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The Ugly Animal: Aesthetics, Power, and Animal-Human Relationality[1]

Pigeon feces (photo by Emily Snyder)

Being situated in an ecological crisis for the past couple of decades, one can find numerous resources for thinking about the environment, nature, and animals. Green politics deal with animal-human relations, albeit in very diverse ways. Kerry H. Whiteside describes ecological thought within English-speaking debates as too focused on anthropocentric versus ecocentric views — that is to say, protecting nature for our own human interests versus recognizing that nature has its own existence (2). In this latter part of the debate, nature is often romantically framed as pure, and as something

that is to remain untouched (Haraway, *When Species Meet* [*WSM*] 10-11). Whiteside sets up a discussion between English and French ecological thinkers, and argues that French accounts of ecology are quite different and offer something unique and necessary to this discussion. He describes, "French green theorists tend to study how conceptions of nature and human identity intertwine. They elaborate green thought more often by *reciprocally problematizing* 'nature' and 'humanity' than by refining the distinction between them" (3). Whiteside characterizes French theoretical approaches as "noncentered," as "*skeptical* humanism," or "ecological humanism" (3). What Whiteside speaks of is similar to posthumanism — a field of study that currently does not appear to be unique to English or French speaking theorists, despite Whiteside's above claims.

In its project of breaking down divisive boundaries and binaries that predominate in "Western thought"[2] posthumanism attempts to understand embodiment as a complex intermingling of the human, the animal, and technology (Gane). Posthumanism also aims to break down the divides of nature/culture and animal/human (amongst many other related binaries). Further, it is described as "a condition of uncertainty" (Gane 432), and N. Katherine Hayles remarks, "I regard the posthuman, like the 'human', as a historically specific and contingent term rather than a stable ontology" (160).

In this essay, my focus will be on Donna Haraway and Michel Serres — both of whom are hesitant to be labeled posthumanists (Haraway, "Encounters" 102; Haraway, *WSM* 17-19; Wolfe xi). Haraway and Serres come from different philosophical traditions; perhaps not in the sense that Whiteside speaks of concerning ecological focus, but rather, their genres and traditions of writing are quite different. I will focus on Haraway's *When Species Meet* (2008) (WSM) and Serres's *The Parasite* (1982).[3] Though Haraway and Serres are rarely treated together, they are not far removed from each other. They have an unacknowledged, once-removed relationship via Bruno Latour (Haraway is influenced by Latour, and Latour considers Serres a mentor, however Haraway speaks little of Serres). Haraway and Serres are both concerned with relationality[4] and aim to imagine an ethic of relating that does away with divisions between animals and humans, objects and subjects. They are both concerned with power. Their approaches to relationality attempt to provoke readers to consider how to engage in interspecies relations in non-romanticized ways amidst untidy realities, and to consider the broader implications and impacts of such politics. They undertake this similar task of troubling inter-species engagement in different ways. I arrived at this place of bringing the two together by way of the pigeon, and its feces.

The pigeon, largely via its feces, is an abject animal, particularly in North American urban centers. Turning first to Haraway to make sense of my relationship to this creature, I encountered a compelling, yet problematic, politics of animal-human relations premised on respect and caring. I believe Haraway's politics, while concerned with power and committed in theory to a practical, non-romanticized mode of relating with nature and animals, needs to be pushed further to engage more realistically with disgust. Confronting the negative cultural discourses that construct the pigeon as a revolting "rat with wings" (Jerolmack, "Pigeons Became Rats"; Jerolmack, "Animal archeology"), I turned to Serres's work on parasites to think further about disgust. Serres offers a parasitic relationality that is both potentially transformative and helplessly paralyzed and abusive. Challenges arise as well when applying Serres's ideas to ugly animals. Working between the complexities of Haraway's politics of respect and Serres's politics of abuse, I will try to articulate an approach to animal-human relationality more alert to the problem of disgust.

Aesthetic considerations, which are generally absent in Haraway's and Serres's work, are a key part of understanding how we get along. I believe Haraway's and Serres's insights must be pushed further, via aesthetics, to reflect more deeply on conflict and the power dynamics that saturate animal-human entanglement. An analysis of negative aesthetics in particular complicates politics and practices of living together and I consider how much "indigestion," as Haraway advocates, we can handle in our politics (*WSM* 74). With human-pigeon relationality in mind, the main question guiding this discussion is: how might a focus on ugliness, disgust, and abjection help us to further understand animal-human relations in theory and practice?

The notion of the ugly animal and a politics of disgust,[5] when centered on the pigeon, suggest additional complexities and questions to be considered when articulating models of interspecies relationality. The mode of relationality I would like to articulate includes acknowledging that ugliness, disgust, and abjection are part of our everyday lives and relationships. I do not wish to reinforce the binary of beauty/ugliness or to essentialize particular traits in particular others. Rather, I aim to dwell with the tension of acknowledging "ugliness" as something that is simultaneously illusory and real — that is to say that ugliness can be complexly considered a social construction or just a form of categorization, as well as a lived reality that shapes the everyday. Further, negative aesthetic judgments are culturally and time specific, they are not static. A politics of disgust encourages thinking about conflict and becoming uncomfortable with the categories and labels that "we" use and how they fit into broader power structures.

By embracing disgust, and thus discomfort, one can allow conflict into our politics in ways that critically examine what sustains conflict and how it exists as it does, while also knowing that conflict cannot be eradicated (although it can be understood as fluid). This politics of disgust is also a challenge to ethics-based approaches to relationships premised on notions of openings and callings. As I discuss below, disgust abounds and it is crucial to recognize how it can more quickly lead to closure than to an opening in which one faces and acknowledges the other. While much of the discussion here is a critique of Haraway and Serres, I raise questions throughout that more generally aim to encourage animal studies scholars to face the limitations of our engagements with animals.

Haraway's Politics. Throughout Haraway's work, one finds a variety of figures that aim to challenge boundaries and rigid categories — the cyborg (Simians), monsters ("Promises of Monsters"), the coyote ("Cyborgs, Coyotes"), and most recently the dog. Haraway maintains that these "figures are never innocent" ("Cyborgs, Coyotes" 338) and that her still popular cyborgs can be understood "as junior siblings in the much bigger, queer family of companion species" (*CSM* 11). Her recent focus on animals connects to her previous work on science and technology and can still be described as a feminist project:

> none of this work is about finding the sweet and nice — "feminine" — worlds and knowledges free of the ravages and productivities of power. Rather, feminist inquiry is about understanding how things work, who is in the action, what might be possible, and how worldly actors might somehow be accountable to and love each other less violently. (7)

Haraway's work on interspecies relations rests on the thesis that we must do away with human exceptionalism and eradicate the "Great Divides," as Bruno Latour names it, between nature and culture, animals and humans (*WSM* 9). We ought not believe that humans are better, that we are the opposite of animals, and that we exist independently from the rest of the living and non-living beings that make up the universe. This is not to say, however, that we are the same as animals. Dealing primarily within Western philosophical thought on animals, Haraway calls for a recognition of co-species interdependence and entanglement within "naturecultures." While the term "companion animals" is used most often to describe pets, work animals, and leisure animals, the term "companion species" is much broader and is to include all "critters"[6]

on the earth (*WSM* 134-35; *CSM* 14-15). It is important to note that Haraway's work emphasizes the tactile and the visual in face-to-face encounters with companion species, whether such encounters include a physical proximity or something more figurative or virtual. The relevance of this point will become clearer in my own discussion of aesthetics and disgust.

In a somewhat Levinasian tone, Haraway contends that in co-constitution "the partners do not precede the meeting; species of all kinds, living and not, are consequent on a subject- and object-shaping dance of encounters" (*WSM* 4). The overall task in Haraway's politics is to "become with" (a phrase she borrows from Vinciane Despret [*WSM* 16-17], conveying that it is in the encounter with another that we become who we are). For Haraway "every species is a multispecies crowd" (165).

To work with multispecies entanglement, Haraway draws on Isabelle Stengers's concept of cosmopolitics, which welcomes messy politics (106). For Haraway, living with and becoming with has to cause indigestion, which is a call to embrace discomfort. Yet how do we actually recognize the practice of becoming with, and what are the advantages of this approach to animal-human relationality? Haraway emphasizes that each encounter has a material-semiotic aspect. We must interrogate the materiality and the historicity of each encounter — by considering the histories of all parts of the encounter (histories of place, space, race, gender, age, etc.) and how they converge to create a new one. We must be perpetually undoing and questioning the world around us if we are to become with, or to become worldly, as Haraway advocates. A key part of embracing this relationality is respect. Haraway insists that "species interdependence is the name of the worlding game on earth, and that game must be one of response and respect. That is the play of companion species learning to pay attention" (19). For Haraway, "this truth-telling is about co-constitutive naturalcultural dancing, holding in esteem and regard that is open to those who look back reciprocally. Always tripping, this kind of truth has a multispecies future. *Respecer*e" ("Encounters" 111). Respectful relationality is to lead to an ethics of flourishing — always asking "questions of who belongs where and what flourishing means for whom" (*WSM* 41) and being compelled toward "compassionate action" (134).

Thus, with Haraway we find a politics of multispecies relationality premised on respect and caring. We must be "propelled by the tasty but risky obligation of curiosity among companion species, once we know, we cannot not know. If we know well, searching with fingery eyes, we care. That is how responsibility grows" (287). We appear to end up in the fantastic human-animal-technological power-saturated mess that Haraway

desires. Yet problems arise when applying Haraway's theory to ugly animals. Despite her call for indigestion, the uglier the co-species get the more difficult it is to take up her politics. Although Haraway attempts to include history and power, she overlooks many of the hierarchical everyday realities that ugly animals are framed by. Her politics of respect becomes particularly complicated when the animal-human encounter is imbued with disgust. How do we face and respect the pigeon? How do we face its feces, which has its own biological existence and characterizes the everyday in urban space? I turn to Serres and *The Parasite* to think further about these questions.

"When Parasites Meet" acrylic painting by Emily Snyder[7] (Photo by Shandie Poitras)

Serres's Politics. Serres's work offers a parasitic relationality — a "flourishing" in which only those who can occupy the position of parasite benefit. He advocates "fuzziness" (57) in his theorizing and describes himself as a fly — "I guide myself by sound" (67). While it is said that "Serres' work does not lend itself to easy summary or application" (Brown, "Michel Serres" 3), and that it "struggles *against* clarity" (Wolfe xiii), I will offer a summary to apply it to everyday practice.

Serres describes *The Parasite* as "about animals, our relations to our closest neighbors, to work, meals, sickness" (Serres and Latour 168). Like Haraway's text it is a book about relationality and power. To understand relations and the collective, Serres argues that we must turn to the parasite (*Parasite* 185). "Parasite" has three meanings: 1) a biological parasite, 2) a social parasite, and 3) static or noise (an understanding of parasite that is common in French but generally not found in English [Schehr vii; Wolfe xiii]). All three of these parasites are connected and feed on relationships. To be a parasite, one must always be last in the chain of relations; whoever is at the end gets to be parasite rather than be parasited (Serres, *Parasite* 4). Serres's conceptualization of relationality is premised on one-way relations. In a world full of parasites, there is no such thing as production, and nothing can be original, since everything is immediately parasited. This approach to relationality leads him to conclude that "abuse appears before use" (7) and that abuse value is a part of our relations

> the balance of exchange is always weighed and measured, calculated, taking into account a relation without exchange, an abusive relation. The term abusive is a term of usage. Abuse doesn't prevent use. The abuse value, complete, irrevocable consummation, precedes use- and exchange-value. Quite simply, it is the arrow with only one direction. (80)

Cary Wolfe argues that abuse value is not to be interpreted as violent, but rather as different from use and exchange value — "the Latin prefix ab- meaning ... 'off or away from'" (xx). I disagree with Wolfe's interpretation that abuse value is non-violent, given, as I discuss below, Serres's problematic conceptualization of power.

Through these abusive relations, the parasite creates a "new" logic (*Parasite* 35). The typical understanding of exchange is that "it must be of the same order" as, for example, food for food. But the parasite does something else. It can, for instance, show

up as a guest, eat the food of the host, and give stories in exchange for the food.[8] Brown describes this logic of the parasite:

> *analyse* (take but do not give), *paralyse* (interrupt usual functioning), *catalyse* (force the host to act differently). This parasite, through its interruption, is a catalyst for complexity. It does this by impelling the parties it parasitizes to act in one of two ways. Either they incorporate the parasite into their midst — and thereby accept the new form of communication the parasite inaugurates — or they act together to expel the parasite and transform their own social practices in the course of doing so. ("Michel Serres" 16-17)

The parasite feeds on relations. Communication is typically seen as occurring and as successful when two stations (for example, two people) are able to exchange ideas and communicate with one another, uninterrupted (Brown, "Parasite Logic" 384). However, for Serres, this conceptualization of communication is an illusion. Brown explains, "Serres inverts our usual sense of what is meant by communication, by displaying that it is noise and interruption which are fundamental to organising social relations" (384). For Serres, there is always a third, always a parasite — its interruption is what makes the system work. Every system, for Serres, is mediated and messages are always manipulated (*Parasite* 79). While this assertion is similar to Haraway's notion that all existence is a multi-species existence, Serres's tone is quite different with the inclusion of the third. The third is manipulative, not respectful. The parasite wants nothing to do with the stations themselves. Being "at the intersection of relations" is "the most profitable [position]" if one wants to be in control (43).

Serres writes frequently about "the collective," which one can surmise is a social collective, though he does not commit to a coherent notion of it. He asks, "what […] is living together? What is the collective? I don't know, and I doubt that anyone does. I have never read anything that taught it to me" (224-225). He contends that the collective lives in a black box; something happens in this black box, but we do not quite know what. For Serres, whatever happens in the black box ought not be foolishly premised on harmony. Our understanding of the collective needs to have "waves and shocks" and be "etched in acid, with a bitter, astringent taste" (13). This call is similar to Haraway's call for indigestion, and my call for discomfort and messiness; however, as Serres's

ideas are developed in practice, it is evident his politics differ both from Haraway's and from mine.

Serres asks repeatedly if the system is infected or is itself an infection. He inquires,

> who will ever know if parasitism is an obstacle to its proper functioning or if it is its very dynamics? Daily, general patterns of behavior depend on the answer to this question. If we eliminate these tie-ups, would a system still remain? Is the system a set of constraints on our attempts at optimization, or do these latter, quite simply, produce the system itself? (27)

While he often laments our current social condition in which exploitation abounds, and he seems to offer us a negative politics in which there is no possibility of change, he also argues that there is potential for transformation in the system. The chain of relations can collapse at the sound of a new noise. The chain is reordered, but whether it reorders itself with the same parasite on top, or with a new parasite that will redefine the system, remains unknown. Lawrence R. Schehr describes the parasite as "both the atom of a relation and the production of a change in this relation" (x). The reader is faced with many multiple meanings: the parasite is transformative, yet it paralyzes; it is silent, but it creates noise (*Parasite* 237); it is quasi-object and quasi-subject (225); it is object and subject (15); it is host and guest (15); it controls and resists (6); it "[belongs] to order and disorder" (6); and it is human and animal.

Serres calls "man" "the universal parasite" (24). Nature is dominated, "plants and animals are always his hosts; man is always necessarily their guest. Always taking, never giving" (24). And as others before him, Serres notes that in addition to dominating nature, "man" turns also to dominating humans (24). This dominance is problematic for Serres, and while it is not as explicit in his work in *The Parasite* as it is in Haraway's text Serres includes animals and nonhumans in his ideas on relationality. Both Haraway's theory of respectful relationality and Serres's conception of parasitic relationality offer provocations for thinking about animal-human relationships. The next step in this analysis involves bringing aesthetics into the discussion to consider how we might think further about animal-human relationality.

Ugliness, Disgust, and Abjection. I understand ugliness to mean something that repulses, causes discomfort, and is unpleasant, as it causes a general incongruence with one's beliefs about that which is pleasant. Ugliness can induce a reaction of disgust, and

if this reaction is harsh enough, it can invoke a move to abject and to keep distance, either physically or cognitively, from that which is deemed ugly. Aesthetics touches on all of our senses, including affect and embodiment, and ideologies running through aesthetic judgments work to sustain what is beautiful and ugly. Aesthetic judgments are also fluid and change in relation to cultures and time. Responses of disgust could be towards something material, virtual, abstract, or probable (Shields 29).[9] Overall, there is a lack of research in the area of negative aesthetics.[10] Some common ways of framing ugliness, disgust, and abjection include biological theories, social constructionism, and psychoanalysis (Meagher). Here I take up social constructionism and traces of psychoanalysis (via Kristeva). While reactions of disgust are felt in the body (Ahmed; Kristeva) as "a visceral difficulty" (Meagher 24), I reject biological theories that argue there is something entirely instinctual in disgust reactions. I do not understand the ugly animal here as something inherently repulsive. Ugliness and beauty are cultural reactions, which necessarily include the political.

It is necessary to deconstruct claims about what is ugly and beautiful, and to examine the politics and power dynamics circulating in claims-making processes. This is especially crucial to do when theorists rely on arguments of "reason," which often works to assert claims as being "logical" and "neutral." When writing on beauty and the sublime (and to a lesser degree ugliness), Edmund Burke offers the aesthetic experience as largely involving a sensory reaction, but also the use of reason, to understand our sensory encounters. He contends that beauty (which can cause feelings of love and happiness) is found in things that are small, smooth, have lines that flow, are delicate, and are a color that is "fair" (180-190). Burke justifies the conclusions he comes to about these qualities of beauty by explaining that he is using reason, yet he does little to unpack why these qualities manifest beauty, and it is evident that his work is, as Timothy Morton argues, based on "ideologies of class and tradition" (18). Burke's 18th century ideas on beauty are similar to notions of beauty today, in that they rely on gender- and race-based, heteronormative qualities that uphold particular normative standards often passed on as "natural" and "reasonable." In her reading of Kant Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak shows that people in positions of privilege can determine what "reason" is and who can possess it. For Spivak Kant's ideas on aesthetics rely on the possession of a rational will and a morality in response to experiences with nature; the "native informant" (Spivak's term) or the "raw man" (Kant's term) "has not yet achieved or does not possess a subject whose *Anlage* or programming includes the structure of feeling for the moral" (14). Christian Helmut Wenzel comments, "the task

that Kant sets for himself is to explain taste in a way that takes into account the intuition that some aesthetic judgments are right and others wrong, although no rules for assigning aesthetic values can be given. The task is thus to avoid the two extremes" (1-2). But judgments *are* made in our society about what is right and wrong concerning beauty (as they were in Kant's time), and despite Kant's conviction that aesthetics and science are to be separate (Wenzel 3), science and technology have been, and still are, employed by people in positions of power to merge aesthetics and social control. Science and aesthetics are part of the same project (Mosse).

George Mosse contends that racism was a central aspect of modernity in Europe and was integrally connected to aesthetics.[11] What was deemed beautiful was influenced by emerging ideas about science, as well as a religious resurgence. Science was taken up, used to measure, calculate, and record the physical proportions and appearance of racialized others to determine not only their aesthetic worth, but intertwined with this their moral and cognitive capabilities. Mosse notes that "the most ominous standard that was applied to racial classification during the eighteenth century was based upon aesthetic preferences that were necessarily highly subjective. The new emphasis on classical beauty set the tone. It led to a stereotype which would never leave racism from that day to this" (18). Notions of animality and nature are deeply connected to stereotypes about race, gender, sexuality, and class, and to aesthetic judgments (Mosse). Haraway is attentive to complexities of race, gender, and animality in her work (although she does not link it to aesthetics *per se*), and Serres, as I set out, does little to explicitly bring these realities into his analysis (and does not engage with aesthetics).

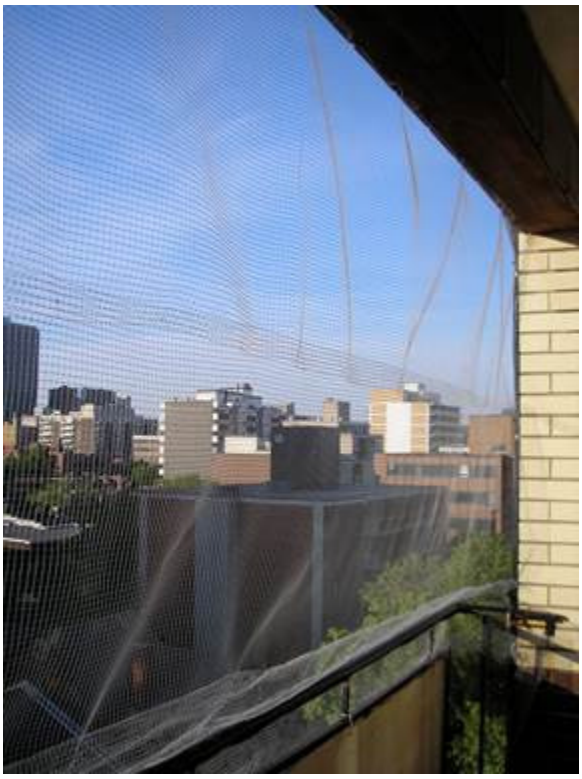
Too frequently work on aesthetics concentrates on beauty. Ugliness, while certainly existing in relation to beauty, and vice-versa, needs to be theorized in depth, as it evokes different affective responses and carries different social and cultural values. It is unsatisfying just to infer from work on beauty what ugliness means and entails. Likewise, it is inadequate to treat ugliness as an afterthought only to be accounted for by modifying work that is grounded in the beautiful.[12] Further disconcerting are approaches to ugliness in which moves are made to make the ugly beautiful. While the binary of beauty/ugliness is extremely problematic, Michelle Meagher's work insightfully suggests that dissolving one side of the binary into the other would actually work to entrench the binary further rather than to deconstruct it. In her analysis of the intentionally ugly paintings of female figures by Jenny Saville, Meagher maintains that when viewers attempt to frame the grotesque images as beautiful, "rather than acknowledging and confronting disgust, disgust itself has been rendered disgusting and shameful" (29). I will return to this problem of trying to eradicate ugliness and

disgust below, though it is noteworthy than my intention in this paper is not to eliminate these concepts, to deny their existence, or necessarily to reconceptualize them as beautiul and pleasant. I aim to understand instead what can be learned about power and animal-human relationality when focusing on ugliness and disgust.

Beauty and ugliness are spectacular in many ways (particularly the sublime), but they are also quite everyday (Zylinska; Ngai). Sara Ahmed advocates that we should recognize emotions as "social and cultural practices" (*Cultural Politics* 9), and that notions of disgust, proximity, and fear of contamination are connected — "through disgust, bodies 'recoil' from their proximity, as a proximity that is felt as nakedness or as an exposure on the skin surface" (83). Feeling disgust, we distance the object and blame our reaction on it. She argues that "we need to account for how it is that the object of disgust impresses upon us, as if the object contained the 'truth' of our own response to it" (85). Disgust plays out in relationships, through what Ahmed calls "stickiness" (90). Stickiness conjures up the idea that the reaction of disgust is caused by inherent qualities in the other; it is a threat to one's own non-sticky surface. Some people are treated as stickier than others — "feelings of disgust stick more to some bodies than others" (92). For example, the word "terrorist" sticks to specific racialized bodies (97).

Ahmed argues that in being disgusted by another, the other becomes abject — "to be disgusted is after all *to be affected by what one has rejected*" (*Cultural Politics* 86). Citing Julia Kristeva, Ahmed explains that "to abject something is literally to cast something out, or to expel something" (94). The abject is that which threatens the foundations upon which we live. These foundations include conceptions of life, health, and cleanliness, which are connected to and shaped by norms regarding morality (Kristeva). Invoking Mary Douglas, Kristeva notes that the abject/excluded become abject in line with social systems/notions of social ordering (68). The abject other might manifest or be perceived as "unclean," but what is really at stake are notions of the self and perceptions of one's rightful place in a social system. Thus the abject threatens "borders, positions, rules" (*Cultural Politics* 4), and Ahmed explains "Kristeva shows us that what threatens from the outside only threatens insofar as it is already within" (*Cultural Politics* 86). Though Ahmed's and Kristeva's work focuses on human relations, it can be applied to animal-human relationality. I do not make these transitions between humans and animals as if to say they are the same — different humans and different animals are constructed and perceived in varying ways. But I have argued throughout that what we

think about animal-human relationality reveals the mess of ontological categories that merge in it.



Keeping pigeons out. A balcony in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada (Photo by Emily Snyder)

Discussion. Haraway is committed to her ideas being applicable in practice (see Thrift 189; Braidotti 202). In her previous work before *WSM*, she maintains, "category-making is a labor process with its own materiality" ("Cyborgs, Coyotes" 335). She writes about "thinking technologies" (335) and notes that "overwhelmingly, theory is bodily, and theory is literal. Theory is not about matters distant from the lived body; quite the opposite" ("Promises of Monsters" 68). Serres echoes these sentiments that working with concepts is a means of practice (Wolfe xxv; see Whiteside 125-126 for a critique). Haraway argues, "the task is to become coherent enough in an incoherent world to engage in a joint dance of being that breeds respect and response in the flesh … And then *to remember how to live like that at every scale, with all partners*" (*CSM* 62, emphasis added). This task must always be done, as we are never finished learning, never finished becoming with (*WSM* 27). Haraway and Serres importantly demonstrate that

theorizing is a means of practice, yet as I argue below, through a focus on the pigeon, their conceptual practices seem in several ways to be quite impractical, particularly when considering ugliness and disgust.

The pigeon is quite ordinary in the sense that those who live in urban spaces encounter it daily. While for some the pigeon may be a welcome creature in the city (or iconic of a city), there is no shortage of negative cultural ideas that work to reinforce that the pigeon is "out of place" (Jerolmack, "Animal archeology" 74; see also Wolch on animals in urban centers). While the relationship of the human to the pigeon is sometimes positive (there are, for example, human-pigeon interactions focused on leisure, such as pigeon racing, homing pigeon activities, farm exhibitions etc.), I will focus on negative discourses, which are most dominant, to show that aesthetic norms work to sustain hierarchies and need to be made explicit in our politics. When thinking with Haraway and Serres, the challenge arises that the further one goes down the animal hierarchy, and the uglier the animals get, the modes of relationality that they suggest become more complicated to enact.

Both Haraway and Serres aim to problematize rigid categories, and Haraway is eager to include all animals in the process. She writes of dogs, chickens, and flies, as well as bacteria and viruses that cannot be seen by the human eye. Her politics aim to include the ordinary and to challenge human exceptionalism (*WSM*). Yet how do we proceed in a manner that allows for these new conceptualizations while also taking into account the lived reality that the old conceptualizations matter and shape the everyday? With pigeons, the challenge is to recognize both that the label of parasite imposed upon the pigeon is a human construct, and that pigeons have the lived reality of being "pests" faced with diverse deterrence and extermination efforts. Haraway's ideas on situated knowledges are relevant to consider. Situated knowledges means that at every encounter we are to call into question the power relations between species, their histories, and how we shape one another. By questioning these dynamics in each encounter, Haraway suggests that we are able to account for the existing cultural norms, and also to think about how we might relate differently.

There are several "knot[s]" (*WSM* 19) or entanglements of interspecies relationality for thinking further about the pigeon, and about Haraway's and Serres's work. The pigeon has a long history of entanglement with humans. It has been kept for food ("Animal archeology" 79-80; Allen 91-100), used for medicine (Allen 89-91) and for its feces or

guano ("Animal archeology" 79; Allen 89-90, 100-101); it has served as messenger (and thus been labeled a noble hero during times of war), and been a part of human leisure activities ("Animal archeology"; Allen). The pigeon has been employed to signify a variety of metaphors and symbols, from love and monogamy (as the bird is a rapid reproducer but generally mates "monogamously" ["Animal archeology" 80]), to war hero (83-84), to "'rats with wings'" (74), and the embodiment of disease (74; Jerolmack, "Pigeons Became Rats" 80). Colin Jerolmack argues that in the cultural hierarchy of animals, companion animals receive the most attention, followed by livestock, wildlife, while "'nuisance' or 'pest' animals" are situated at the bottom ("Animal archeology" 75).

Technological and economic shifts shape perceptions of the pigeon. As humans domesticated and lived alongside pigeons, they discovered the bird's unique "'homing ability'" ("Animal archeology" 82). The trade in pigeons led to this realization, as the pigeons would make their way back the place they were traded from. Jerolmack observes that "it was not long until humans began to selectively breed the most able pigeons to heighten this capability" (82). The pigeon's ability to return home intact with important messages was taken up as a technological advance in many wars (82-84). During World Wars I and II, they were utilized as "a modern instrument of war" (83). Expertise was developed and fostered by specific soldiers ("pigeoneers") to work with them (83). With technological advances in communication, the "technology" of the pigeon became obsolete (84).

Jerolmack shows that once the use-value of pigeons shifted, negative relationships ensued ("Animal Archaeology"; "Pigeons Became Rats"). While pigeons are used for leisure in farm exhibitions, and rural and urban pigeon racing ("Animal archeology"), the urban pigeon is generally denigrated socially and culturally — symbolically and materially. Another illustration of this shift in use-value and social standing concerns pigeon feces. When one speaks of the pigeon, it seems necessarily to include pigeon feces. Their feces are easily encountered in contemporary urban environments and can (along with other referents, such as pigeon deterrents) stand in for the actual pigeon itself. Historically, human relationships to pigeon feces were shaped by their health benefits and economic worth. One popular historical use of pigeon feces in North America has been for medicinal purposes (Allen 89-90).[13] They were considered medicinal cures for conditions ranging from from baldness to gout (89). Another common use was as fertilizer (Allen 100-101; Jerolmack, "Animal Archaeology" 79-80). The work of Didier Gille is of value here, as it explores the changing relationships that humans have with animal feces, and the various symbolisms that can be attached to

them at different points in history. Excrement was a welcome part of production and consumption in the city of the ancien régime. Pits and collection areas for feces outside of artisans' shops were viewed as positive status symbols (244). Animals were valued in the city for their excrement, as it could be turned into production for fertilizer, to soften leather, and to help with other processes in the textile industry (as, for example, paper making). This is very unlike how we perceive pigeon feces in a North American city today. Pigeon feces are now the "breeding ground" for parasitism and disgust.

Along with the economic and technological changes in its social position, the pigeon came to be seen as disgusting primarily through notions of disease connected to its feces. The city is now supposed to be a clean place. Possible sources of "urban stagnation" (for example, hospitals, cemeteries, garbage) were moved to the periphery of the 19th century city (Gille 229), and ideas of a sanitary city continue today (Jerolmack, "Pigeons Became Rats" 73). In a clean city the pigeon is a threat — "the pigeon became merely a container of disease" (80). Jerolmack notes that pigeons are also believed to be sickly because they eat our refuse (86). The concepts of disgust and abjection suggest that we perceive a threat in the other if it is deemed that it takes up that which we reject. Kristeva reminds us, "filth is not a quality in itself, but it applies only to what relates to a *boundary* and, more particularly, represents the object jettisoned out of that boundary, its other side, a margin" (69). Discussing Serres's parasite, Isabella Winkler remarks, "as the outside and the dirty itself, the parasite befouls someone else's inside(s), and in doing so, appropriates what was not its own to begin with" (228).

The foregoing paragraphs are an attempt at situated knowledge. To this encounter we would then need to add the specific history of each individual encountering pigeons and the broader social and cultural norms they are connected to. One concern about Haraway's practice of respectful relationality is that it is privileged. Haraway is no doubt aware of the critique that she draws on privileged relations involving many privileged animals (for example agility training with expensive dogs). Her book makes it clear that she is trying to work with what she might learn from these power dynamics (WSM). However, she does not adequately address the problem of a politics that requires substantial intellectual and material resources in order to better understand animal-human relations.

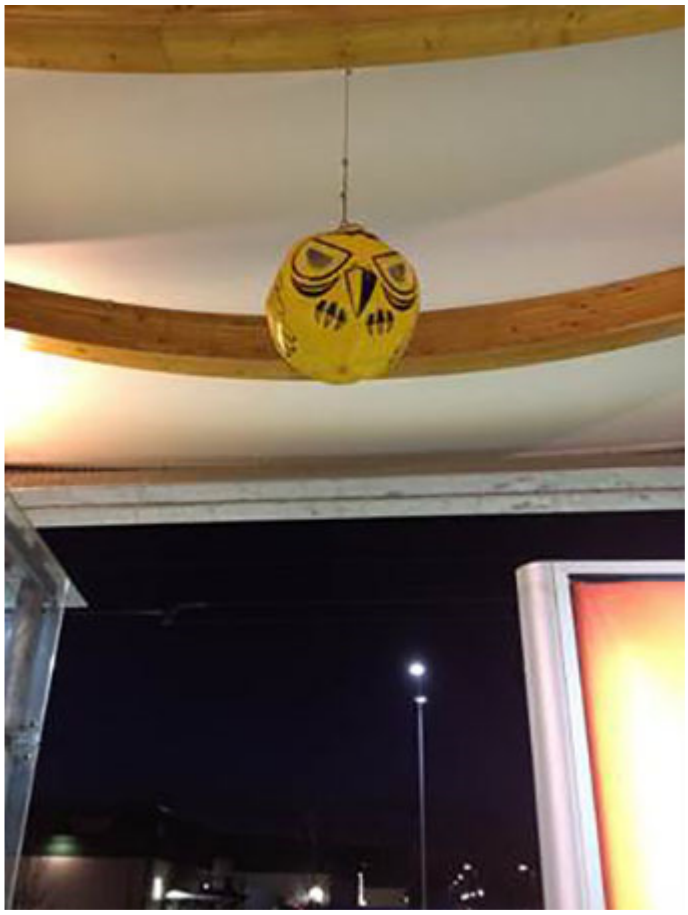
It is challenging to consider how one might convince people to recognize that we exist in a co-constitutional relationship with other creatures. Even more difficult is the

question, how might one convince people to face the "disgusting other," to dwell and think with a potentially uncomfortable, seemingly visceral encounter? Are situated knowledges, driven by the mode of relating premised on respect, enough to convince one to take up the task of considering how the revulsion that one projects on the other is actually revealing about something disgusting in oneself? And how can this reflection account for both the personal and the social? Including aesthetics in relationality brings in additional layers of complexity and additional histories to untangle (harsh bodily reactions in which disgust "feels instinctive" and "irrepressible" [Meagher 31]) that involve queries about whether something is naturally ugly or displeasing, or whether our aesthetic reaction is culturally constructed.

One widely held interpretation is that feces *are* gross — they smell bad, look disgusting, and are packed full of bacteria. But our relationship to feces is not that straightforward. Many humans are willing to get very close to dog and cat feces and allow "pets" to defecate in their homes. Disgust towards, and fear of, pigeon feces is especially heightened and frames the animal itself as diseased. Jerolmack argues that the opinion that pigeons are diseased is more hype than anything — pigeon feces are no dirtier than excrement from the common tropical birds that many people love, kiss, and keep in their homes ("Pigeons Became Rats" 84). Even if the pigeon were diseased, it is important to ask how we implement a politics of respect with that which is physically threatening to humans. Are sick and violent animals allowed to join the animal-human relationality proposed by Haraway?

How do we work with disgust in relationality, acknowledging that disgust is emotionally charged and leads to feelings of abjection sooner than to respect? How might we convince someone confronting a pile of pigeon feces that they ought to engage in a respectful relationship with all of the creatures that brought that excrement to be, as well as with the ones that live deep in every nook and cranny, coil and splatter? This relationship does not have to be one of liking the feces *per se*, but it should include thinking with the other. Haraway acknowledges that when people look at species as a whole, there are particular ones that cause harsh reactions, for example "creepy crawlies" (WSM 10). Further, she remarks about her encounters with feral cats that "becoming feral demands — and invites — becoming worldly just as much as any other species entanglements do. 'Feral' is another name for contingent 'becoming with' for all the actors" (281). Yet the reader is then given details about how to practice this relationality with less uncomfortable critters — dogs, the animals that we eat, animals in labs, and animals that we watch on television. Haraway admits that "certain domestic animals have played the starring roles" but then suggests that the overarching

ideas ought to apply to all species. I am not convinced that her ideas trickle down the animal hierarchy to the lowest critters. While Braidotti describes Haraway's dog as "a radical other" (202), I am still wondering how Haraway's and Serres's politics can engage with perhaps more intense radical others.



A pigeon deterrent hovers over a train station in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada (Photo by Emily Snyder)

What is particularly challenging when confronting the disgust imposed on the pigeon is that the pigeon symbolizes a multitude of interconnected strains of disgust, ugliness, and hatred. As Ahmed puts it, "feelings of disgust stick more to some bodies than others" (*Cultural Politics* 92). In the pigeon, we encounter additional bodies denigrated via social and cultural discourses of disgust. Other beings deemed to be pests, such as rats and cockroaches, stick to the pigeon (and vice versa) through phrases like "rats with wings" and "'cockroaches of the sky'" (Jerolmack "Pigeons Became Rats" 81).[14]

Notions of disease and bacteria also stick to these already sticky, supposedly dangerous bodies. Local governance strategies of extermination and pest control commonly label pigeons as vermin, alongside insects, and Jerolmack notes that "over the last century, pigeons have been shot, gassed, electrocuted, poisoned, trapped, and fed contraceptives, among other such efforts to repel them including spikes and sticky gel on ledges" ("Pigeons Became Rats" 72). Moreover, pigeon deterrent efforts also rely on notions of predation and violence from other, more "useful" birds. The Ultrasonic Bird Repellent, for example, is typically described as a device that "uses a natural predatory principle to scare unwanted birds" (BPC website). The physical (and moral) eminence of birds such as hawks and falcons, and the weakness of other bird species, are made use of in that "the Bird Chaser broadcasts a variety of naturally recorded bird distress signals and predator calls that frighten, confuse and disorient pest birds within the effective range"(BPC website). The pigeon is the primary "pest bird" that is joined by other nuisance birds, such as starlings and sparrows (BPC website). Not only are these "pest birds" a threat to human enjoyment and use of the outdoors, but prospective customers of these ultrasonic products are warned that "pest birds create unsafe conditions, and cause untold billions of [dollars in] damage and maintenance costs, liability and risk exposure from accidents, pollution and disease" (Bird-X website). Discourses of risk, various social problems, and violence stick to the images and representations of products aimed at deterring and/or eliminating pigeons. In a context in which the pigeon is socially and culturally abject, angry images are employed to target them. The large inflatable bird (possibly an owl?) in the image above, for example, has a menacing look, which I suggest does more to cajole humans into scorning the pigeon than it does to actually deter pigeons themselves.

By-laws that set out rules for human-pigeon engagement (for example, when pigeons can be kept on one's property, fines for feeding pigeons) legally compel disdain for the pigeon and criminalize both the pigeon and those who might challenge the rules. Notions of criminality therefore also stick to the pigeon. Ideologies fuelled by racism and classism are deeply entangled in encounters with the birds, who are also now described as "feral pigeons" or "street pigeons" ("Animal archeology" 78; "Pigeons Became Rats" 81). Connecting "homelessness" to pigeons draws on sentiments of disgust towards marginalized others who are violently labeled as threatening and less than human, and like animals. Pigeons are also thought of as global creatures ("Animal archeology" 88) and as Morton notes in *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* ideas of nation and nature are interconnected (15).[15] The potential exists for dubious claims that the pigeon is an immigrant who must prove that it belongs.[16]

Haraway remarks throughout *When Species Meet* that her goal is to deal with the messiness and harshness of animal-human relations, and she strictly rejects romanticizing nature and animals. Braidotti comments that in general, Haraway "is an utterly non-nostalgic post-human thinker: her conceptual universe is the high-technology world of informatics and telecommunications" (198). Haraway accepts many aspects of our current condition, including that there is violence in the world and that humans and animals suffer (although she wants to explore how we might suffer less or at least feel discomfort from this suffering). Yet Haraway still romanticizes. My concern about her romanticization has more to do with her embrace of respect, "getting on together with some *grace*" (*WSM* 15, emphasis added), caring, joy, and love. For her "caring means becoming subject to the unsettling obligation of curiosity, which requires knowing more at the end of the day than at the beginning" (36). Her definition of caring resists romanticizing, but this approach is compromised by other assertions. For example, Haraway contends that "to hold in regard, to respond, to look back reciprocally, to notice, to pay attention, to have courteous regard for, to esteem: all of that is tied to polite greeting, to constituting the polis, where and when species meet" (19). She asks of this relationality – "what if a usable word for this is joy?" ("Encounters" 105). Also, Haraway claims that "to be in love means to be worldly" (*WSM* 97). We frequently read about her love of dogs. But what do we make of the task of becoming worldly with that which we might hate, dislike, or be disgusted by? Can a politics of disgust work with a politics of respect? Do we have to do away with ideas of ugliness, disgust, and abjection? And where might that lead us? How do we account for the ugliness that exists, and will continue to exist, in the world? More generally, is it even possible to respect all animals? Commenting on artist Patricia Piccinini's hybrid human/wombat creatures, Haraway asks, "what do they contribute to the flourishing and health of the land and its critters [...]?" (288). What if they do not contribute to flourishing? To begin to address these questions, and to think further about discomfort, it is worthwhile to turn to Haraway's ideas on suffering.

It is with Haraway's ideas on the suffering of lab animals, and more generally, the killing of animals for consumption, that serious problems arise in applying her theory of respect in practice. For the lab animal, or the cow heading off to slaughter, Haraway encourages people to examine their connectedness to these others, to appreciate them as responsive and responding, and to share in the suffering. She explains,

> human beings' learning to share other animals' pain nonmimetically is, in my view, an ethical obligation, a practical problem, and an ontological opening. Sharing pain promises disclosure, promises becoming. The capacity to respond may yet be recognized and nourished on this earth. (84)

Haraway does not oppose testing animals in labs or eating animals, as long as we can learn to be uncomfortable with these practices and to recognize that the logic for doing so will never be sufficient. She remarks, "I suggest that it is a misstep to separate the world's beings into those who may be killed and those who may not and a misstep to pretend to live outside killing" (79). Killing will happen. However, sharing suffering with lab animals and with the particular animals that get used for food will not do away with human exceptionalism, as Haraway hopes. She comments, "I am [...] convinced that multispecies coflourishing requires simultaneous, contradictory truths if we take seriously *not* the command that grounds human exceptionalism, 'Thou shalt not kill,' but rather the command that makes us face nurturing and killing as an inescapable part of mortal companion species entanglements, namely, 'Thou shalt not make killable'" (105-106). But Haraway is making particular animals killable (lab animals and animals for food) while simultaneously saying that one should not classify animals as such. She separates extermination from her proposed relationality and insists we do away with exterminist behavior: "such *criminality* takes on special historical force in view of the immense, systematized violence against animals that deserves the name 'exterminism'" (78; emphasis added). However, shared suffering and the violence done to lab animals and food animals are not framed as systematic violence; instead, they fall under her ethics of response and respect.

Haraway merges the ideas of discomfort and respect, and articulates a politics in which we must care for each other while simultaneously harming the other. She has acknowledged lived reality and structure, to a degree; however, her suggestions regarding how to act differently do not seem very different from how we actually behave now (except that perhaps some are now more uncomfortable about it). I fail to understand how it is *respectful* of the other to share in their pain, yet still to uphold the very system that makes that pain happen. In this context Haraway's ideas do not translate well into practice. Is this a logic that Haraway applies only in the animal-human context? What happens if we try to apply it to human relations — to recognize that some behavior is systematic violence yet pretend that other targeted behavior is not, and to allow it to continue as long as we are unsettled by it?

All of these contradictions compel another question: can parasites be companion species? According to Haraway, all creatures are companion species, thus perhaps the question needs to be asked differently: can parasites be *worldly* companion species? While Wolfe argues that the presence of abuse value in parasitic relations is not exploitative, in Serres's depiction it seems to be exploitative indeed, as it is premised primarily on notions of one-way relations (*Parasite*). Although not directly commenting on parasites, Haraway states,

> to be in a relation of use to each other is not the definition of unfreedom and violation. Such relations are almost never symmetrical ('equal' or calculable). Rather, relations of use are exactly what companion species are about: the ecologies of significant others involve messmates at table, with indigestion and without the comfort of teleological purpose from above, below, in front, or behind. This is not some kind of naturalistic reductionism; this is about living responsively as mortal beings where dying and killing are not optional. (*WSM* 74)

Further, Haraway insists she is "advocating the understanding that earthly heterogeneous beings are in this web together for all time, and no one gets to be Man" (82). But someone *does* get to be "Man," even in her own politics, despite her claims.

In his work on the parasite Serres asks, "how many of these rough political rats are there around us? How many of them break things they don't understand? How many of these rats simplify? How many of them have built such homogeneous, cruel systems upon the horror of disorder and noise?" (14). Serres's ideas are fantastically harsh and treat dominating humans with their simple attitudes and policies toward animals and other humans as parasites. Yet Serres also asserts that everyone is a parasite in parasitic relationality and "we are all attacked, together" (8). While he means that the system that we live in is too simple and imposes violence on all of us, his framing of relationality and power remains problematic. I have two connected concerns here: first, Serres has a tendency not to differentiate adequately between the parasites he speaks of; and second, his ideas about rupturing the system via noise are contradictory and oversimplified.

What does it mean to claim that everyone is a parasite, or as Yates remarks, that "all the guests are abusive" (201)? We learn from Serres that the oppressed and the powerful can be parasites. Brown describes of Serres's quasi-object,

the token is a marker of the subject. She or he who is caught with the token is 'it', a subject. We others form the indivisible mass, we are the mute collective who will turn on the 'I', who is now victim, the excluded. The quasi-object marks out these 'I's, it is the moving back and forth of this marker, these provisional subjects. In this sense Serres refers to the token as equally quasi-subject. But this pointing out is ambiguous. To be the 'I' is to enjoy a privileged position. One is able to influence the play — shoot for goal, make a heroic move. But equally one is potential victim — the fool, the one to be excluded. Hence the collective turns around the endless selection and passing on of 'I's. ("Michel Serres" 21)

Anyone in this game can be a parasite. But structural realities and power dynamics are missing. While Brown does not address the fact that some people rarely win at this game, nor does he describe who these people might be, he does note that the quasi-object moves within a social system and that "the quasi-object is only relatively undetermined, meaning that it can become embedded within a concrete, highly deterministic social practice" (22). Explicit statements like this from Serres are rare. He oscillates between acknowledging that some people are more oppressed than others and treating everyone as the same. In an interview with Latour, Serres remarks that

Perhaps no other period in history has seen so many losers and so few winners as our own. And time, because it advances through the acceleration of its exacerbated competitions and mimeticism (in science and elsewhere), produces and multiplies exponentially the great crowd of losers — of which everyone risks becoming a member, overnight — and shrinks the more and more rarified and exclusive club (I almost said "pantheon") of winners. What nation today, including our own, does not risk slipping into the third world? And what individual lives in the security of never falling, overnight, into the fourth world? (185-86).

Most certainly France does not "risk slipping into the third world" (186) or risk impoverishment as many other nations do (and actually experience). Further, there are *many* individuals who do not risk plunging suddenly — "overnight" — "into the fourth world." Who is this undifferentiated mass, this "great crowd of losers?" The fables he uses in *The Parasite* to support his arguments do not acknowledge any social matters, such as sexism, racism, colonialism, and the ways that systemic social oppression and privileging operate. We learn little of how parasitic relationality plays out with actual people. Serres does acknowledge at one point that many relationships are not equal, but he does not elaborate or explore this idea (*Parasite* 53).

Serres writes, "I no longer really know how to say it: the parasite parasites the parasites. In other words, any given position in the ternary model is, ad libitum, parasitic. Who is the third? Someone, anyone. The noise stops; someone leaves. Someone, anyone: both formal and random" (55). But who gets labeled as a social parasite will not be "anyone" and this categorization is not "random." Further, it is quite predictable who the political parasites will be. Serres is stuck between, on the one hand, lamenting that the system will never change, that he has written a "book of evil" (88), and, on the other, hoping for transformation. We read that "the master doesn't move at all" (81) and that "the nightmare of the interminable series starts again; I have not stopped being [in] misery" (244). But Serres repeatedly contradicts himself. He also writes that the system "collapses at the slightest noise" (11), and that "we have to get together, assembling, resembling, against whoever troubles our relations" (56). The description on the back of the 2007 English reprint of his book states that "by being pests, minor groups can become major players in public dialogue — creating diversity and complexity vital to human life and thought." Most definitely the oppressed can, and do, make noise and engage in dialogue, but in what ways are those who are marginalized heard (and what of the implications of referring to "minor groups" as "pests"?)? Serres acknowledges that when interrupted by noise, the system might not be entirely transformed. In one rare instance he also acknowledges that the oppressed face obstacles, but he does not consider why this might be beyond fear of the powerful (59).

I do not write "social" and "political" parasite in the way that I have above to claim that society has two tidy positions — the oppressed and the oppressor. Power is far messier than this. Serres understands the system as having multiple norms (Wolfe xxii), and pushes for double meanings and "fuzziness" to affront simple systems that adhere to Enlightenment logics (*Parasite* 57). However, he overlooks hierarchies and binaries. Maria Assad, writing on Serres and gender, contends that it is unfair of Serres's critics to argue that his work ignores gender, inasmuch as it is these very binaries that he is trying to do away with. This reasoning is insufficient. Proposing a theory that is a challenge to hierarchies, binaries, and simplicity does not mean that one's alternative social theories can ignore the lived reality of these very things that shape our lives.

Are Serres's ideas about interrupting the system with noise perhaps too simple because they are derived primarily from the logic of communication theory? Is it possible that this theory accounts well for communication being parasited, falling apart,

restructuring, but that a social and cultural system is too complex for this analogy?[17] When defined by communication theory parasitic relationality fails to apply meaningfully to animal-human relations and ideas concerning disgust and ugliness. In what ways do we hear pigeons in urban space? Does their capability to adapt continually to urban structures and space constitute an interruption? Are the spikes and fierce looking plastic predators that adorn urban built environments symbolic of the pigeon's capability to interrupt human exceptionalism? In his work on the natural contract, Serres treats animals as *actants* that engage us in the act of listening (*Natural Contract*). However, Serres's approach to power is inadequate for explaining social structure and power dynamics, and the question of *how* we listen and respond is crucial. While the pigeon might have some space to "interrupt," ultimately these disruptions occur within a system that normatively derides the pigeon, rather than humans, as the disgusting parasite. Pigeon deterrent modifications in urban built environments reflect the criminality, disempowerment, and hoped for disappearance of the pigeon.

A politics of disgust can help us to think beyond Serres's parasitic relationality and Haraway's respectful relationality. Serres's politics of abuse appears initially to allow for disgust and discomfort, but, while it is unlikely that Serres would aim to make the ugly "beautiful," we must consider how his conceptualization of power and refusal to acknowledge social structures and norms works against the inclusion of the pigeon and a politics of disgust. Additionally, while Haraway's politics of respect aims to involve discomfort, introducing aesthetics, the pigeon, and its feces create the need for further theorizing. Abjection, that is, to cast something out, is a kind of exterminist act. Haraway is concerned with challenging extermination, since it makes particular critters killable and therefore has no place in her politics. However, she welcomes this reality only halfway. Can a politics of respect recognize that abjection happens? How does one respect that which one ejects?

My understanding of a politics of disgust is distinct from Ange-Marie Hancock's use of the term. In her work on welfare policy in the US, she argues that a politics of disgust is taken up against African American women based on the intersection of their gender, race, and class. She frames this disgust as a threat not only to this group of women but to everyone generally and a threat to what democracy ought to be. She advocates for the elimination of the use of disgust in politics. While I agree with Hancock that disgust is social, cultural, and political, and that it needs to be interrogated, I depart from her in several ways. Aesthetics is largely absent in Hancock's work. Further, I apply ideas on disgust to animal-human relationships. Most significantly, I do not aim to eliminate disgust. I do not mean to embrace disgust as an inherent quality, and I understand that

it can be detrimental to those labeled "disgusting," but I do not think that disgust can be eliminated. The targets of disgust might shift, but disgust, like conflict, is pervasive. Working with, rather than attempting to eliminate disgust, does not mean that we should then abandon critical interrogation of reactions and labels of disgust. Challenges to the ideologies and violence that uphold Others as disgusting are crucial. Working with disgust involves attempting to recognize disgust realistically as something that is both socially constructed and a reality, as well as to understand how deeply intertwined an analysis of disgust is with an analysis of power and the reality of conflict.

A politics of disgust, as articulated here, is in many ways an affront to particular ethics-based approaches to relationships that focus heavily on notions of obligations, respect, response, and callings/invitations, which I contend many people do not actually experience when disgusted. While some might argue that this closure is the main problem — i.e., that there is a lack of reflecting on this reaction — I think that we need to dwell with disgust in a much more realistic way. By enabling ugliness, disgust, abjection and tension to be a part of understanding human and animal-human relationships, I suggest that we work with an ethics and politics premised on partiality — an approach to thinking about relationality that rids us of the notion that all humans ought to have some capacity for obligation to the other, and instead admits the reality that, while some might be on board with ideas for thinking differently, there is also a substantial portion of the population that might not agree with one's propositions, care about them, or be willing to examine the contradictions and uncomfortable things in their own lives that are believed to be necessary or contingent upon one's politics working. Sianne Ngai argues that "ugly feelings" are a way in to thinking about social problems (so too are "pleasant" feelings — see Ahmed, Promise of Happiness). While it is very useful to work with openings, I suggest that animal studies scholars should face the limitations of our engagements with animals more practically and be more realistic about power and conflict.

Conclusion. Kerry Whiteside argues that a "noncentered" approach requires that, when we think about the environment, nature, and animals, we must problematize both human and nature rather than theorizing them in a way that reinforces a harsh division between them (3). While Whiteside treats this approach as somewhat unique and refreshing, one has the impression, particularly after reading Haraway and Serres, that we are still left with the same problems concerning the environmental crisis and animal-human relationships. Haraway's and Serres's texts on their own do not provide new

ways of understanding animal-human relationality, at least not one that is palpable in practice. Neither text adequately addresses lived conditions and the real consequences of how power circulates in our society. Haraway remains somewhat of a romantic, and she does not allow for as much indigestion as she suggests. With Serres, one is faced with oversimplified ideas about power. The ugly animal remains a challenge. Further, Haraway's and Serres's relationality-based approaches suggest presence from all involved in a given encounter. "Animals" might have no interest in "humans" "becoming with" them.

The pigeon, its feces, and consequently a politics of disgust allow one to consider questions regarding the ways that consider ugliness, disgust, and abjection can be part of one's politics. The most uncomfortable aspects of the pigeon, which are constructed and promoted by cultural discourses, help us to engage realistically with hierarchies and norms. Negative aesthetics need to be explored as culture and time specific, as illustrated via the social, economic, and technological history of the pigeon. In the same vein, the additional complexities of affect and embodied reactions need to be accounted for when we think about how disgust circulates in our relationships. By focusing on the pigeon and its feces, I hope I have pushed Haraway's and Serres's ideas to arrive at a more uncomfortable place in practice. While the numerous questions throughout this paper encourage ongoing dialogue and reflection, notions of disgust, disease, revulsion, and even institutionalized aversion to the pigeon via urban policies, built environments, and extermination encourage working with the reality of closure, power, and ongoing contestation in our politics.

Notes

1. Thank you to Dr. Val Napoleon, Dr. Rob Shields, and Dr. Sourayan Mookerjea for their valuable feedback on earlier drafts of this essay. Thank you as well to the two anonymous reviewers for their detailed, thoughtful comments. This research was supported by a Canada Graduate Scholarship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

2. A precarious set of terms accompany the word "Western," as for example "Western thought," "Western culture," and "Western values." When I use the term "Western thought" I speak to not only normative political ideas that have originated in specific geographic regions, but also to the pervasiveness with which they spread in those regions and beyond physical place ("the West").

3. Why focus on *The Parasite* and not Serres's work in *The Natural Contract*, which is a text explicitly about animal-human relations, perhaps even one that would complement Haraway's text? In *The Natural Contract* (1990), Serres expands J.J. Rousseau's notion of social contract (which was only focused on humans) to bring in all of the other actors on this planet (Wesling 193). Similar to what we read in *The Parasite*, all creatures in his work on the natural contract are both subject and object, and Serres believes that "'the Earth speaks to us in terms of forces, linkages and interactions, and these suffice in the making of a contract'" (qtd, in Wesling 196). As in Haraway's work, Serres's natural contract is understood, as Donald Wesling describes it, as a "link, knot, connection, bond" (196). Further, Whiteside notes that "Serres reveals the forgotten role of contract in imagining relationships between human and nonhuman beings in terms of equilibrium, partnership, and reciprocal influence" (122). I am most compelled by the texts that I have chosen (*The Parasite* and *WSM*), given their explicit discussions on relationality. The notion of parasitic relationality is particularly important to address considering the cultural construction of the pigeon as a parasite. I do not intend to set up my analysis in a way that depicts Haraway and Serres as completely at odds with each other. I am instead trying to work between ideas on relationality.

4. When I use the term "relationality," I am referring not just to the act or possibility of relating, but also to the ways in which relationships are social. My usage of "relationality" has to do with social relationships and living together.

5. The term "politics of disgust" is also articulated elsewhere by Ange-Marie Hancock. I discuss her conceptualization and use of this term, in relation to my own understanding of the term, in the discussion section of this essay.

6. Haraway explains in a footnote that "critter" means, "a motley crowd of lively beings including microbes, fungi, humans, plants, animals, cyborgs, and aliens. Critters are always relationally entangled rather than taxonomically neat" (WSM 330).

7. "When Parasites Meet" is a multi-media piece of art in which a video of pigeons and humans, along with urban audio, are projected onto four by four foot acrylic painting of pigeon feces shown in the photo above. The piece is about human-pigeon relationality and visually explores the questions about aesthetics, disgust, and abjection taken up in this essay.

8. It remains unclear to me how this logic is new. It is difficult to understand Serres's assertion, as there is no real sense of time in his work because of his rejection of linearity and time periods.

9. Though Shields is not writing about disgust in his work, it is still important to consider.

10. When I use the term "negative aesthetics," I am referring to ugliness and disgust.

11. Unfortunately, Mosse neglects to bring gender and sexism meaningfully into his analysis throughout most of his book. Sexism and racism are interconnected forms of violence and aesthetics, sexism, and social control are also deeply intertwined.

12. For an example of work that treats ugliness as its starting point, see Ngai. In saying that she starts with ugliness, this is not meant to deny that ugliness exists in relation to beauty, nor to suggest that she leaves beauty unexamined. However, he work dwells on political aspects of "the aesthetics of negative emotions" (1), which are too infrequently focused on.

13. Pigeons themselves were also used for medicinal purposes (Allen 89-91).

14. For a discussion on the emergence of these metaphors see Jerolmack ("Pigeons Became Rats" 81).

15. For an analysis of the interplay of animal care-taking, ethnicity, and nation, see also Jerolmack, "Animal Practices."

16. See Jerolmack's note on sparrows as immigrants ("Animal archeology" 76).

17. I do not mean to suggest here that communication is separate from social norms and dynamics.

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