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Finding Agency in Nonhumans

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“Agents of Description”

Animals, Affect, and Care in Thalia Field’s *Experimental Animals: A Reality Fiction* (2016)

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I explore questions of laboratory animal agency in dialogue with Thalia Field’s literary text “Experimental Animals: A Reality Fiction” (2016). Using the framework of “care” (understood, following María Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, as a multi-dimensional concept comprising affect, ethics, and practice), I consider how Field’s synaesthetic descriptions of animal suffering create an affective response in readers, alerting them to a shared carnal vulnerability. Indeed, rather than anthropomorphizing animals through narration or focalization, Field “stays with the body” to consider how animals call to us not as experimental objects, but as ethical subjects, how they become – in other words – agents of the description (Stewart 2016). To develop this idea, I introduce the “practiced” dimension of care. More specifically, I explore how Field uses narrative strategies like first-person narration and second-person address, “bridge characters” (James 2019), and juxtaposition to morally structure the text and encourage “transspecies alliances” between readers and represented animals. I argue that such devices direct and train affect, allowing us to better appreciate how conceptions of nonhuman animal agency are always contextualized within particular sets of social, cultural, historical, and disciplinary frames and practices.

Keywords: agency; care; critical animal studies; description; ethics; lab lit; laboratory animals; narratology; practice; Thalia Field.

1. INTRODUCTION

In February 2019, researchers from Zhejiang University published an article titled: “Human Mind Control of Rat Cyborg’s Continuous Locomotion with Wireless Brain-to-Brain Interface” (Zhang *et al.* 2019). By implanting microelectrodes into the brain of a living rat and mediating the motor imagery “instructions” of the human operator through a com-

puter which decoded electroencephalogram (EEG), humans took “brain control” of the rat, moving it through a maze (Zhang *et al.* 2019, 3). In the process of directing the rat, researchers argued that “a tacit understanding [formed] between the human and the rat cyborg” (*ibid.*, 7, n. 2). Yet, contra the researchers’ claim, the relationship outlined here is completely antithetical to the formation of such an understanding. Instead, what we have is a relationship which is unidirectional and wholly nonreciprocal in terms of flows of information. The animal becomes a shell through which the ghost of human consciousness passes. This highly sensational and ethically problematic¹ example exaggerates a tendency within scientific experimentation to strip animals of their agency to respond. As Ronald Bogue puts it, “the ideal of pure objectivity in [...] experimentation misconstrues the relationship between researchers and their animal subjects in which both parties affect and are affected by, one another, even in the laboratory” (2015, 170; Despret 2004). While the animal here is linguistically present, it has become what ethnographer Michael Lynch calls an “analytic” animal – that is, “data” to be interpreted, “a creature in generalized mathematical space”, which is “a product of human intervention” and invention (1988, 267, 269).

The kind of bodily puppetry we find in Zhejiang’s rat cyborg experiment has a long history. Indeed, the perceived malleability of animal bodies was central to the vivisectionist practices that helped shape the field we today recognize today as biomedicine. Writing in the nineteenth-century, Claude Bernard (1813-1878), arguably France’s most famous physiologist, would state that “[t]he scientific principle of vivisection is easy to grasp. It is always a question of separating or altering parts of the living machine, so as to study them and thus to decide how they function and for what” (Field 2016, Kindle Location 174)². In an experiment that shares uncomfortable resonance with Zhang *et al.*’s rat cyborg research, Bernard and his colleagues intervened in animal locomotion by “altering parts” of the animals’ bodies: by “damag[ing] the brain of a pigeon or

¹ To justify research on ethical grounds, researchers need to demonstrate that “the ethical cost of the research (the pain of the animals, the ultimate death of the animals) [is] either balanced or outweighed by the potential value of the research to human or animal health, the advancement of knowledge, or the good of society” (UConn Health, “Scientific and Ethical Justification”, <https://ovpr.uchc.edu/services/rics/animal/iacuc/ethics/scientific-ethical-justification/>). While research exploring methods of brain control might be able to be scientifically justified (in that it is “generalizable to other species”), it hardly seems to meet any of the categories required for ethical justification. See also APA guidelines: <https://www.apa.org/science/leadership/care/guidelines>.

² References to Field’s text will henceforth appear as Field, KL xx, or simply KL xx.

cat” the vivisectionists made the animal turn “around and around” so that it was “no longer able to walk straight” (Field, KL 174).

In this paper, I consider laboratory animal agency in dialogue with Thalia Field’s *Experimental Animals: A Reality Fiction* (2016), a literary text set during this foundational period in biomedical history. Constructed as a quasi-witness testimony, Field’s “reality fiction” unfolds as a collective statement made in a trans-historical trial that transports present-day readers hundreds of years into the past. As the title suggests, this work takes as its focus animal experimentation, critically engaging with the origins of contemporary biomedicine. The fiction is made up of a collage of historical fragments from nineteenth-century France – though, also occasionally supplemented by historical snippets from England, Europe, and “the American Republic”. Collecting and collating literary, philosophical, and scientific quotations, diary entries, letters, newspaper clippings, photos, diagrams, and political and historical information, Field weaves together an alternative narrative of “accidental activist” Marie-Françoise (“Fanny”) Bernard. Fanny, Claude Bernard’s wife, has been historically characterized as greedy, stupid, and hostile – an “executioner-woman” who fought “the freedoms of modern science” (de Monzie in Field, KL 56). Her husband, Claude, is hailed by many as the father of modern medicine and is renowned for replacing theory, philosophy, and speculation in science with “verifiable” practices like experiments on living animals. In addition, his work on “blind experimentation” – which, in the case of animal experiments involves withholding from observers the hypothesis being tested in order to avoid bias – is widely agreed to be important in the development of “scientific objectivity”. Yet, in Field’s “fiction”, it is Fanny Bernard who takes center stage, and she emerges as a sympathetic spectre-protagonist who is intuitive, intelligent, determined, and angry. Throughout, Fanny and Claude’s unhappy marriage microcosmically enacts a broader struggle between the ethical agenda of animal activists and the experimentalists’ pursuit of scientific knowledge.

Given its hybrid status as an assemblage of historical fact woven together through the fictionalized characterization of (the historical figure) Fanny, Field’s text is uniquely situated at the intersection of science and literature and, as such, offers an opportunity to explore notions of nonhuman animal agency through both of these lenses. Indeed, through its nuanced and cross-disciplinary exploration of vivisection, Field’s fiction navigates a myriad of ethical complexities pertinent to – but currently unaddressed – in contemporary biomedical experiments like Zhejiang’s rat cyborg research. Where scientific writing has, as we

will see, a tendency to downplay both the participation and presence of animals, Field's fiction uses attentive, visceral descriptions of animals to suggest that rather than "analytic", animals are "affective" beings – with "affective" here understood as an "actant [...] which has efficacy, can do things, has sufficient coherence to make a difference, produce effects, alter the course of events" (Bennett 2010, viii) ³.

In what follows, I explore some of the narrative strategies Field uses to portray animals as lively and agential *without* rendering them anthropomorphized extensions of the human ⁴. By coupling affectively engaging descriptions, and positioning techniques like an attentive "bridge character" (a concept I will expand on), Field situates her readers in a web of care where they are encouraged to turn a critical eye to science's frequent obfuscation of the agency of nonhuman animals. As I will argue, readers engage with animals in Field's text not through a single strategy of "narrative engagement"; for example, Amy Coplan's (2004) categories of "emotional contagion", "empathy", or "sympathy", but instead through a form of *careful* engagement which traverses empathy's *feeling for* with sympathy's *feeling with*.

According to María Puig de la Bellacasa, care is a multi-dimensional and multi-species concept comprising affect, ethics, and practice ⁵. In his elegant summary of Puig de la Bellacasa's work for the journal *Environmental Humanities'* "Living Lexicon", Thom van Dooren describes care as "an entry point into a grounded form of embodied and practical ethics" (2014, 292):

As an *affective* state, caring is an embodied phenomenon, the product of intellectual and emotional competencies [...]. As an *ethical* obligation, to care is to become subject to another, to recognize an obligation to look after another. Finally, as a *practical* labour, caring requires more from us than abstract well wishing, it requires that we get involved in some concrete way, that we *do*. (*ibid.*)

Taking my cue from Bellacasa's tripartite approach to care, in the sections which follow I explore care's affective, practical, and ethical

³ For more on the absence of animals in scientific reports, see Birke and Smith 1995 and Migeon 2014.

⁴ See also Lambert 2021, forthcoming.

⁵ As she writes in *Matters of Care*, Puig de la Bellacasa's conception of the triptych of care is inspired by Joan Tronto and work where care is described as including, "everything we do to maintain, continue and repair 'our world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web" (Tronto 1993, 103; emphasis added by Puig de la Bellacasa).

dimensions, considering how Field's represented animals call to us not as experimental objects but as ethical subjects. After situating my approach within the field of literary animal studies, I introduce some of the tensions between detached, observational description (often favored by nineteenth-century scientists and authors like Émile Zola) and the viscerally-affecting descriptions Fanny offers us, paying particular attention to the affective exchanges that occur when description is reframed as a haptic, rather than visual, practice. Prompted by van Dooren's contention that "While we may all ultimately be connected to one another, the specificity and proximity of connections matters" (2016, 60), the final section of the essay considers the practical dimension of care by beginning to attend to some of the narrative strategies used to create human-nonhuman "alignment" and moral "allegiance" (Smith 1999, 220). While scholars within animal studies have drawn attention to instances of animal affect and "emotional contagion" (see Baker 2000; Weik von Mossner 2017, 2018), more work is needed in exploring the practiced dimension of interspecies engagement in literature. By better accounting for the deliberate, moral structuring devices used by authors to encourage "transspecies alliances", we can better understand how conceptions of nonhuman animal agency are contextualized within particular sets of social, cultural, historical, and disciplinary frames and practices. Before coming to this point, however, I dwell a little longer on literary animals.

2. LITERARY ANIMALS

While we should be careful in drawing connections between living and textual bodies, the tendency to use and disappear animals as extensions of and surrogates for human thought, or to view them as bodies to be interpreted, is also common in literature. In their function as symbols, metaphors, and moralizing examples, animals *as animals* disappear into systems of human meaning-making. Here, too, we see a relationship which is unidirectional – we can think, for example, of animals as conduits for moral lessons in *Aesop's Fables*. While these instances of symbolic surrogacy sometimes evoke humor, they are far from harmless. As Josephine Donovan has argued, literary devices like metaphor frequently aestheticize animal pain and suffering to explore *human* feelings (2016, 46). And, even when not depicting animal suffering, the use of animals as stand-ins for humans reinforces anthropocentric modes of thought which gravitate around humans as sole sites of "mattering". Yet, at the same time, liter-

ary narratives have the potential to problematize these anthropocentric tendencies. For instance, David Herman's (2011, 2018) work on animal narration has demonstrated that along with human-centred approaches to literary animals, it is possible to find literary examples which reverse this directionality and destabilize taken-for-granted assumptions about what it means to be human.

In contrast to human-centered strategies for representing nonhuman animals like animal allegory and "anthropomorphic projection", Herman explores strategies of "zoomorphic projection" and, further along the representational continuum he posits, "Umwelt exploration". Where zoomorphic projection defamiliarizes the human through transformations where humans take on nonhuman characteristics (we can think of transformational narratives like Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* and Julio Cortázar's "Axolotl"), *Umwelt* explorations attempt to represent the experiential or phenomenological world of a nonhuman animal (found, for example, in a narrative like *Rat* by Andrzej Zaniewski). Yet, while both of these strategies perform important work in demonstrating how "nonhuman ways of encountering the world can reshape humans' own modes of encounter", neither fully capture the representation of humans and animals in Field's fiction.

Rather than the exploring strategies for representing individual humans and other animals, *Experimental Animals* focuses on *relations*, demonstrating how narratives featuring a human protagonist are capable of raising "important questions about the scope and limits of selfhood in a wider world of selves, nonhuman as well as human" (Herman 2014, 133). According to Herman, a focus on transspecies relationality "opens space for biocentric becoming" and situates the human "self within wider webs of creatural life" (*ibid.*, 133, 139). In its focus on relationality, Herman's work on "narratology beyond the human" chimes with theoretical approaches like feminist care ethics – one of the main methodological strands woven into this article. Instead of privileging an autonomous "self", proponents of this perspective argue that the world is constituted by a myriad of relationships, a "thick mesh of relational obligation", or "care" (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 3). In emphasizing relationality, the feminist ethics of care perspective "denies the possibility of an impartial moral standpoint" and instead "sees moral judgments as dependent on situative or relational contexts" (Biller-Andorno 2002, 42).

Recently, narratological work exploring transspecies encounters in literature has focused on care. In "Nonhuman Fictional Characters and the Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis" (2019), Erin James asks,

“[can] novels that refuse to anthropomorphize nonhuman characters inspire care for real-world nonhuman subjects while also avoiding the illusion that readers have direct access to the minds and emotions of nonhuman characters?” (*ibid.*, 582). In other words, can readers feel with and relate to literary animals whose depiction is not built around a recognizable human or human-like consciousness? In an attempt to answer these questions, I argue that, unlike Allan Burns, for whom “[w]ithout an interest in the minds of other animals, empathy cannot exist” (2002, 348), care is rooted in the body. It is important to note here that in focusing on the body, I do not seek to reinscribe Cartesian dualisms like mind/body; rather, as Brian Massumi writes, “body” and “corporeality” should always be understood as part of “a relation of reciprocal presupposition as modalities of action differentially belonging to the same process; in a word, dynamisms” (2014, 45)⁶. Rather than taking up in a general sense Jeremy Bentham’s famous question of “can they [animals] suffer?” here I focus specifically on the perceptible manifestations of *physical suffering* – manifestations we might describe (using the common, if contested, metaphor) as appearing on the “skin” or “surface” of animal experience⁷. In what follows, I turn to Field’s fiction to explore textually-mediated encounters with laboratory animals as both “affective” and “practiced”.

⁶ See also Stephanie Erev’s lucid synthesis of this idea in “What Is It Like to Become a Bat?” (2018). Here she argues that the body and consciousness exist on a continuum and “[t]he materialities of our bodies harbor experiences of their own, which, although inaccessible to conscious experience, nevertheless help to compose it” (*ibid.*, 136).

⁷ For more on the relationship between suffering and pain, see Oliver Massin (2020). In my focus on the body, I follow the work of scholars like Anat Pick (2011) and Ralph Acampora (2006, 2012). For Pick, while scholars like Cary Wolfe critique the “discourse of species” *internally* through “‘inside’ of the site of what used to be called the ‘self’ and the ‘subject’”, she works in the opposite direction, “*externally*, by considering the corporeal reality of living bodies” (2011, 2-3). Like Pick, Acampora turns to corporeality, seeing a focus on the body as a means through which to redress the tendency in trans-human moral theories of extensionism to “‘elevate’ nonhuman beings into our still all-too-humanist sphere of moral concern, often by drawing attention to the ‘higher’ (i.e. humanoid) mental capacities of other organisms”. In contrast, for Acampora, the “live body is the primary locus of existential commonality between human animals and other organisms, and the appreciation of commonality undergirding differentiation enables the growth of moral relationships” (2012, 236). For more on “extensionism”, see Cary Wolfe 2008.

3. AFFECT: BODIES DESCRIBED

Sew the two ears of a rabbit together, then having fused them, cut one below in order to watch the reestablishment of sensibility, and see if the action of the sympathetic might then pass from one ear to another. (Field, KL 400-405)

Drawn from Claude's "Red Notebook", the excerpt above typifies a scientific gaze that is "distancing and objectifying", transforming "*being* into *phenomenon*" (Panofsky in Donovan 2016, 16). The style of Claude's laboratory shorthand is such that "one often forgets there's any animal involved: *The lung did such, the vagus nerve such*" (KL 181). Indeed, not only does Claude's writing remove the holistic animal body from view through its jargon-heavy partitioning ("On cutting the spinal accessories the voice will be seen to stop while breathing nevertheless continues", KL 225), but it also removes his own.

Throughout *Experimental Animals*, Claude's writing serves as a counterpoint to Fanny's situated and graphic descriptions of nonhuman animals. Through their affective power, her descriptions attune readers to animal bodies, encouraging them to see glimmers of animals' affective power even in scientific excerpts like Claude's above. In an interview with Field, Lauren Choplin from the Nonhuman Rights Project observes how "*Experimental Animals* seems to have great faith in the rhetorical power of straightforward, visceral description of animal experimentation and animal suffering" (Field 2017, n.p.). She asks, "How did you want description to function in the book?". In response, Field explains how *Experimental Animals* explores "different aesthetic choices toward suffering and description" and how she is particularly interested in description's capacity to tangibly evoke suffering bodies. Throughout the fiction, Field portrays the sensory environment of the nineteenth century where individuals were able to see, feel, smell, and hear animal suffering. For example, Fanny notes how she thinks

more about animals this past year than in all the years combined: howls and barks echoing down the narrow streets, and the animals Claude lodges in the kitchen – bleeding or half-conscious – crawling with high-pitched yells into the corners, or lying in a tight ball licking their fur. (KL 219-233)

As Field's work articulates, this sensory exposure led to many antivivisectionist protests, forcing the proponents of the practice to close the doors to their laboratories indefinitely. Yet, by foregrounding descriptions which shift readers from the visual to the haptic – a shift which means

that, even from behind a closed door, Fanny “sees feelingly” the “horrific agonies of a dog just outside” – Field draws (textual) animal and human reader together through the locus of the body (KL 253).

Unlike animal narration and focalization which offer access to the “mind” or approximate the experience of animal consciousness⁸, the descriptions here evoke a type of corporeal compassion (Acampora 2006) which engages a full spectrum of the body’s sensory modalities. In place of description which operates purely through the visual, Fanny’s gaze is what Barbara Ettinger has called “matrixial”:

The matrixial gaze [...] enters visibility, disturbs it and change[s] the tableau, because it penetrates and alters the scopic field, which by definition is impure – inseparable from other unconscious dimensions of the psyche (oral, anal), informed by different sources of the sensibilities (like changes in pressure, movement, touch, etc.) and also connected to the unconscious of others in intersubjective and trans-subjective spheres. (2001, 90)⁹

Fanny’s matrixial gaze positions her as “wit(h)ness” – “a means of being with and remembering for the other through the artistic act and through an aesthetic encounter” (Pollock 2010, 831). The graphic descriptions within Field’s text are vivid enough (particularly in the quantity of action verbs they contain) to “cue a strong embodied response in the [...] reader” (Weik von Mossner 2017, 80). As animals “howl”, “bark”, “yell”, and “crawl”, they break the fiction’s diegetic frame, demonstrating the proximity of a haptic, matrixial, gaze where it is unavoidable to be “touched by what we touch” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 20).

As well as these synaesthetic descriptions, Field problematizes the “distance” of the visual sensory modality by creating a degree of proximity and continuity between Fanny’s own body and those she describes¹⁰.

⁸ Focalization describes “the selection or restriction of narrative information in relation to the experience and knowledge of the narrator, the characters or other, more hypothetical entities in the storyworld” and is loosely related to “perspective” or “point of view” (Niederhoff 2009, 115). While scholars working at the intersection of narratology and animal studies have explored the potential of narration and focalization to explore and approximate nonhuman consciousness and experience, less attention has been given to the ways in which *description* might enable or limit our engagements with literary animals. For more, see Lambert 2021, forthcoming.

⁹ While there are important differences (particularly in relation to the ethical status of art), the synaesthetic quality of the matrixial gaze shares space with Eva Hayward’s concept of “Fingeryeyes” (2010): a “haptic-optic” involving the “overlay of sensoriums and the inter- and intrachange of sensations” as well as “expressivity in the simultaneity of touching and feeling” (*ibid.*, 581).

¹⁰ For more on the ‘distance’ of vision, see Haraway (1991) 2018 and Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 97-98.

In the fiction's opening, Fanny claims that while she and Claude both did their "deeds", it is, she says with a personification that evokes a haptic intrusion into the visual, "only [her] eye into which history jabs its finger" (KL 39). Fanny seeks to clear her own name from historical smudging at the same time that she attempts to defame her husband. Significantly, her "testimony" is heavily reliant on descriptions that foreground and challenge science's and – more specifically here – her husband Claude's laboratory shorthand. In contrast to Claude's "disembodied objectivity", Fanny thrusts herself – and her body – into the limelight, using it to create proximity with the animals she describes and to demonstrate, very self-consciously, that all bodies are situated and all stories are told from a certain perspective, place, time, and affective disposition.

Fanny's descriptions of the affective impact of animal encounters on her own body play a crucial role in ensuring the readerly gaze is neither detached nor mastering – nor even sympathetic in a Smithian sense¹¹ – but is instead attentive, entangled, and responsive. With her first-person narration, Fanny draws us into her world, bringing us close to her body as she engages with animals: she "limp[s]" and her "feet burn" as she walks the street trying to find stray animals before her husband – who will use them for vivisections – does; she "slip[s] across wet stone, fall[s] forward, and injure[s] her leg badly" (KL 530), she notes how she is constantly "tired" and "exhausted" (KL 463), and how her "throat and nose burn" (KL 466). Out on the streets, looking for animals:

Shit mixes in our shoes [...] The rain makes the mud slick, and our boots suck it as we tumble into each other, hands down in the sticky mess, the cold breaking our skin. (KL 644)

With these descriptions, Fanny draws her body onto the stage, seeking to create a "conversation" with pain's "inarticulate" utterances (KL 199-204).

In her article on "bridge characters"¹², or a human character who feels compassionately towards the nonhuman characters represented, James argues that one of the ways in which human characters can bridge readerly engagement with a nonhuman animal is through a "symbolic twinning" (2019, 590) – that is, by describing the human character's emotional and cognitive responses to situations that are similar to the

¹¹ In Adam Smith's model, sympathy involves an external spectator observing, evaluating, and forming judgements about the other, making imaginative leaps across an interpersonal distance (Burgess 2011; Fairclough 2013).

¹² James draws the concept of "bridge character" from Suzanne Keen's *Empathy and the Novel* (2007).

animal character's (2019, 590-591). However, in *Experimental Animals*, we are encouraged to be cautious (and critical) about these kinds of symbolic substitutions and the attached experiential conflation. On multiple occasions, despite creating proximity between herself and animals, Fanny draws attention to strained and irresponsible analogical mappings. Pushing on correspondences between vivisectors and authors and husbands, she quotes, for example, Balzac's *Physiology of Marriage*: "27. Marriage is a science. / 28. A man cannot marry before he has studied anatomy and dissected at least one woman" (KL 193-198). And, as well as spending a great deal of time with Émile Zola and his attempts to extrapolate the scientific method to literature (KL 2838), Fanny introduces author George Lewes into the mix, quoting his contention that within the "department" of Literature, "criticism [...] is also vivisection. There is a great deal of real torture inflicted upon authors by critics" – a comparison which is questioned explicitly within the text by a "Commission chairman": "But I suppose you would scarcely compare that [...] with the fact of a living animal being cut up?" (KL 2481, 2486). "Why not?" Lewes responds.

Instead of acting as a symbolic surrogate, Fanny seeks to make her body available for a response (Despret 2013), to cultivate a corporeal presence and openness, where she – and, possibly by extension, readers – attends to and is affected by animal pain: "[n]oise penetrates the body, shaking it awake because ears haven't lids to close, though we can often choose deafness" (KL 118). Rather than "coherence", Fanny seeks conversation, "possibilities of an embodied communication" (Hayward 2010, 584; Despret 2013, 51). Instead of standing-in for animal experience, Fanny's descriptions of her own body encourage readers to *bear witness* and *care* about similar (but not identical) instances of nonhuman suffering. By drawing her body into proximity with those of animals, she allows for the circulation of affects, or a "symphysical" relationship which, according to Acampora, "designate[s] the felt sense of sharing with somebody else a live nexus as experienced in a somatic setting of direct or systematic (inter)relationship" (2012, 283). It is to these more "systematic" relations that I now turn.

4. PRACTICE: BODIES SITUATED

By coupling visceral descriptions with narrative strategies like second-person address and juxtaposition, Field begins to train affect, encouraging readers to align themselves ethically with Fanny's antivivisectionist stance. In this way affects are "accumulative" and "the iteration of

similar experiences and [...] affects [...] accumulate[s]” into “dispositions that predispose one to act and react in particular ways” (Watkins 2010, 278). Through such accumulations, Field encourages readers to both *align* themselves with Fanny’s perspective as well as feel a sense of moral *allegiance*. According to Murray Smith, “alignment” is a result of “our access to the actions, thoughts, and feelings of a character” (1999, 220) and is therefore, as Alexa Weik von Mossner writes, “a matter of narrative perspective” (2016, 83). What makes this alignment – and its entrainment of affect – particularly effective, though, is the way in which it works in concert with Murray’s other category of positioning: “allegiance”. Distinct from alignment, allegiance “refers to the way in which narrative ‘elicits responses of sympathy’ toward a character. Such responses are ‘triggered – if not wholly determined – by the *moral structure*’ of the narrative” (Smith in Weik von Mossner 2016, 83). Through its series of micro and macro conflicts, *Experimental Animals* continually asks readers to assess their alignments and allegiances – a challenge which may, in turn, lead readers to critically reflect why they have adopted particular perspectival and ethical positions. Throughout the fiction, readers participate in a process of “side-taking” in what Fritz Breithaupt has called a three-person model of empathy where one person (in this case, the reader) “observes the conflict of two others [Fanny and Claude]” (2012, 84). To use Lori Gruen’s succinct phrasing, “[w]e live in a world of conflicts and need guidance about how to resolve at least some of that conflict, some of the time” – here I look at how narrative strategies and depictions of animal agency guide readers’ alignment and moral allegiance (2012, 226).

One of the key strategies *Experimental Animals* employs to draw readers into the action of the text is second-person address: “Did you hear him [Claude] say that to understand a watch isn’t to watch it but to break it?” (KL 26). Like a finger that jabs itself into potentially passive eyes, Fanny’s frequent use of second-person address works with the visceral descriptions to draw readers out of detached, and passive observation. As well as this, it works with Fanny’s use of first-person plural to call out across textual and historical boundaries, drawing readers into her growing antivivisectionist community: is it “what we hear that determines what we’ll do?” (KL 995). Beyond the micro-level grammatical alignments, juxtaposition plays an important role in encouraging our alignment with Fanny. As alluded to in the previous section, across the novel, visceral descriptions of animal pain always occur in a “set-piece” alongside a “clinical” and disembodied excerpt from “Claude’s Red Notebook”. Where Fanny recounts how

a raspy whine pulls me to a rabbit in a box in the kitchen. She is cut practically in half, and relaxes into death when touched on the head. *What kind of greeting is this?* I think, holding her paw. (KL 301)

Claude writes, "Rabbits lose their sugar when they are varnished. Would it be the same if their spinal cords were cut at the same time?" (KL 301). Here, the shifts in register are played out across two characters, creating oppositional modes of relation: one of the embodied activist and one of the disembodied scientist¹³.

Juxtapositions like these work in conjunction with three other inter-related strategies which morally structure the text, syncing up readerly alignment *and* allegiance. Firstly, it is possible to read the fiction's judicial framing ("she goes safely to trial whose Father is a judge", KL 45) as a strategy to force readers to take a side in the conflicts. According to Breithaupt, in a three-person model of empathy, "A judicative decision can be made when it is calculated which of the two opponents is morally or legally right" (2012, 89). Again, by positioning an evocative description like "Of course the animal feels every poke and jolt without a way to cry" alongside Claude's "What morality says we can't do to those like us, science authorizes us to do to animals", Field pits two competing perceptions of animals (as either affective or analytic) against one another (KL 298). While this alone may not create a sense of allegiance with Fanny and the animals, the judicial framing of the fiction works with more localized strategies for directing allegiance. As Breithaupt writes, individuals may base their decision to take a particular side on the basis of "self-reflexivity" (2012, 89). In these instances, "[o]ne may side with the more passive party in a conflict because as an observer open is also in a more passive, receptive position" – a position which may "predispose" the observer to take sides "with the tendentially more passive of the observed persons, the victims, the sufferers, the weaker, or simply those to whom the action happens" (*ibid.*)¹⁴. While Fanny's vivid descriptions make a case for animals as affective agents, in Claude's passages, readers who are separated from the action by textual and historical boundaries and unable to intervene will likely

¹³ In *Narratology beyond the Human*, Herman compares the action-oriented register (associated with subjectivity and agency) with event-oriented register (associated with objectivity and passivity) (2018, 241). These categories can be read alongside Lynch's categories of the "naturalistic" and "analytic" animal, respectively (1988).

¹⁴ Breithaupt is, of course, careful to remind readers that "the privileging of the weak and the passivity of observation as a form of sympathy is culturally coded" (2012, 89). For more on narrative empathy with those similar to us (Keen 2006, 212).

feel a greater sense of allegiance with “voiceless” animals who, after being poisoned with *curare* (a substance which acts on the connection between brain and motor nerves), endure “sufferings more atrocious than the imagination can invent” – deprived not of “sensation or intelligence, but only of the means of expressing these through movement” (KL 293).

Lastly, these juxtapositions work with causality. As Anna Lindhé notes, “when we are able to detect a clear causal connection – ‘this pain was caused by that person or event’ – empathy is ‘generally stronger’ than when such connection is absent” (Cook 2011, 82 in Lindhé 2016, 31). By placing the descriptions of animals in set-pieces, Field ensures that readers connect the suffering animals we find in Fanny’s descriptions with the “analytic animals” we find in Claude’s writing: “the animals *Claude lodges* in the kitchen – bleeding or half-conscious” (KL 222; my emphasis). Where Fanny attunes her senses to, especially, sounds of animal suffering, Claude discovers “the trick of cutting dogs’ vocal cords” (KL 258). Coupled with her first-person narration and linguistic strategies for community-building, it is possible to argue that through the fiction’s judicial framing, readerly reflexivity, and the mapping of causality, we are gradually, accumulatively, trained to respond to animal affect in a manner similar to Fanny: not by “cutting” but by attending.

As Donald Nathanson articulates, “Affect is motivating but never localizing; the experience of affect tells us only that something needs our attention. Other systems must be engaged in order to decide what must be done and how” (2008, xiii). In Field’s text, visceral descriptions are deliberately framed, creating an “affective accumulation” that encourages us to bear witness and care about nonhuman suffering. Rather than observing animal suffering “from above” we “wit(h)ness” the suffering of animals in an encounter which “acknowledges the gap between different beings, times and places, while ethically making each partner vulnerable to the other’s trauma” (Pollock 2010, 838). The mediation of visceral descriptions through Fanny creates an transspecies encounter where we engage with animals care-fully across an ethically-attuned, but necessary distance. Where Field’s protagonist asks, “doesn’t writing always hide the bodies?” the text itself answers with, “well, that depends on how you describe them” (KL 2958).

5. CONCLUSION: ETHICS

I can't help asking: what is care? Is it simply where you put your attention? Is it a feeling of fellowship, or can you care about unknown things? If I say I care about you, is it because I acknowledge we share something in common? What is pain for, I also wonder: it speaks in a thousand inarticulate ways, yet seeks a conversation. (KL 199-204)

Asked early in *Experimental Animals*, Fanny's series of questions about the operations of care probe some of the key issues explored throughout this essay: attention, commonality, and fellowship. In part two, I explored the ways in which detached observation is troubled by haptic descriptions of animal bodies. In evoking a range of sensory modalities, these descriptions "touch" the bodies of Fanny and her readers, encouraging a greater recognition of the agency of animals to affect the world and bodies around them. Field further enables this kind of exchange by bringing Fanny's body into proximity with those of animals, creating a sense of corporeal *conversation* in place of anthropocentric monologues like that of the Zhejiang rat cyborg experiment. Rather than creating or reinforcing distance, the descriptions I have explored encourage us to "see feelingly", to locate points of connection and moments of reciprocity in which animals are no longer the objects of our gaze, but, instead, also agents of the description (Stewart 2016, 33).

In the final part of this paper, I considered the "practiced" dimension of care by exploring how these affective descriptions work in concert with structuring devices like grammatical alignments and juxtapositions. By employing these devices, Field trains our affective responses so that Fanny's textual attitudes and practices become the ghostly preludes (and possibilities) to our own. In both description and bridging, Field keeps Fanny and readers on the surface of animal experience and at a slight remove – she avoids anthropomorphizing animals by depicting their minds, and she also resists the conflation of human and animal experience favouring instead a *careful* mode of relation which cuts across empathy's *feeling with* and sympathy's *feeling for*. While a number of scholars have explored the potential for the "emotional contagion" of affecting textual encounters to encourage transspecies empathy, in looking at specific devices that direct affect, we might develop a more nuanced understanding of how literary texts influence readers' attitudes on issues like animal agency¹⁵. As Vera Nünning writes (summarizing recent neurological research), "the plasticity of the brain ensures that

¹⁵ See for example Weik von Mossner 2017, 2018.

extended and repeated practice will have biological as well as mental consequences” (2015, 40). By attending to devices that repeatedly direct our affective responses, we might begin to consider reading itself as an “affective practice” (Wetherell 2013, 2015) – a move which brings affect into dialogue with deliberation, reminding us that “[c]ontext, past and current practice, and complex acts of *meaning-making* and *representation* are involved in the spreading of affect, no matter how random or viral it appears” (Wetherell 2015, 154).

By exploring the ways in which language can “hide the bodies”, Field’s fiction seems to intimate that what is lost in a scientific view (at least on the level of discourse) is a crucial recognition of messy, reciprocal entanglement where “scientists and animals are fleshy creatures which are enacted and enacting through their embodied choreography” (Despret 2013, 69). This recognition is not about becoming more “emotional” in scientific practice, but about becoming more “accurate”. As Puig de la Bellacasa notes, “the term ‘accurate’ derives from care, ‘prepared with care, exact’” (2017, 91) – an etymological relation, which opens onto an ethics or a politics concerned with the “thick, impure, involvement in a work where the question of how to care needs to be posed” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 6). This kind of question is dynamic and processual and in scientific contexts should, to use Vinciane Despret’s words, engage with “interesting questions that give animals a chance to demonstrate their interests” since such questions have important implications for the accuracy and ethics of scientific practice (2015, 121). For, as Despret claims, “the question of response is a question whose answer changes everything” (*ibid.*, 122).

Literature like Field’s articulates and reflects on the ethical complexity of animal experimentation, bringing into sharp relief the problematic quality of work – like Zhang *et al.*’s mind controlled rat – that fails to acknowledge and *carefully* attend to such considerations. Field’s fiction also offers a space for thinking through and critically engaging with laboratories as sites of reciprocity and considers how affective encounters translate in writing. Through haptic description and the situated practice of “wit(h)nessing”, readers of *Experimental Animals* enter into webs of care where they are forced to (re)hear the cries which, to repurpose George Eliot’s words, “lie on the other side of silence” ([1871-2] 2000, 162). Or, perhaps, following Field, the cries which “lie on the other side of” *science*.

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