which begins with a question very similar to my own: "What makes us come back again and again to the zoo, that sad 'monument to the impossibility of animal encounters', in order to catch the eye of the tiger behind bars—what are we hoping for?" she asks, citing Berger (2005).

culture distances farmers from their livestock, and urbanization separates city-dwellers from wild and rural nature. Real animals have disappeared, Berger claims, and been replaced by forms of virtual animality such as spectacle (the zoo) and anthropomorphism (Disney cartoons). “Today”, he concludes, “[m]ost people scarcely ever meet the gaze of an animal” (1971, 1043). According to this theory, the Sumatran tiger in Regent’s Park Zoo is not a real animal at all: she is a simulacrum, a sign of the absence of an authentic human-animal relationship.

[N]owhere in a zoo can a stranger encounter the look of an animal. At the most, the animal’s gaze flickers and passes on. They look sideways. They look blindly beyond. They scan mechanically. They have been immunized to encounter Therein lies the ultimate consequence of their marginalization. That look between animal and man, which may have played a crucial role in the development of human society, and with which, in any case, all men had always lived until less than a century ago, has been extinguished (Berger 1980, 26).³

However Berger’s thesis also requires him to posit an authentic visual relationship that preceded capitalist modernity. In this lost, primordial and once-crucial exchange,

[t]he eyes of an animal when they consider a man are attentive and wary.... Man becomes aware of himself returning the look. The animal scrutinizes him across a narrow abyss of non-comprehension. This is why the man can surprise the animal. Yet the animal—even if domesticated—can also surprise the man. The man too is looking across a similar, but not identical, abyss of non-comprehension.... [W]hen he is *being seen* by the animal, he is being seen as his surroundings are seen by him. His recognition of this is what makes the look of the animal familiar. And yet the animal is distinct, and can never be confused with man. Thus, a power is ascribed to the animal, comparable with human power but never coinciding with it. The animal has secrets which, unlike the secrets of caves, mountains, seas, are specifically addressed to man (1980, 2-3, italics in original).

This pre- or non-modern exchange is characterized by mutuality and difference. Both human and animal look across an ‘abyss of non-comprehension’; they are familiar but not the same; their knowledge and their ignorance of each other are similar but not identical; there

³ For an extensive discussion of zoo spectatorship see Randy Malamud’s *Reading Zoos* (1998, 225-68).

is recognition but distinction; address but secrecy; expectation but surprise.

Berger notes parenthetically that this visual encounter could pertain even between humans and domesticated animals. He is referring to the kind of relationship that he attributes (rather nostalgically) to “those who live intimately with, and depend upon, animals”, for example ‘peasants’ (1980, 5). But he specifically excludes from this authentic relationship those domesticated species that he considers to be products of modernity, such as the zoo animal and the companion animal: “[t]he eye of the pet acts only as a coloured mirror”; pets are “creatures of their owner’s way of life”, a fact that “lies behind the truism that pets come to resemble their masters or mistresses” (Berger 1971, 1043; 1980, 13).⁴

Nevertheless, the gaze of a pet cat has recently inspired and preoccupied one of the most original and influential figures in contemporary theory. Shortly before his death, Jacques Derrida turned with great seriousness to questions provoked by an apparently trivial encounter: one morning, before getting dressed, he found himself naked in front of the fixed stare of his cat. Of course this is precisely the kind of relation—between ‘pet’ and ‘pet-owner’—that for Berger would preclude the possibility of a mutual encounter; however Derrida’s description is strongly reminiscent of Berger’s evocation of the pre-modern authentic relation between human and animal⁵. Berger writes of the animal’s “secrets” being “addressed to man” across a “narrow abyss of non-comprehension” (1980, 3); Derrida stresses that the animal’s gaze is an “address”, but one that is “uninterpretable, unreadable, undecidable, abyssal and secret” (2008, 8, 12). Berger asserts that ‘man’ is “being seen as his surroundings are seen by him” (1980, 3); Derrida describes the gaze of his cat as “there

⁴ Scholars and theorists of human-animal relations remain divided on this issue. Ittner, for example, repeats and accepts Berger’s judgement about the visual non-agency of pets (2005, 111). But Woodward offers a more nuanced discussion of the different potentialities implied by the gaze of different animals (2008, 91-3), while accepting that “[t]he power dynamics inherent in responding to the gaze of a feline predator or a wild baboon are very different from those inherent in the gaze of a dog with whom one lives” (92).

⁵ In fact Derrida remarks that “the cat ... is a domestic animal, but according to me not a tamed one, not trained, not ‘domesticated’” (2008, 157). This distinction opens a gap ignored or denied by Berger, between the taming effects of consumer-capitalist domesticity and the capacity of animals to resist those effects in some form or degree.

before me, there next to me, there in front of me ... [and] behind me. It surrounds me" (2008, 11). Berger argues that in the exchange of the gaze "a power is ascribed to the animal" because "[n]o animal confirms man, either positively or negatively" (1980, 3); Derrida writes that "the gaze called 'animal' offers to my sight the abyssal limit of the human: the inhuman or the ahuman, the ends of man ..." (2008, 12).

Both theories suggest that 'man' is unmanned when confronted by the gaze of an animal. What is the source, nature and history of this unsettling power of the animal gaze?

II.

The human experience of discomfiture before the gaze of other animals has a long genealogy. For many centuries the eyes of animals were thought to emit a physical force, an irradiation with the power to transfix or infect those who encountered it. In his *Natural History* (c. AD 70) Pliny describes how "[t]he eyes of night-roaming animals like cats shine and flash in the dark so that one cannot look at them", while those of the wolf "gleam and shoot out light" (Pliny 1940, 527). The thirteenth-century bestiarists hyperbolized this observation, writing that domestic cats have "such sharp sight that the brightness of their glance overcomes the power of night" (Barber 1997, 109). Renaissance natural historian Edward Topsell (1607) went further, asserting that cat's eyes "glisten above measure, especially when a man comes to see them on the sudden, and in the night they can hardly be endured for their flaming aspect" (Topsell 1981, 37). Moreover cats are "dangerous in the time of pestilence" when they are apt "to poison a man with the very looking on him" (40). The eyes of the lion are "red, fiery, and hollow.... The pupils or apples of the eye shine exceedingly, insomuch as beholding them a man would think he looked upon fire" (127). The wolf's eyes "are yellow, black, and very bright, sending forth beams like fire, and carrying in them apparent tokens of wrath and malice ..." (176).

In these descriptions, a dynamism is ascribed to the nonhuman gaze that correlates with uncertainty about human mastery over the animal in question. So, in the case of the lion, Pliny's advice (repeated by the bestiarist and Topsell) is to meet the animal's fiery gaze with abject supplication, for this noble beast "spares those bent down

before it ...” (Pliny 1940, 37).⁶ Not so the wolf, however, whose eye has “a noxious influence” such that “[i]f a wolf looks at a man before the man sees the wolf, the man will temporarily be unable to speak” (59). This belief is expanded upon by the medieval bestiary, who writes that the wolf’s eyes “shine in the night like lanterns” and “its nature is such that if it sees a man before the man catches sight of it, it can deprive him of his voice”. On the other hand “if the wolf thinks that it has been seen first, it loses its wildness and cannot run away” (Barber 1997, 70). Here is the human-canine dialectic rendered in visual terms: subject to the gaze of the wolf, the human becomes a dumb animal; subject to the human gaze, the wolf becomes docile, doglike.

Such was the mystique of the association between nonhuman menace and radiant vision that it featured as a primary characteristic of mythical creatures. In *Beowulf* (c. AD 1000) English literature’s oldest extant epic, the gaze of the beastly Grendel is described in this way: “*him of ēagum stōd / ligge gelīcost lēoht unfēger*” (Chickering 2006, 90-1); “a baleful light, / flame more than light, flared from his eyes” (Heaney 1999, 24). At the end of the poem Beowulf faces a dragon, another opponent associated with ocular potency: the word derives from the Greek *drakon*, meaning acute and penetrating vision (OED). Topsell speaks of “the vigilant eyesight of dragons”, their “most bright and clear-seeing eyes”, and their correspondingly heavy eyelids: “whenever they move upon the earth, their eyes give a sound from their eyelids much like unto the tinkling of brass” (1981, 75-7). In “The Dragon of the North”, an Estonian legend retold by

⁶ Woodward discusses a fascinating recent instance of subjection to an apparently merciful leonine gaze, described by acoustic biologist Katy Payne (Woodward 2008, 57-8). Attempting to record lions roaring at night in Etosha National Park, Payne finds herself face to face with a wild lion, separated only by a fence with a large hole in it:

I lay as still as I could, for I remembered an instruction from my childhood: in the presence of a threatening animal, you must hold perfectly still so he will think you are dead. I looked into his eyes, since that’s what I was doing when he arrived, as unblinkingly as possible (as if dead).... (Payne 1999, 136).

She remains transfixed by the lion’s eyes, which are “exquisite, brown and gold”, with a “glint” picked up from the moonlight. Eventually the lion begins to drool: “I thought, He has acknowledged that I am food and has not reached for me. He has decided not to do it.... Was the decision pragmatic or merciful?” (137). At last, after “[t]welve hours have passed since the start of our vigil”, the lion looks away, gets up and walks off; a few minutes later Payne sees that he has killed a kudu (137).

Andrew Lang, the monster's "two great eyes shone by night, and even by day, like the brightest lamps; and anyone who had the ill luck to look into those eyes became bewitched and was obliged to rush into the monster's jaws" (Lang 1949, 12). This tradition of potent vision is bequeathed to the dragons of modern fantasy: *Beowulf* scholar J.R.R. Tolkien writes of the "baleful eyes" of the fire-drake Glaurung, which cast a hypnotic spell (Tolkien 2007, 178-80, 208-9, 243), and of the eyes of the dragon Smaug, which emit piercing rays that illuminate his den "from floor to ceiling like scarlet lightning" (Tolkien 1978, 189, 192-3).

Perhaps the most vivid example of an animal attributed with preternatural ocular power was the basilisk or cockatrice, a hybrid of venomous serpent and cockerel, which according to Pliny and the bestiaries could "kill a man simply by looking at him" (Barber 1997, 184). Shakespeare relies on his audience's familiarity with this mortifying gaze, in *Romeo and Juliet* (1597) referring to "poison" in "the death-darting eye of cockatrice" (3.2.46-7) and in *Henry V* (1599) comparing the king's eyes to "[t]he fatal balls of murdering basilisks" (5.2.17)—a punning reference to a type of large cannon. To Shakespeare's audiences, such images were not mere poetic fantasies, but references to a real animal with real powers. Topsell's *History of Serpents* (1608) confirms that the "hot and venomous poison" of the cockatrice is transmitted via the animal's sight (Topsell 1981, 46-7).

No doubt these accounts of nonhuman ocular power derived, in the first instance, from observation of 'eye-shine', the reflective illumination in the eyes of night-roaming animals such as cats, dogs and wolves. Today's biologists attribute this radiance to the tapetum lucidum, an area behind the retina that enhances night vision by reflecting light back into the eye; this mechanism is present in many nocturnal species (cats, dogs, possums and so on) but lacking in diurnal ones (including humans and other apes, pigs and squirrels) (Ollivier et al. 2004). It also seems likely that this eerie phenomenon led to a durable theory about the nature of vision itself: the notion that the eye, rather than merely passively receiving images from outside, actively sends forth a kind of visual flux to apprehend the objects of its gaze. Thus Plato's *Timaeus* (c. 360 BC) describes sight as a corporeal "stream" or a "visual current [that] issues forth" from the eye (cited in Lindberg 1976, 2-3).

At least until the seventeenth century, experts continued to believe in this capacity of the eye to have physical effects on its objects, and

particularly to inflict harm. Visual beams issuing from the 'evil eye' could produce various emotional disturbances, diseases or even death in any person upon whom they were cast. Even the skeptical Reginald Scot, author of the *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584) describes how dis-tempered humours, "ascending into the highest parts of the head, doo fall into the eies, and so are from thence sent foorth" as "beames and streames" with a "fierie force". It is by this means that "the cockatrice depriveth the life, and a wolfe taketh awaie the voice of such as they suddenlie meete withall and behold" (Scot 1930, 281-2). Nearly a century later Sir Thomas Browne's *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (1672), another work dedicated to discrediting superstitious views of the natural world, continued to assert that "venenation shooteth from the eye, and that this way a Basilisk may empoysen ... is not a thing impossible ... for the visible species of things strike not our senses immaterially, but streaming in corporall rayes..." (Browne 1981, 183). Conceived as a current, flame, fire, stream of particles, or corporeal ray, eyesight was not just an active force in itself but also a vehicle for other physical effects: poisons, contagions, influences of various kinds. Moreover this visual flux seemed especially menacing because it was observably strongest in the gaze of humanity's most feared animal predators: wolves and big cats.

Yet, although the theory of visual flux survived in the work of early modern skeptics, its influence was weakening in two ways. First, the connection between vision and the power of actual animals was being challenged by empirical evidence. Thus even the broad-minded Edward Topsell—who accepts the existence not only of the basilisk but also the unicorn, the lamia and the winged dragon—dismisses as "fabulous rather than true" the belief that the gaze of wolves causes muteness in humans and vice versa (1981, 179). Browne rejects the link between lupine vision and power over humans still more emphatically. He asserts this "conceit" to be "daily confutable almost every where out of England"—presumably because in his time wolves had already become scarce in England and were in retreat on the Continent—and suggests that the source for the notion was probably not a "venomous emanation, but a vehement fear which naturally produceth obmutescence ..." (Browne 1981, 187). The shape of this argument demonstrates a fundamental shift in thinking about the nonhuman natural world occurring during the seventeenth century, whereby the authority of classical and medieval sources was first supplemented and then replaced by the emphasis on skepticism,

rationalism and empirical observation associated with Francis Bacon, René Descartes and other proponents of the ‘New Science’.

The second way in which the power of animal vision was undermined was by the rise of geometrical theories of vision. Johannes Kepler’s 1611 theory of the retinal image, upon which Descartes based his 1637 essay on optics (Lindberg 1976), represented the progressive abandonment of the ancient and medieval notion of vision as an unpredictable, risky, corporeal network—a complex interchange of fiery rays, material atoms, contagious vapours and animal spirits—in favour of an abstract and mathematical concept of vision as a field of intersecting vectors. One consequence of this paradigm shift was the removal of visual agency from nonhuman animals and its sole investiture in the human mind, which alone possessed the capacity to apprehend optical geometry. In this way, the New Science struck flat the thick rotundity of the world; the rich multi-dimensionality of pre-modern visual phenomenology was reduced to a series of two-dimensional planes. The translation of vision into a problem in geometry is a crucial enabling factor in the modern conquest of nature, whereby each field of modern enterprise acquired its own mathematical application: navigation and cartography for the exploration and colonization of space; astronomy and optics for the reconceptualization of time; perspectivism for the development of realism in the visual arts. And for the study of nonhuman animals: anatomy, focusing on the measurement, weighing and tabulation of organs and bones. In this way the animal body was also reduced to a layered series of planes, to be opened up and mapped by the dissecting gaze of the natural philosopher.

The translation of visual phenomena into metrical formulae, and the accompanying translation of the nonhuman animal into a dissectible body, is central to Descartes’ theoretical contribution. In the *Discourse on Method* (1637) he sets out a series of epistemological steps: first he establishes the existence of the cogitating mind “entirely distinct from the body”; then contemplates the world as “the object studied by geometers”; then “[f]rom the description of inanimate bodies and plants I went on to describe animals, and in particular men” (Descartes 1985, 127-9, 134). The undertaking to treat the organic body the same way geometry treats the earth leads inevitably to dissection:

so there may be less difficulty in understanding what I am shall say, I should like anyone unversed in anatomy to take the trouble, before

reading this, to have the heart of some large animal with lungs dissected before him (for such a heart is in all respects sufficiently like that of a man) (134).

The point of this demonstration is to show that the body (of the animal, and by inference, of the human also) operates according to purely “mathematical” principles, “just as necessarily as the movement of a clock follows from the force, position, and shape of its counterweights and wheels” (136). Accordingly, referring to the radiance in the eyes of “those creatures which can see in the dark, such as cats”, Descartes insists that this “action is nothing other than light”—explicitly ruling out older theories of vision as a material flux, poison, contagion or heat (154). He thereby subjects the power of the animal gaze to the rule of geometrical optics, and hence to the epistemological mastery of the philosopher. The obvious next step follows: Descartes recommends the reader test out these principles by dissecting “the eye of an ox or some other large animal” (166).

By the time we get to the heyday of Enlightenment, at the end of the eighteenth century, the older notion of visual flux seems to have been mostly extirpated from natural historical discourse. Thomas Bewick’s *General History of Quadrupeds* (1790) makes no mention of it in the entries on cats, wolves or reptiles. Only his description of the lion includes an echo of the tradition, albeit a qualified one: “his round and fiery eye-balls ... upon the least irritation, seem to glow with peculiar lustre ...” (Bewick 1980, 201, italics added).

III.

Of course the Enlightenment emphasis on the sovereignty of reason and empirical observation, and the scientific and industrial practices that followed, produced powerful forms of reaction and resistance. These included, in the cultural sphere, Romanticism and Gothicism, which continued to evoke the archaic, the spiritual, the irrational and the supernatural in defiance of the modern, materialistic, rationalistic and positivistic spirit of the age. Accordingly the ancient notion of a dynamic animal gaze, however decisively it was ruled out by natural philosophy, remained a feature of the literary imagination.

A typical Romantic example is provided by William Blake’s “The Tyger” (1794). “In what distant deeps or skies / Burnt the fire of thine eyes?” the poet asks, evoking the intense visual energy of the animal,

“burning bright / In the forests of the night”, in contrast to the “hammer”, “chain”, “furnace” and “anvil” that represent the fetters of early industrial Britain (Blake 1970, 148). Blake’s models were the captive big cats of London’s Tower menagerie—the forerunner of Regent’s Park Zoo—who spent their whole lives in dark stone cells. Perhaps for this reason, the painting that accompanies the poem in *Songs of Experience* depicts a blunt, soft, feeble creature, glancing sideways with eyes that appear dim and apprehensive. By pitting poem against painting, fiery gaze against a look of subjection, Blake implies a contradiction between what a tiger ought to be and what it is reduced to by colonial and industrial modernity.

The Gothic genre—Romanticism’s dark twin—evoked the fearsome aura of the animal gaze with great vigour. In “The Raven” (1845), Edgar Allen Poe writes of “the fowl whose fiery eyes now burned into my bosom’s core” (Poe 1966, 755). And “The Black Cat” (1843), an early fictional recognition of the link between animal abuse and violence towards other humans, begins with an attack against the animal gaze when the narrator cuts out one of his cat’s eyes. This cruelty leads to more violence: he hangs the animal, then acquires another cat which he also comes to hate because it, too, has only one eye. When he is prevented by his wife from killing this second animal, he kills her instead and walls her up in the basement. The murder is discovered because unwittingly he has also imprisoned the cat, which yowls until police tear down the wall, discovering the decomposing corpse of the wife with the cat sitting on her head, its “solitary eye of fire” shining in the darkness (Poe 1966, 63-70).

The survival of folk beliefs about demonic beasts with glowing eyes can be observed even in nineteenth-century works that take a sceptical attitude to the supernatural. In Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), the prosaic title character finds herself at night approached by a dog, which momentarily she mistakes for the “North-of-England spirit called a ‘Gytrash’” which “haunted solitary ways” in the form of a large beast; she half-expects the animal “look up, with strange pretercanine eyes, in my face” (Brontë 1996, 128). Such creatures, with eyes that like embers or sparks of fire, linger in British folklore, and include the Padfoot, Barguest, Hellhound, Black Shuck and Demon Cat (Matthews and Matthews 2005, 57, 78-9, 267).

Arthur Conan Doyle’s *Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902) was inspired by such legends, but the novel’s dénouement represents nothing other than the triumph of empirical rationalism over

irrational 'superstition'. The story opens with reports that a beast is terrorizing Dartmoor: Watson's diary records the rational interpretation, that "these poor peasants ... are not content with a mere fiend dog but must needs describe him with hell-fire shooting from his mouth and eyes" (1973, 117). Yet, during the climactic scene on the darkened moor, Watson and Holmes do indeed encounter "an enormous coal-black hound" with eyes "ringed with fire" and glowing "with a smouldering glare" (167-9). Having shot the animal dead, however, they discover the scientific explanation: the villain of the story has painted the dog's eye-sockets with phosphorous. So it is that, in the first years of the twentieth century, the reader's satisfaction aligns with the triumph of the analytic scrutiny of science as it discredits the uncanny gaze of the animal.

A similar pattern shapes Rudyard Kipling's 1897 story "The Tomb of his Ancestors". John Chinn, whose father and grandfather have been imperial administrators in Madhya Pradesh, arrives in India to discover a legend among the local Bhil people that his ancestor rode a clouded tiger as a sign of supernatural authority. Perceiving the younger Chinn as the reincarnation of his grandfather, the Bhils become fearful and resistant to the current project of the imperial administration, which is to vaccinate them against smallpox. The story's denouement requires Chinn to kill a clouded tiger in order to disperse the uncanny aura that surrounds him. Describing the animal emerging from his cave, Kipling writes:

He looked leisurely for some ten seconds, and then deliberately lowered his head, his chin dropped and drawn in, staring intently at the man...; so that, head on, as he stood, he showed something like a diabolically scowling pantomime-mask. It was a piece of natural mesmerism that he had practiced many times on his quarry, and though Chinn was by no means a terrified heifer, he stood for a while, held by the extraordinary oddity of the attack...

"My word!" he thought. "He's trying to frighten me!" and fired between the saucer-like eyes, leaping aside upon the shot (Kipling 1988, 131).

The power of the animal's gaze, whether natural or supernatural, is answered down the barrel of a gun; it is extinguished by the Cartesian conjunction of instrumentalism, visual geometry and mastery of the nonhuman world. With the death of the tiger the Bhils' supernatural suspicion of Chinn evaporates, and he is able to administer vaccinations to them all.

Around the same time H.G. Wells—perhaps of all novelists the most ardent proponent of science—also focused on the visual aspect of the confrontation between human and animal. In *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) the narrator Prendick finds himself aboard a vessel carrying a cargo of wild animals to the Pacific island where Moreau has his experimental station. Prendick's first anticipation of the nature of the doctor's work occurs when he encounters M'ling, who is one of the products of Moreau's attempts to create human beings out of animals through surgical, chemical and hormonal adjustment. Facing M'ling at night, in the light of a lantern, Prendick notices that "the eyes that glanced at me shone with a pale green light", suggestive of a "stark inhumanity" (Wells 1996, 76). Later, having landed on Moreau's island, Prendick is nervously exploring when through the undergrowth he observes "something" drinking from a stream. At first, the figure seems to be human insofar as he returns and holds Prendick's look:

He looked up guiltily, and his eyes met mine. Forthwith he scrambled to his feet and stood wiping his clumsy hand across his mouth and regarding me.... So, staring one another out of countenance, we remained for perhaps the space of a minute. Then, stopping to look back once or twice, he slunk off among the bushes ... (96-7).

By their second meeting, however, Prendick has begun to realize that the island's inhabitants are not entirely human. This perception is expressed as shift in visual relationship:

looking hard, I distinguished through the interlacing network the head and body of the brute I had seen drinking. He moved his head. There was an emerald flash in his eyes as he glanced at me from the shadow of the trees, a half-luminous colour, that vanished as he turned his head again.... In another moment he had vanished behind some bushes. I could not see him, but I felt that he had stopped and was watching me again.

What on earth was he—man or animal?... I was anxious not to show the fear that seemed chilling my backbone. I pushed through a tangle of tall white-flowered bushes, and saw him twenty yards beyond, looking over his shoulder at me and hesitating. I advanced a step or two looking steadfastly into his eyes.

"Who are you?" said I. He tried to meet my gaze.

"No!" he said suddenly, and turning, went bounding away from me through the undergrowth. Then he turned and stared at me again. His eyes shone brightly out of the dusk under the trees (100).

The human-animal relationship, and the relationship between the concepts of humanity and animality, are here dependent on the politics of the gaze. The human's imagined mastery consists of an ability to out-stare the non-human. At their first meeting, when the Leopard-Man met and held Prendick's regard, he seemed more man than anything. Hence at their next meeting he seems worthy of the question "Who are you?" (rather than "What is it?") But his response to that question, even though spoken, reveals the beast in him: he tries to meet the man's gaze again but he cannot. The same idea occurs in Kipling's 1894 *Jungle Book*, where the wild boy Mowgli's adult separation from his animal clan is signalled when he looks into the eyes of his adoptive wolf family, and those of his friends the panther Bagheera and the bear Baloo, and finds that none can meet his gaze. "He is a man", declares the tiger Shere Kahn, "and none of us can look him between the eyes" (Kipling 1955, 18).

Eye to eye, then, the power of the human gaze out-ranks that of the animal. But something unsettling can still occur when the animal watches, stares or glances at the human in a way that escapes the latter's gaze: "I could not see him", says Prendick after the Leopard Man makes off into the undergrowth, "but I felt that he had stopped and was watching me again" (Wells 1996, 100). Here the animal gains mastery of the field of vision while the human loses it. Prendick senses his vulnerability to the beastly gaze physically, as a chill up his spine. Moreover what makes this different from being watched by another human is the "emerald flash", the "half-luminous colour" in the glance of the "brute", the radiance of his eyes as he stares from the shade. The gaze of the animal still achieves its most potent and uncanny expression as a flash, spark, light or fire. Ultimately, however, it is extinguished using the same method as Kipling's John Chinn. The Leopard-Man becomes a rebel against Moreau's authority, and is hunted. Prendick finds the fugitive first, and "seeing the creature there in a perfectly animal attitude, with the light gleaming in its eyes", he aims his revolver "between its terror-struck eyes" and shoots (Wells 1996, 166).

Prendick's visual encounters with M'Ling, the Leopard Man and the other Beast Folk remain unsettling as long as he has no guaranteed or predetermined mastery of the visual field. Small wonder that the end of the novel, having witnessed the death of Moreau and the 'regression' of the beast-folk into 'mere' animals, Prendick retreats as far as he can from the insecure boundary between human and other

species. He takes refuge from the animal gaze in the most modern of ocular pursuits: the study of astronomy and optics, which allows access to “whatever is more than animal in us” by translating the visual field into pure geometry, abstracted from the other senses and from animality itself (Wells 1996, 207).

IV.

In the fictions of Wells, Kipling and Conan Doyle we see the fiery animal gaze extinguished by the epistemologies of analytic rationalism and evolutionary theory, the instrumentalism of the gun, and the accompanying ideology of human mastery over nature. Berger’s hypothesis of a rupture between humans and other species, embodied by a break in the mutuality of the gaze, would seem to be borne out.

Amongst the modernist writers who were the literary successors of the Victorians, evocations of the animal gaze were most often elegiac, expressing mourning for a lost, primeval authenticity. For example Ernest Hemingway’s final and unfinished novel, *The Garden of Eden* (posthumously published in 1980), turns on the traumatic memory of David, the narrator, witnessing his father’s shooting of a bull elephant in Africa. Fallen but not yet dead, the elephant returns the child’s appalled gaze: “[h]e did not move but his eye was alive and looked at David. He had very long eyelashes and his eye was the most alive thing David had ever seen” (Hemingway 1980, 199). And D.H. Lawrence describes the stallion St. Mawr, in his 1925 novel of that name, as having “great, glowing, fearsome eyes, arched with a question, and containing a white blade of light like a threat. What was his non-human question, and his uncanny threat?”. Yet the very dynamism of this animal dooms him: too proud and dangerous to ride, he is first threatened with castration, and eventually ends up “slavishly” serving human profit on a stud farm (Lawrence 1925, 20, 154). Again, these nostalgic snapshots of the animal gaze confirm Berger’s analysis, since they subscribe to a theory of animals’ marginalization. “The horse is superannuated, for man”, writes Lawrence, adding “[b]ut alas man is even more superannuated, for the horse” (1925, 90). In a similar vein, Berger describes how

[d]uring the 20th century, the internal combustion engine displaced draught animals in streets and factories. Cities, growing at an ever

increasing rate, transformed the surrounding countryside into suburbs where field animals, wild or domesticated, became rare. The commercial exploitation of certain species (bison, tigers, reindeer) has rendered them almost extinct. Such wild life as remains is increasingly confined to national parks and game reserves (Berger 1980, 10-11).

However, because “[t]he animals of the mind cannot be so easily dispersed”, the material marginalization of animals in the twentieth century was accompanied by the proliferation of conceptual (or, we might say, theoretical) animals. As they vanished from physical reality, animals multiplied in the psyche. Yet even these virtual animals, Berger insists, “have been co-opted into other categories so that the category *animal* has lost its central importance” (15). When industrial modernity thinks about animals, then, “animals are always the observed. The fact that they can observe us has lost all significance. They are the objects of our ever-extending knowledge” (14).

This effacement of the animal gaze by twentieth-century theories of knowledge is vividly illustrated by psychoanalysis. One of Freud’s most famous case histories is known popularly as “The Wolf Man” (1918), a title that refers to a dream the patient had as a young boy: through the windows of his room he sees, sitting in branches of a tree outside, several white wolves, staring menacingly at him: “[i]t seemed as though they had riveted their whole attention on me” (Freud 1979, 259). By reading the wolves as representations of the boy’s father, Freud manages to reverse the look that the animals direct towards the boy, interpreting it as the child’s fantasy of observing his father having sex. Even real animals are interpreted by Freud as representations of unconscious fears and desires. The Wolf Man confesses that as a child “he used to torment beetles and cut caterpillars to pieces”, “to catch flies and pull off their wings, to crush beetles underfoot”, and that “[o]n other occasions he ... enjoyed beating horses”, but to Freud these acts of interspecies violence are merely displacements of the child’s “sadistic impulses” towards other small children whom he perceives as rivals for his father’s affection (Freud 1979, 244, 255, 355). Thus Freudian theory epitomizes the transposition—characteristic of the twentieth century, according to Berger—of animality into fantasy, myth, dream and fiction, and the associated eclipse of the animal gaze.

V.

The second half of the twentieth century saw, at least in wealthy and heavily urbanised societies, a resurgence in the desire for connection with 'nature', and especially with animals—a resurgence closely associated with a growing tendency to blame industrial modernity for despoliation of the organic environment and depletion of human beings' relationship to it. Widespread manifestations of this post-modern trend included the proliferation of urban parks and zoos; the rise of the television nature documentary; a growth in numbers of companion animals; the renaissance of the vegetarian, animal rights and environmental movements; and an efflorescence of interest in wildlife study, habitat conservation, bush walking and ecotourism (Franklin 1999, 45-61). The representation of human-animal relations in literature and theory was no less thoroughly affected. If, as Berger argued, industrial modernity involved the disappearance of animals, and the extinction of the human encounter with their gaze, then the attempt to reverse those tendencies has been a strong feature of postindustrial and postmodern cultures. Yet this reversal also undercuts some of Berger's assumptions, for the gaze that proves most unsettling in postmodernity often derives from the very animals he considered incapable of possessing one: industrialized livestock, laboratory specimens, zoo captives, urban pests and pets. Although they are, no less than their human counterparts, the products of modernity, these creatures are often shown in postmodern texts and theories to be capable of resisting or escaping its structures.

In Margaret Atwood's futuristic satire *Oryx and Crake*, the narrator Jimmy recalls as a child visiting the laboratory where his father worked and meeting the eyes of the 'pigoons', pigs genetically modified to produce multiple organs for transplantation into human recipients, whose "tiny, white-lashed pink eyes" look up at Jimmy "as if they saw him, really saw him, and might have plans for him later" (Atwood 2003, 26). Later, after surviving a GE virus that has wiped out the rest of *Homo sapiens*, Jimmy is troubled by a sense of being observed by "someone unseen, hidden behind the screen of leaves, watching him slyly" (46); this cryptic observer turns out to be one of the many feral animals, descendents of laboratory escapees and bio-engineered pets, who have taken over the post-apocalyptic landscape.

Other writers focus on more mundane animals to signify a crisis in the psycho-social foundations of contemporary urban life.

Jonathan Noel, the protagonist of Patrick Süskind's *The Pigeon* (1989), flees the village of his birth because his wife's infidelity exposes him to "public attention"; he settles in Paris and dedicates himself to avoiding the gaze of others by withdrawal into a tiny apartment, the only environment over which he can exercise absolute control (Süskind 1989, 3). Yet even this modest security is destroyed by a single encounter with the gaze of an animal—a pigeon he encounters outside his apartment door. "It had laid its head to one side and was glaring at Jonathan with its left eye. This eye ... was dreadful to behold lashless, browless, quite naked, turned quite shamelessly to the world and monstrously open" (9). This gaze overwhelms Jonathan with "a riotous mass of the most random terrors":

"You've had it! ... no human being can go on living in the same house with a pigeon, a pigeon is the epitome of chaos and anarchy, a pigeon that whizzes around unpredictably, that sets its claws in you, picks at your eyes, a pigeon that never stops soiling and spreading the filth and havoc of bacteria and meningitis virus, ... you won't be able to leave your room ever again, will have to starve, will suffocate in your excrement ..." (12).

The pigeon's eye contaminates Jonathan's compulsive social hygiene; it possess the same contagious virulence that was attributed to the gaze of certain animals in pre-modern theories of vision. Merely seeing himself seen by the bird leaves Jonathan susceptible to bacterial and viral infection; he even imagines himself contracting the fecal incontinence for which pigeons are everywhere notorious.

Similarly, in Keith Ridgway's *Animals* (2007), the presence—or even the imagined presence—of otherwise familiar animals embodies an escalating sense of giddy helplessness. Ridgway's narrator suffers from a growing panic that, rather than being explained by any rational or clearly identifiable cause, seems to be a response to an over-complex and unhealthily artificial society. As in Süskind's novel, this anxiety is first evoked by the menacing gaze of an animal, here "a large, dark dog" who appears walking "with a great swagger ... right down the middle of the sodden roadway, as if it was in charge here".

It glanced this way and that with huge cloudy eyes, and paused, and went on, and looked, as it passed, directly into the café—directly, it seemed, at me—registering my stare, taking note of me, its hard intelligent mind considering and then dismissing me (Ridgway 2007, 38).

Later, after a series of ludicrous accidents, the narrator ends up trapped in a city park at night. In a state of increasing agitation he imagines that he sees the now-luminous gaze of the same animal: “at the edge of the path, I thought I saw two reddish pinpricks of light, at knee height, quite close together” (140-41). Abandoning all pretence of calm, he clambers to the top of a roundabout and, looking around at the darkness, envisions it full of “animals everywhere. The dark was alive with forms, with life, with the idea of living things” (144). And again there follows a febrile interior monologue in which animals appear as the incarnation of all the forces that threaten the fragile scaffolding of contemporary urban life.

We live on manufactured surfaces, inside boxes, with everything brought to us ... and we believe we are above it all, that the world is ours, but really we know nothing here, we have forgotten what the world is, we have forgotten the terror and the threat, ... [W]e give each other science and we give each other comfort, and we think we are ancient but we are new, and we think that we are safe but we're not, and we think we are special but we're surrounded, and we think we are in control but we're surrounded, and we think we are alone but we're surrounded—by animals (144-5).

One way of responding to the postmodern return of this kind of atavistic fear, of course, is to reach back nostalgically to the kinds of mastery that seemed appropriate to human-animal relations during the reign of high modernity. This tendency is demonstrated in Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* (2002), which centres on the story of a young man and a Bengal tiger marooned together on the lifeboat in the Pacific. The protagonist, Pi, decides that he can only survive by establishing territorial mastery over his companion, and does so by a combination of techniques derived from the theories of scientific behaviourism and practised in zoos and circuses.⁷ In particular he dominates the animal through eye contact: using a technique he explicitly associates with zookeepers, Pi stares “wide-eyed and defiant” into the tiger's eyes, until eventually the latter “lick[s] his nose, groan[s] and turn[s] away”. From that point, we are told, Pi's mastery is “no longer in question” (Martel 2002, 222).

There is, of course, another way of responding. Although the gaze of animals in postmodern culture is often challenging or even menacing, it can be taken as an opportunity not for panic or despair, nor

⁷ For a fuller discussion of this novel see Armstrong (2008).

for a reactionary renewal of mastery, but rather for a new set of theoretical and material relations. This is the kind of response portrayed in Peter Höeg's *The Woman and the Ape* (1996) when the privileged, bourgeois protagonist Madelene encounters an ape captured from the wild for display in Regent's Park Zoo.

Then she met the ape's gaze.

It was open, incalculable.

Madelene ... had the feeling that she was being unmasked, spied on, scrutinized, as though it saw right through her, saw her naked, devoid of make-up and, worse still, saw her pathetic inner self, her insecurity, her worthlessness (Höeg 1996, 31).

Unlike the characters in the other novels just discussed, however, Madelene responds to the gaze co-operatively: she takes the peach offered her by the ape, and so moves into a relationship with him that will completely re-make her view of society and her place in it. It is the possibility of this kind of response that returns us, at last, to Jacques Derrida's contemplation of the experience of being gazed at by his cat.

VI.

Echoing Berger, Derrida argues that "from Descartes to the present", in Western cultures, "the language both of ... refined philosophical argumentation and of everyday acceptance and common sense" has been structured by the refusal of human beings to take "account of the fact that what they call 'animal' could *look at* them, and *address* them from down there, from a wholly other origin" (Derrida 2008 13, 27, italics in original). Unlike Berger, however, he believes that this tradition can be disrupted—deconstructed, perhaps—by an encounter with the gaze of any animal, even a little house cat.

"[C]aught naked, in silence, by the gaze of an animal, for example, the eyes of a cat, I have trouble, yes, a bad time overcoming my embarrassment" (Derrida 2008, 3-4). "I have ... a bad time" is a translation of "*j'ai du mal*", an expression which "also evokes the sense of evil or a curse" (Wills, in Derrida 162 n. 4). Derrida loves puns, and this one associates the cat's gaze with malediction, recalling the long tradition of the evil eye and the potential for harm thought to reside in the eyes of cats, wolves and other beasts. In Derrida's thought, this gaze will prove most harmful to the theories

of animality and humanity that have dominated European thought for several centuries.

He posits that a properly attentive and open encounter with any animal's gaze must entail a challenge to the fantasy of objective knowledge of what we like to call 'nature'. For in this case, what is observed is not a mere object of vision, passively vulnerable to human scrutiny, but a subject of vision, the source of a gaze in which humans are objects too.

The animal is there before me.... And from the vantage of this being-there-before-me it can allow itself to be looked at, no doubt, but also—something that philosophy perhaps forgets, perhaps being this calculated forgetting itself—it can look at me. It has its point of view regarding me (Derrida 2008, 11).

Here Derrida draws on twentieth-century phenomenology, which challenged the faith shown by positivist theory in the possibility of a truly objective structure of observation. "The positivist concept of being" requires "a negativist conception of the seer, which must be an incorporeal and nonsensorial knowing agency, an immaterial spirit ..." (Lingis, in Merleau-Ponty 1968, lv). In other words, positivism imagines an observer who sees but cannot be seen, who undertakes abstract scrutiny from a non-place, a point of view outside the field of vision. For the phenomenologists of the second half of the twentieth century, this came to be seen as delusional. Jean-Paul Sartre insisted that the eye of the seer always depends upon the gaze of the other (1969). Maurice Merleau-Ponty theorized that participation in the visible only becomes possible because both seer and seen are caught up in the 'flesh' of the world (1968). And Jacques Lacan described how the geometrical mapping of visible space, inaugurated in the Renaissance, allows the humanist subject to remain blind to its own subjection to the gaze (1979). For all these thinkers, it is only possible to look if one is the kind of being that can also be looked at.

Derrida, "in front of the insistent gaze of the animal", comes to the same conclusion (2008, 5). And since to be looked at—indeed to be surrounded by the gaze to which one is subject—is nothing other than to have a body, he keeps coming back to the simple, irreducible, material fact of his own body, which he associates with animality. The phrase he uses to describe himself in the eyes of his cat is "*à poil*": a common expression for 'naked', literally meaning 'down to one's

(animal) hairs” (Wills, in Derrida 2008, 162 n. 5). A little later he speaks of being “as naked as a beast” (Derrida 2008, 4). And while insisting on the corporeality of his own point of view, Derrida also reminds his audience (and himself, perhaps) of the materiality of his scrutinizer: “the cat I am talking about is a real cat, truly, believe me, *a little cat*. It isn’t the *figure* of a cat” (6, italics in original).

The look directed at him by this little cat also invites Derrida to deconstruct the most formidable and durable of distinctions used to reinforce the boundary between humans and (other) animals: language. This, of course, was the crux of Descartes’ theory: the ‘fact’ that only humans could use linguistic signs meaningfully meant that only humans possessed ‘mind’. Derrida, is not interested in whether animals other than *Homo sapiens* can use language in the human sense. Instead he suggests widening our understanding of what language might mean, so that the gaze of a cat might be understood not as a mere “reaction” (according to the Cartesian and evolutionary notion of animals as machines programmed by instinct, or by genes), nor as “speech”, but as a “response” and an “address” (Derrida 2008, 8, 13). And he goes on to argue, with uncharacteristic directness, that such a reconsideration of our dominant theories about animality must also entail an urgent reassessment of how animals are treated; that refusal to encounter the gaze of animals comprises a “disavowal” of their subjection to “cruelty” and “violence” of “unprecedented proportions” by industrial and technoscientific systems “on a global scale” (25-6).

Of course, as Donna Haraway points out, in order to engage appropriately with the gaze of animals, both philosophy and practice need to learn from other ways of ‘gazing upon’ (or theorizing) animals. She suggests that in order to consider “what the cat might actually be doing, feeling, thinking, or perhaps making available to him in looking back at him that morning”, Derrida could have read the work of ethologists like “Jane Goodall or Marc Bekoff or Barbara Smuts” who have “met the gaze of living, diverse animals and in response undone and redone themselves and their sciences” (Haraway 2007, 19-21).⁸ It is no accident that these are researchers who prefer to observe animals in natural environments, rather than in the

⁸ Actually, Derrida seems to agree with Haraway’s criticism when he criticises Kant, Heidegger, Levinas and Lacan for failing to integrate “progress in ethological or primatological knowledge” into their theories of animality (Derrida 2008, 89).

laboratory, for the latter is a space purpose-built to eclipse animals' gaze, and to grant the scientific observer that "incorporeal and non-sensorial knowing agency" which Lingis describes above. Lynda Birke offers an instance of the practices required to maintain this fantasy of a transcendent point of observation when she cites a technician's remark that "the scientists in the lab insisted that she put the rats in opaque cages. They did not like having rats in clear cages because the 'animal could look at you'" (2003, 215-16).

By contrast, studying animals in the environments proper to them means that the body of the human observer is inescapably caught up in the visual field, along with her or his subjects.⁹ And it means forgoing the abstract geometry to which modernity reduces the gaze, and instead allowing vision to regain its interconnection with those other sense networks—aural, tactile, olfactory and pheromonal—to which animals are attuned. Moreover, only by observing them in context can the true diversity and complexity of animal's gazes be recognized; hence field studies document not one animal gaze, but a whole bestiary of visual transactions. Cats "look around" to feign indifference in response to an "observer's gaze" (Leyhausen 167); they signal changes in mood by "pupil expansion" or the "degree of opening or closing of the eyelids" (Morris 1996, 179). Dogs and wolves indicate aggression with "eyes large" and focused in a "direct stare"; "narrow[ing]" of the eyes accompanies attack; "blinking", "eye closure" and "looking away" can communicate respect for a social superior; but so can "constantly looking towards" senior pack members (Fox 1971, 45-6; 1977, 732-5). Amongst primates, staring with "eyebrows raised" indicates a challenge and "eyebrows lowered" suggests submission" (Zeller 1987, 435-6), yet "trying to catch the other's eye" and even "gaz[ing] intensely into each other's eyes" can also be a means of "reconciliation" after conflict (Goodall 1986, 435-7).

Derrida's thought comes nearest to these kinds of observation when he cites Martin Buber on the meaning and liveliness of the nonhuman look: "[a]n animal's eyes have the power to speak a great language.... The beginning of this cat's glance, lighting up under the touch of my glance, indisputably questioned me" (Buber 1958,

⁹ Perhaps no one has written more evocatively about this than Jane Goodall, who describes with (sometimes painful) honesty her own sensory and emotional experiences of living amongst chimpanzees, along with their reactions to her presence and the long-term impact of her studies upon their world (Goodall 1971). See also Woodward's extensive discussion of the genre of popular field ethology (2008).

96-7, cited in Derrida, 164 n. 11). The phrase “lighting up” restores the kind of radiant power that humans once perceived in the eyes of animals, while the word “glance” suggests a more appropriate human-feline visual transaction than a “gaze”, if Leyhausen is correct in asserting that cats usually hate to be stared at intensely (1979, 167-8). Indeed, when he goes on to describe the discomfiture of tigers in zoos as a result of constant exposure to the human gaze, Leyhausen offers another perspective on the troubling experience with which I began this chapter.

In bringing together philosophy, the arts, and the sciences, perhaps our new theories about animals—our new ways of “gazing upon” them—will allow us to learn from animals as well as about them; to encounter them with greater respect; to know when to catch their eye and when to avert our own, when to gaze intensely in the spirit of reconciliation, and when to glance away in shame.

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