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**Narrative, Affect, Love and Confusion**

**Kathy Rudy, *Loving Animals. Toward a New Animal Advocacy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011. 288 pp. \$ 24.95 hc.**

“What is love? Oh, baby, don’t hurt me, don’t hurt me, no more” (Haddaway, 1993)

Social science has recently witnessed what can be called an affective turn, particularly within cultural studies. Emotions, sensations, and affect become highlighted as objects of study as well as as research tools to help understand contemporary phenomena. Animal studies have witnessed a similar trend, and scholars such as Ralph Acampora, Josephine Donovan, Vinciane Despret, Eva Hayward, and Donna Haraway have sought to understand what affect and corporeality mean in terms of interspecies communication and the generation of more ethical relationships with other animals. Whether the answer to these questions read “symphysis,” “attention,” “anthropo-zoo-genesis,” “impression,” or “response-ability,” these authors and others carefully engage with both the philosophical and political implications of living with other animals. The book under review can be read in light of these recent concerns.

What role could affect play in animal advocacy? Could love towards, for example, pets contribute to a more ethical treatment of other animals? And, could this transformative power be the constituent of a broader social movement, based not on the reason of right or utility, but on emotional and spiritual connectedness across species? These are some crucial questions raised by ethicist, feminist/queer, and animal-studies scholar Kathy Rudy in her new book entitled *Loving animals*. The author is clearly frustrated by the fact that although endless numbers of animals are mistreated, even tortured, in the meat industry, pet business, and science labs, the opposition is mute. We are, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, witnessing a striking silence and acceptance of the malicious treatment of other animals. There are of course exceptions, and Rudy talks about three promising, yet in her opinion misguided, fractions. First, the animal rights movement is a courageous thorn in the side of capitalist animal use. Rudy acknowledges that all successful movements such as the gay and the women’s movements were based on cutting edge, as well as separatist, ideology. However, the animal rights movement, by remaining extremist in for example advocating veganism, has failed to found a broad acceptance and thus any true achievements. Similarly, the

utilitarians who believe that reason will do the work, fail to recognize that the rationality that they advocate may just as easily lead to increased distance in regards to animals (17). Third, the animal welfare advocates, driven by empathy for animals and often spending their lives helping individual animals in shelters or sanctuaries, fail to transform existing power relations, their work merely reforming or even worse, legitimating, human exceptionalism. Even animal studies get its share of criticism, when it is said to be too jargon ridden and distant from actual animals and real politics (21). These are all well rehearsed criticisms, but the fresh take on them is to introduce affect as a transformative force, and narrative as the means to make it happen. Rudy lets her own experiences as well as interviews and encounters with others in various animal contexts form narratives of and with other animals. These stories are used in order to argue for and against existing doxa within philosophy and animal studies. Thus, the book builds on animal ethics in the above respects (animal rights, utilitarianism, welfare), but adds a dimension to what Rudy considers the incomplete picture drawn by philosophy (xvi). In Rudy's words,

Loving animals applies the concept of affect to the language of ethics, activism and advocacy. Throughout the book, I will suggest that because who we love is always a question of politics, the greatest resource we have in the struggle for animal advocacy is the deep connections many of us form with other animals. We need to value animals more because their radical otherness contextualizes our lives. (25)

One radical conclusion is that not only do we need to acknowledge love of animals in order to change their lives, but also to change our human ones. The book is divided into an introduction, six main chapters, and a concluding discussion. It draws on a rich amount of data, both secondary and the author's own, and the argumentation is generally well reinforced, even though the prose is often unnecessarily wordy.

In chapter one, Rudy outlines what she considers the problems of animal advocacy as it stands today in the US, and sketches the foundation for the affective approach. As stated above, Rudy describes the pitfalls of various existing perspectives and the need for a joint take on animal politics. One could argue that Rudy could have been more careful in painting the picture. Activists are portrayed as too extreme, which rhetorically allows the author herself to appear as reasonable. The second chapter concerns pets, and Rudy's own dogs – resident as well as foster ones – provide our guides to the world of animal rescue and advocacy. It is well known that there are more and more pets in Western households creating space for puppy mills and urban pet

breeding, and increasing numbers of abandoned and unwanted pets. As a consequence, the shelter movement is thriving but the shelters are overpopulated. There are pure breed shelters for dogs (such as Beagles or Pitbulls), non-kill shelters, dog pounds, cat shelters, and so on. Millions of healthy cats and dogs are killed annually, just in the US. Rudy argues that a change in practice can start with the love of a dog, thus the fact that so many people actually interact with other animals on a daily basis can provide the fertile soil, a petri dish, for cultivating better understanding of the conditions of other animals like abandoned pets, meat animals, or captive wild ones. Rudy provides rich stories of her own dogs, and how they came into her family. Her most telling and moving story is about her own identity as a dog lover, as one who cannot be named. Is she queer since she chooses to live her life with non-human companions? “It’s not so much that I am no longer a lesbian, then, it’s that the binary of gay and straight no longer has anything to do with me. My preference today is canine” (41).

In the next chapter, “The animal on your plate,” Rudy takes the reader through her own painstaking worries over meat eating, the wrongness of industrial animal production, and her meeting with local free-range farming as a solution. Rudy advocates a middle or third way between veganism on the one hand and the over-consumption of heartlessly produced meat on the other. In order to get more people on board the animal movement, the “localvore” version of ethical meat consumption could be a means, providing a promise that one can both have the cookie and eat it (although, a whole lot less than before). Once again, the highly personal stories, this time of local farmers and their free ranging pigs and chicken, provide an entrance to discuss difficult identity issues: What, when, and whom should I eat? Vegan feminists say that engaging in violent food practices – that is, eating meat – means that one ultimately consumes violence. I think they are right. But I also agree with Rudy that no food practices are innocent, and appreciate the very difficult task that she takes on in trying to work out, on a personal level, a good enough practice. One important issue that the author brings up is the importance of combining concerns for animals, the environment, and human health. But the problem remains: how to end the horrendous industrial conditions for billions of animals. It certainly cannot change through a change in consumer practice alone.

Chapter four discusses so-called wild animals in captivity and the author asks the intriguing question: Is it really bad for animals to be kept by humans? Through the stories of big-cat sanctuaries and exotic animal owners, we learn how the love of individual animals can transform relations as well as individuals. Here, terms like feral,

wild, and domestic are set rocking. Similarly, the proper place for animals is questioned. For example, one story surrounds a southern woman, Sally, who keeps a 400-pound tiger called Charles in her back yard. The facilities are tailor made to allow Charles to run around and to play with Sally, to shelter him from rain and sun. Charles also has his own bed next to Sally's, where he sleeps at night (128). In Rudy's stories, while zoos pretend to make the environment as habitat-like as possible and minimizing interaction with people, some private owners treat their wild animals as pets and spend hours training and playing with them. Rudy discusses this finding in terms of nature/culture crossing and our ingrained ideas about domestication as a one way street, and states that the humans are similarly transformed through the interaction with the animals. Native American Chuck, who states that he became more closely connected to his roots through interacting with the family's wolf, serves as an example. However, the conclusion that it may be better for individual animals to be captive/tamed is problematic, since it obscures the bigger picture: the exploitation of nature, wrecking habitats, and killing wild animals.

Chapter five concerns laboratory animals, a category of animals that in the US is more or less without any legal protection. Here the author paints a picture of fierce controversy between animal rights activists and scientists. The fear of animal activists has, according to Rudy, made animal experimentation a secret and hidden enterprise. The most perverse example of this is the recent legislation in the USA that designates all kinds of protest against animal abuse in corporate forms, including university based animal experimentation, as acts of terrorism (162). Again, the author is searching, through stories, for a third way. Perhaps some experimentation is necessary, but it should be performed by people who really care for the animals, she argues. This chapter is not so well researched, perhaps because the author had difficulty finding experimenters willing to be interviewed, and Rudy was refused access to university facilities. I could not agree more with the fact that transparency is important and that care, in fact love, is essential to provide better lives for these animals (Holmberg). Openness in animal experimentation exists in other countries, for example in Sweden, where pharmaceutical companies invite school classes as well as interested others, to visit their premises, including the animal houses. Some scientists go public in order to explain the role of animal experimentation. However, as I have argued elsewhere, this openness is selective, thus contributing to a status quo between science and the publics (Holmberg & Ideland). And Rudy is wrong to blame the activists for the lack of transparency. It is like blaming radical feminists for men's violence worldwide. The two greatest obstacles for real reform (I admit, not revolution) of this area are the lack of legislation, statistics, and education, on the one hand, and the standardization doctrine

of science, on the other. As long as these animals are not granted legal protection (as in the US), and the use of them is not registered, available statistics will be lacking. Education of staff is another important issue, and in Europe, FELASA (Federation for Laboratory Animal Science Associations) is working to standardize training for animal technicians as well as researchers. Moreover, the standardization doctrine in science prevents local initiatives in providing, for example, better/larger cages, enrichment, and feed. This is a dimension that Rudy neglects, which unfortunately, along with the lack of stories, makes this chapter a rather poor one.

The last chapter is entitled “Clothing ourselves in stories of love,” but it is not really about clothing. This is unfortunate, I think, since the production of fur, leather, and shoes, is an under-researched area of animal studies. Instead, the author uses clothing as a metaphor for thinking about affect and embodiment.

The concept of affect helps make this visible, especially the emotional bonds many of us feel with pets, farm animals, or wildlife. These bonds are not add-ons to an already established human identity; they are circuits of exchange that direct our actions and ethics. These relationships change us on the deepest level. (193)

This takes the author to the realm of spirituality, and she reflects on how the notion of “sacrifice” could be enhanced to encompass thinking about the role of pets, farm animals, wild life, and laboratory rodents, as well as the role of humans: We all sacrifice in order to live better and fuller lives (194). This is a rather troubling metaphor with roots in world religions as well as in more pagan belief systems, and to suggest that animals can choose to be sacrificed for the benefit of humans is problematic to say the least. Rudy ends her survey with one last story of her family of six dogs, and how she had to choose between two of them for the benefit of the pack, thus highlighting how love always comes with other affects like agony, guilt, sorrow, and pain. Love is not an easy task, but it is, according to Rudy, the only route in order to be fulfilled.

The strength of this book is, as the reader probably has noticed, the stories. They are moving, seductive, intriguing, troubling, and utterly provocative. Moreover, Rudy does not avoid many difficult and politically charged issues like meat eating or animal experimentation. Her difficult goal is to broaden the agenda and to meet the opponents half way through the introduction of third way solutions. As an eye-opener and a discussion generator, I have to admit that although I do not agree with many of the

conclusions, this book works well and will no doubt stir a heated debate. As a scholarly book, it has some serious problems. It uses references loosely and selectively, and does not build on, for example, the work on affect and ethics introduced in the beginning of this review. Thus, the notion of becoming human through the corporeal interaction with, and love of, other animals is theoretically undeveloped — and that is a shame. Further, while using narrative as a technology for change Rudy is far too ignorant of her own use, and thus reproduction, of discourse through the use of terms like “food animals,” “pets,” “euthanasia,” and “sacrifice.” She does not recognize her own rhetoric when positioning others as extremists, and her third way as a solution. In addition, the narrative methodology, however useful, is too anecdotal for academic standards and often leads to sweeping, almost universal, conclusions.

These general issues aside, I would like to expand on some more specific issues, before concluding. First, I find it wrongheaded to blame animal rights activists and vegans for dominating the discourse of animal liberation. Vegan animal advocates fend against a society that has a radically different view of animals. Arguing that veganism would erase all farm animals is downright silly; many vegans refrain from eating animals as a political strategy, not as an end in itself. Two to three percent of the US population is vegan, some for quite other reasons than animal ethics. Thus, the core problem is not the vegans, but the bulk of people that simply do not care about animals at all. Second, Rudy argues that we need to open the hearts of these people to the needs of other animals. That is of course a good idea. But, following Rudy’s own reformist agenda, why not do this by attending to the law? If things are going to be improved with regard to pet overpopulation or lab research for example, the protection of animals must be regulated. Again, the problem is less the proclamation that animals should have rights, but that humans need to have obligations and responsibilities. Here, I think the US-centeredness of Rudy’s analysis is problematic, since it obscures the perspective. Again, I will use Sweden as an example. Although cat overpopulation is an urban problem, there are hardly any homeless dogs. Why is that? One reason is the mandatory tax and registration system that prevailed between 1923-1996, putting dog owners in a position of accountability. The new Animal Welfare Act white paper suggests mandatory registration for cats. Looking for stories elsewhere, Rudy could have elucidated the pet problem from a sociological angle, blaming the lack of welfare state involvement along with capitalist profit making, a coupling named neo-liberalism.

A third criticism is the lack of problematization of “love.” What, in Kathy Rudy’s view, is love? Where are the feminist-studies lessons to be learned? Feminist care ethics has taught us that love is not a pure feeling or ethical space, but a troublesome and power

loaded relationship full of exploitation and even wickedness. This is not to say that love cannot be a useful tool for exploring the human/animal bond and expanding ethical concerns, but a more thorough investigation of this literature and a sophisticated treatment of power would have strengthened the arguments and perhaps might even have made Rudy choose some different conclusions, for example regarding the love of experimental animals as a guarantee for better treatment. Instrumentalization, making others objects for our own good, is part of all relationships, and particularly so in animal experimentation. In fact, it is part of loving relations as well. This means that we can both harm and kill, in the name of love.

In spite of the criticism above, I want to conclude that I appreciate Rudy's take and that the personal style of narrating makes a strong rhetorical device that convinces me of the authenticity of the book's intentions, and its usefulness in fulfilling the aims: to move its reader through narratives.

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