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## Chapter 3

### Aesthetic Imagination and Animate Peace

Pauline von Bonsdorff<sup>1</sup>

#### 1. Introduction

It has been suggested that our civilisation is in a state of prolonged moral crisis in its relationship to nature, environment and non-human species. The crisis is not, then, just about material resources but about fundamental values that affect us as much as the natural environment. Philosophers and scholars have described the crisis in terms of a war between humankind and nature, or between humans and other species.<sup>2</sup> If there is a war it is fought in blindness: without an explicit will to harm nature yet with a profound negligence of how our life-styles and societal structures – such as global trade, agriculture, foresting, urban land-use, mining for communication technology – affects local ecosystems and the earth as a whole, its ground, air and water systems. One might see the crisis as one of misplaced priorities where care and

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<sup>1</sup> I thank participants in the *Poesis of Peace* conference for valuable comments suggestions, especially Tomaž Grušovnik who challenged me on the need to introduce imagination in order to see animals as agents. More personally, this piece is dedicated to my cousin Gunilla Donner, with whom I have shared animal friendships and narratives from childhood on. Significantly, she was given her nickname Dure by an older brother who saw his baby sister as an ‘animal’ (*djur*). – I should also thank the late cows at Ahdenkallio who made me realise the similarities between bovine and human herds, not to forget my present interspecies community.

<sup>2</sup> See Michel Serres, *Le contrat naturel* (Paris: Flammarion, 1990); and Jacques Derrida, *L’animal que donc je suis* (Paris: Galilée, 2006), 46, 140. I use ‘nature’ to refer to both the environment, organic and inorganic, and to nature as part of our own physiology. Agreeing with Donna Haraway in *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003) that nature and human culture are intertwined I find the conceptual distinction useful.

protection of non-human habitats is not seen as important enough as compared to economic growth or political power; or of an inability to grasp the big picture, or of not caring for our non-human companions. Other reasons could certainly be named as well.

Looking especially at the educated middle class in contemporary Western societies our nature relationship is indeed paradoxical. Many people ‘love’<sup>3</sup> nature: some enjoy beautiful landscapes and travel far to see them, others seek adventure in nature, some grow gardens, and some breed and train animals in order to participate in competitions where aesthetic qualities such as skill, force, beauty and courage are at stake. Yet through our very life-style we consume natural habitats, as if our individual life and the broader environment were disconnected, as if what is not seen did not exist. There is however also a growing insight and an increasing sense of urgency to it, that humans can live only in interdependence with other species. In philosophy a turn towards interdependence is linked to criticisms of the dualistic traditions that separate mind and body, human and animal.<sup>4</sup> Writing on the animal ‘that I am’ and the absence of the animal as a philosophical theme in the West, Jacques Derrida shows how the idea that thinking alone constitutes the subject keeps the question of life, of living and breathing, of the animate and animals firmly outside ‘the subject’. For Derrida, unlike Descartes, it is not thinking but animal that ‘therefore I am’.<sup>5</sup>

In this chapter my aim is to contribute to the discussion about the nature crisis through looking at how we might work towards dynamic coexistence with non-human nature through

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<sup>3</sup> For a critical discussion of the ‘love’ of pet animals see Haraway, *Companion Species Manifesto*, 33–40.

<sup>4</sup> For an in-depth discussion of animals’ role in Western philosophy, see Kelly Oliver, *Animal Lessons: How They Teach Us to Be Human* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Derrida, *L’animal*. This work importantly opens the philosophical significance of animals. Yet the emphasis is more on philosophy than on animals.

communicating and bonding with domestic mammals, thereby anchoring ourselves in the world. Ultimately my contribution is about building peace with nature. I start, in Section 2, with a discussion of negative and positive peace between humans and non-human nature, and introduce 'animate peace' to suggest that peace is a dynamic, complex and challenging, in addition to rewarding, state of affairs. In Section 3 I turn to our interaction and communication with domestic animals. Using personal experience I show the multimodal, holistic character of such communication; how it is temporally layered and emerging in a relationship that transforms both parts; and how it marginalises verbal language as a means of communication. In Section 4 I argue that our communication with animals calls for aesthetic imagination: an imagination that is affected by and partly parallel with actual interactions, and operates with images more than concepts. Aesthetic imagination provides an alternative to the striving for control, with its implications of unilateral power and violence, and a poetic home for animal affections. I end, in Section 5, by addressing one possible limitation of the outlined approach; basically pointing out that self-education is an active process.

## **2. Animate Peace**

In his book *Le contrat naturel*, written when worries about global warming and climate change had recently entered public consciousness, Michel Serres argues that we should realise that humans at present are at war with nature. Such an insight might make us more aware of nature and enable us to draw a peace treaty, e.g. a contract between humans and nature. Serres claims that our culture is fundamentally alienated from nature which we do not know concretely.<sup>6</sup> In a

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<sup>6</sup> Serres, *Le contrat*, e.g. 16. For similar views, see David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996); Gernot Böhme, *Die Natur vor uns:*

sense then, Martin Heidegger's suggestion that humans are world-creating (*weltbildend*) while (other) animals are 'poor in world' (*weltarm*)<sup>7</sup> is turned upside down: it is not animals but contemporary humans whose world is impoverished and thin. The suggestion could be criticised for ignoring what Heidegger means by 'world'. Yet what I want to do is precisely to bypass the hegemony of a particular form of human culture and self-understanding in setting the limits for culturally significant communication between animate beings, including non-humans.

If humans at present are at war with nature, how can we work towards peace? We might start with the distinction between negative and positive peace. Johan Galtung describes negative peace as 'the absence of violence of all kinds', the cure of which is various means of violence reduction.<sup>8</sup> Focused as it is on the absence and reduction of its opposites, violence and war, negative peace leaves the substance of peace undefined. Furthermore, while negative peace implies the absence of violence of all kinds the boundary between negative peace, structural violence and explicit violence may in practice be rather open. Thus Hans Magnus Enzensberger describes violence and hatred in contemporary capitalist society as 'molecular civil war' and points to a cultural vacuum as its root cause.<sup>9</sup> A negative approach to peace, although necessary, is far from sufficient.

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*Naturphilosophie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* (Zug: Die Graue Edition, 2002); and Wolfgang Welsch, *Mensch und Welt: Eine evolutionäre Perspektive der Philosophie* (München: C.H. Beck, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Heidegger's view is discussed critically by Derrida, *L'animal*, 193–219, and refuted by Stephen David Ross, "Living with the animals... In the fullness of our nonidentities...", *Poligrafi* 17, no. 65–66 (2012): 217.

<sup>8</sup> Johan Galtung, *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization* (London: Sage, 1996), 31, 30.

<sup>9</sup> Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *Civil War*, trans. Piers Spence and Martin Chalmers (London: Granta Books 1994), 19–31.

Fortunately Galtung gives directions for positive peace. It comprises qualities such as kindness and love to self and other, freedom, dialogue and solidarity. It is ‘a cooperative system beyond “passive peaceful coexistence” ... that can bring forth positively synergistic fruits of the harmony’. Finally the means towards positive peace are in ‘*processes of life enhancement*’.<sup>10</sup> Several important points are involved here. I would however like to stress the dynamic aspects, including antagonisms and conflicting interests, even more than Galtung, who puts the ‘bliss’ of sexual union at the positive end of a continuum from total separation to total association (while observing that the latter may not be sustainable in the long run). Developing the concept animate peace I agree with Galtung about the need to think about what peace is rather than about what it is not, but I find it necessary to guard the heterogeneity and even messiness of life as *multum in parvo*.<sup>11</sup> This will lead, as I show later, to seeing peace as sustained through aesthetic imagination.

Where and how can we then preliminarily find processes of life enhancement – the building of positive peace – in our interaction with non-human mammals? First, the ideal of negative peace is, at least in practice, connected to control. Control is a constituent part of negative peace in and between societies as well, implemented through rules, borders, police and security forces, and so forth. With domestic animals this implies a demand of obedience, and communication defined unilaterally by humans. The problem is not that such methods of working with animals do not work: they can lead to calm, safe and predictable interactions. However, they are also rigid, and there is no real dialogue in such situations, no looking from the other side or

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<sup>10</sup> Galtung, *Peace by Peaceful Means*, 32, 61, 30. Italics mine.

<sup>11</sup> Oliver is critical of the animal rights discourse because it is ‘oppositional and exclusionary’ as compared to an emphasis on relationships and responsibility. Quoting Derrida she later indicates that difference does not imply opposition; *Animal Lessons*, 29, 25–48, 137.

imagining oneself in the other's place. Such methods often do not enhance the life and flourishing of the other. Second, positive peace is precisely about dialogue in dynamic relationships where the actors are allowed to change rather than stick to roles defined by rules and current opinion. Genuine dialogue is a way towards life enhancement and flourishing.<sup>12</sup> It demands a reflective relationship to oneself and the other: a willingness to change and adapt. Positive peace must be continuously sustained, performed, and exercised: it is an individual and intersubjective practice; a personal task we do with others. In a fundamental sense, it is about culture, education and self-education.<sup>13</sup>

Positive peace, then, is not passive but involves dynamic acts of balancing, including risks and communicational failures. This is evident in 'animate peace', which is my take on the possibility of positive peace between humans and nature. I want to emphasise its lively and unpredictable character. Unlike when we think of peace as an end to war there are no treaties here; the game never stops. Animate peace has the potential of making us more aware of the conflicting interests that are part of life, where the challenge is not to eradicate them or make others give up what they want, but to find ways of living together in mutual enjoyment. With Donna Haraway, it is about 'how worldly actors might ... love each other less violently,'<sup>14</sup> and it reminds us of what we share with non-human animate beings. Finally the idea is inspired by Luce Irigaray's call for a sexual culture:<sup>15</sup> a culture of dialogue instead of juxtaposition and stereotypes; a reflective culture with awareness of how language affects the relationship between

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<sup>12</sup> David Bohm, *On Dialogue*, ed. Lee Nichol (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Galtung, *Peace by Peaceful Means*, 196–210.

<sup>14</sup> Haraway, *Companion Species Manifesto*, 7. She also points out that the human – animal relationship is far from easy, e.g. 12.

<sup>15</sup> E.g. Luce Irigaray, *J'aime à toi. Esquisse d'une félicité dans l'histoire* (Paris: Grasset, 1992).

the sexes; a cultivation of sexual relationships in the broadest sense. Animate peace, accordingly, is the cultivation of our philosophical, practical and poetical relationships with other species towards more insight, fairness, and enjoyment.

Animate peace points us in a direction where communication broadens beyond words towards other forms of communication. Next I want to indicate how dialogues can arise by non-verbal means, where communication is more a making 'in common' rather than only 'making common' what one part desires.<sup>16</sup> Such exchanges demand that we recognise the embodied, multi-sensuous and often unintentional ways in which we share our state of being with other mammals that are more sensitive than we in many ways. We then have to become more worldly; more attached to the natural world through affectionate ties with fellow creatures and their ways of co-inhabiting our shared environment. Often this comes naturally, for despite difficulties and sometimes frustrations grace, joy and playfulness are significant ingredients of animate peace, and mostly near at hand.<sup>17</sup>

### 3. Living with Animals

In reflecting on communication with animals more attention has been given to whether they understand what we want than on whether we understand what they want. Whether the animal responds to the human has been discussed in depth as compared to the virtually in-existent issue of whether the human responds to the animal.<sup>18</sup> Yet either way communication can be understood

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<sup>16</sup> Bohm, *On Dialogue*, 2.

<sup>17</sup> Haraway, in *The Companion Species Manifesto*, argues that precisely play, actual enjoyment and affection between humans and dogs contribute to making us more worldly. I follow her, with other animal companions.

<sup>18</sup> Derrida, *L'animal*, 24ff. Oliver, in *Animal Lessons*, 77, reverses the question that preoccupies Derrida by asking 'what if the human responded?'



as information exchange or ‘making common’. For understanding our life with animals, and for animate peace, the model of dialogue as making *in* common is more fruitful, and underexplored. Refreshingly, in her book on infants and intersubjectivity Vasudevi Reddy introduces the ‘two-person model’ of understanding other persons, where the starting-point is that we are who we are in relation to others, and the presumed gap between self and other is a theoretical construction.<sup>19</sup> Recent multidisciplinary infant research shows that embodiment and intersubjectivity are fundamental conditions of what we are rather than add-ons; and early communication is rhythmic and aesthetic before it is verbal.<sup>20</sup> Language develops from vocal and multimodal gestures; and gestural, expressive elements remain part of verbal discourse.<sup>21</sup>

Relationality and the reciprocal creation of situations, including meaning, are key to our interaction with animals. As I argue below, we understand the other animal largely because we share contexts and in fact co-create them. This acting together can involve various aims, and is also a tuning of the intersubjective relationship. Personal, embodied communication is perhaps always to some extent the modulation of feelings shared in a situation, but together with animals

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<sup>19</sup> Vasudevi Reddy, *How Infants Know Minds* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2008); See also Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), 398–419.

<sup>20</sup> Stephen Malloch and Colwyn Trevarthen, eds., *Communicative Musicality: Exploring the Basis of Human Companionship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Daniel N. Stern, *Forms of Vitality: Exploring Dynamic Experience in Psychology, the Arts, Psychotherapy, and Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>21</sup> See also Abram, *Spell of the Sensuous*; and Pauline von Bonsdorff, ‘Language and emotion in Merleau-Ponty,’ in *Emotion and Language: Theory, Research, Application*, ed. Ulrike Lütke (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2015).

this aspect is emphasised. Who we are is influenced by our relation to animals at least when we share our life with them.<sup>22</sup>

Another preliminary point is that the role of words is transformed when we speak to animals. They do react to names and other words, such as ‘come’, ‘food’ or ‘wait’, but what accompanies the word is as important as the word itself. I can say ‘Mindi’ in a factual tone: the cat half asleep on my desk shows no reaction. But when I repeat her name in the soft, melodious tone that is common between us her ear moves: she recognises that I address her. The linguistic system as such is not there for the animal, but emotional modulations and contextual meanings, and the style of a particular human person are recognised. Thus one answer to Serres’ question how to find a common language with nature<sup>23</sup> is to give up the primacy of the verbal. When Mindi rolls over I abandon the keyboard and caress her, entering her purring playful state. This takes place without any conscious decision: I just respond to her gestures as she invites me. In communicating with animals movements, gestures and sounds are much more important than words. And vision, unquestionably central for us humans, is just one sense in a web of multimodal attention and response.<sup>24</sup>

I will reflect on my experience of interacting with domestic animals, mainly horses and cats, highlighting aspects of companionship, of sharing and influencing the other’s life. The temporal and autobiographical dimension – the prolonged, dynamic conversation between individuals – is crucial. In this case my personal history with cats, cattle and horses provides

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<sup>22</sup> This also applies among animals. Reddy describes how the sheep Isis started to behave like a dog after losing her sheep companion but returned to being sheep-like when there was a new sheep, *How Infants Know Minds*, 31.

<sup>23</sup> Serres, *Le contrat*, 22–3.

<sup>24</sup> While Derrida recognises that non-human animals may use other senses than humans in their social relationships, his reflections might on the whole be too preoccupied with vision to do justice to an interspecies perspective.

familiarity with the character and body language of these creatures. The tacit knowledge that experience provides is the background from which I am frustrated, happy or puzzled with the animal companion or myself. Experience affects both the actual instances of communication and their interpretation. The narratives, on the other hand, also reveal some aspects of me as a person. Different styles of communication yield different outcomes that again influence who we are. The idea is to indicate aspects that are relevant for aesthetic imagination and animate peace. While I consider species and sex as existential conditions for the animal itself, and recognise that they influence our perceptions, my intention is not to generalise but to highlight interactions with individual animals.<sup>25</sup>

A feature that stands out in the human-equine relationship is the intimacy of human actions on the horse. Horses are groomed and ridden; when working they mostly wear iron shoes and iron bits in their sensitive mouths. There is much in riding and driving that relies on the threat of pain. At the same time, trust and reliability are necessary because the animal is big and strong, and potentially dangerous.

Today riders have more opportunities than ever to develop their skills in theory and practice through a wide variety of approaches. The biomechanical approach is especially useful because it looks at the dynamics of rider and horse through careful microanalyses of anatomy and movement.<sup>26</sup> The basic philosophy however varies from behaviourism to respect for the horse as

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<sup>25</sup> Derrida observes that for philosophers animals have no sex; *L'animal*, 59. But for people who have or work with animals they are mostly strongly sexed, sometimes to the point where human gender stereotypes are projected on them.

<sup>26</sup> Centered riding is classical in this field but by no means the only one. See, e.g. Sally Swift, *Centered Riding 2: Further Exploration* (North Pomfret: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 2002); Mary Wanless, *Ride With Your Mind*

an intelligent individual. Thus a dressage simulator – a life-size robot that reacts to the aids of the rider mechanically – can certainly help the rider to improve her actions on the horse, but it marginalises the individuality of horses and the temporally extended relationship between particular humans and particular horses. It leads to seeing the animal as the representative of a species, a token of a type.

The focus of riding instruction is often on control and obedience.<sup>27</sup> This obscures the personality of the animal, its initiatives, suggestions and emotions, and dialogue through a human response. A horse can suggest canter by taking a few strides when being asked for a trot: if she accepts trot the human can thank her by suggesting canter. This is however hindered by the rule that the human should always, with unfaltering consequence, stay with her own idea of what to do. Accordingly the horse's ideas must not be accepted and the relationship is competitive, even conflictual: one of at most negative peace between two separate parties.

Another rule, emphasised by virtually every instructor, is that the horse must not enter the space of the human unless invited. Yet if we accept exceptions in some situations another horse can appear. *One May afternoon I bring fresh willows to the two horses, and we spend time together. I talk to one at a time and stroke them. While I stand with Esteri, Suijari approaches. I*  

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*Clinic: Rider Biomechanics – Basics to Brilliance* (Wykey: Kenilworth Press, 2008); Jean-Luc Cornille, *Science of Motion*, accessed 27 September 2015, [www.scienceofmotion.com/index.html](http://www.scienceofmotion.com/index.html).

<sup>27</sup> For discourses that respect the horse's intelligence, see Cornille, *Science of Motion*; also Perry Wood, *Real Riding: How to Ride in Harmony with Horses* (Addington: Kenilworth Press, 2002); and Mark Rashid, *Horses Never Lie: The Heart of Passive Leadership* (Cincinnati: David & Charles, 2007). A more daring narrative is Anna Clemence Mews and Julie Dicker, *What Horses Say: How to Hear, Help and Heal Them* (Addington: Kenilworth Press, 2005). While Cornille relies on imagination and narrative to give a horse's point of view that differs from popular theories, Mews and Dicker address the imagination at least of a sympathetic if also sceptical reader. These authors break cultural and quasi-scientific assumptions about what horses are capable of thinking and feeling.

*surmise he is bossy and jealous and wave my arms to make him go away. Then I turn toward Esteri again. Surprised I then feel him scrubbing his head against my hip, without aggression. I look down and perceive the thick winter fell on his forehead. I scrub it and it comes off in balls. 'So this is what you meant' I say.* It should be added that Suijari has a reputation of not accepting to be touched on his head as he was probably beaten during his years as a trotter.

Sharing a space with horses requires willingness to see their side of the space as different from ours, and to accept their invitations. When dialogues take place the human and the equine are no longer separate entities, but more like fluids in a bucket, matters that mix.<sup>28</sup> Sharing can be, like with Suijari, tinged with a sense of vulnerability and affection, and gratefulness for being trusted as someone to turn to when there is an itch. On the other hand I doubt that we can ever not share space with domestic animals whenever they perceive us – and they almost always perceive us before we perceive them. When perceived we are present to them and in their space.

When humans train animals the emphasis is often on teaching the animal to react immediately to unambiguous signals. But while it is useful to become more aware of one's body, a side effect of focusing only on performance is neglect about the shared space. Yet the other mammal's perception of the human relies on cues beyond what we are aware of (for physiological or perspectival reasons) such as smells, patterns of movement, body language, tone of voice and gaze direction. Animals perceive us through multimodal, holistic attention to movements, sounds and smells where our feelings, such as kindness, fear or nervousness are immediately recognised. If Esteri lowers her head to smell my breath she probably trusts and maybe even enjoys me; and when I allow her to lick my hands (not recommended by horse

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. Ross, 'Living with the animals,' 217: 'Bodies are proximate, relational, embedded, and entangled.'

professionals), to taste and feel me with her muzzle, I trust and enjoy her touch.<sup>29</sup> Human kisses are bleak, in a sensorial perspective, compared to the thorough appreciation of the other performed by most sniffing mammals. And inter-species interpretation is prone to mistakes because different species communicate differently.<sup>30</sup>

With companion animals there are however many situations where we spend time together without a particular goal, and where communication has a better chance of becoming more reciprocal. This is typical with cats since they co-operate only when they like to. Compared to most domestic animals the cat is a feral species.<sup>31</sup> More than serving humans it shares a symbiotic relationship with us: optimally peaceful co-existence with mutual enjoyment of material goods (like mice and rats: to eat or get rid of) and affection. Like the species once did, individual cats, if they can move freely, can choose their human host and move to a better home. In happy human-feline relationships there is a gift of friendship as the cat has no pressing psychological need of bonding with others. The cat's affection is far from given: the human therefore feels accepted, even chosen, and sustained. To train a cat is possible, yet cats challenge behaviourism by following their own judgement rather than human rules, especially when no-one is around.

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<sup>29</sup> The horse's muzzle is in some respects comparable to human hands. Horses use it to investigate, including manipulating things. Sujjari has opened more than one 'horse-safe' door.

<sup>30</sup> Wagging the tail is a well-known example: for the dog it is a friendly greeting whereas the cat's tail moves from side to side in tension just before attack; see, e.g., Desmond Morris, *Catwatching* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1986).

<sup>31</sup> Derrida points out that a cat cannot be owned, and while a domestic species, it is not domesticated; *L'animal*, 23, 214.

Perhaps it is no coincidence that the cat has been favoured by philosophers and poets.<sup>32</sup> Writing perspicuously on the naming and ‘ad-dressing’ of cats T.S. Eliot indicated their integrity and dignity.<sup>33</sup> Yet cats are not asocial. Like most other domestic animals they address us, sometimes in a simple greeting. But they also create a language intended for humans, typically with situated gestures and vocalisations to ask for specific things, and they train us to understand it. The communication they initiate has different functions and is taught through shared contexts in patient iteration. To Alice in Wonderland, who complained that ‘whatever you say, they always purr’<sup>34</sup> we should point out that it is unrealistic to expect animals to communicate according to a code where meaning is preserved while the context changes. Inter-species communication especially is relational, contextual and situational. I shall shortly give an example of its difficulties. Let me first note however that a basic meaning of purring is emotional connection.<sup>35</sup> A feline mother purrs when she nurses, and kittens purr while pumping her tissues with their paws. This maternal eroticism is present when the cat purrs and pumps its human host, who might prefer to move the claws off her skin. Yet a purring cat on the lap is a basic figure of feline-human contentment.

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<sup>32</sup> In addition to Derrida, one could mention Oliver’s *Animal Lessons*, dedicated to a cat and with cats as chapter vignettes.

<sup>33</sup> T.S. Eliot, *The Illustrated Old Possum: Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1981), 9–10, 61–3. ‘What would it mean if we granted dignity to all things’ asks Ross, ‘Living with the animals,’ 220.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Derrida. *L’animal*, 25.

<sup>35</sup> Another instance of intimacy is when the cat rubs her cheeks against a human leg, marking it with her smell. The cat probably does not realise how relatively poor our olfactory organs are.

Mindi, my present cat companion, is a small-sized black-and-white female, born in the countryside and trained in feline skills by her mother – to play, kill, and enjoy human company. She is confident with humans and able to stay in a flat during the week but likes to go hunting on weekends. She is soft and purring but also unpredictable and violent, or so it may seem. Her behaviour exemplifies much of the cultural mythology about cats.

*Mindi comes towards me as I am sitting at the kitchen table. I take her up and stroke her, she purrs. But then I turn her on her back. Her pupils widen, her body stiffens; she still purrs but meows and gives my hand a bite. I scold her and put her on the floor. Now her movements become predator-like. Jumping sideways, she attacks my leg with front paws and teeth. It does not hurt much but I am offended and get up, talking angrily to her. She runs and hides in another room. I persecute her and throw an object along the floor. Almost immediately I am struck by shame, and call her name in a repentant tone. My mind is flooded with awareness of the innocence of the animals that we bring into our lives and expose to our practices, and the suffering of animals, and my own stupid behaviour. Five minutes later, she is at the other end of the hall. I squat and we look at each other, both hesitant but willing to approach. She allows me to come and stroke her on the back. She purrs again, and her eyes are more normal, her body relaxed.*

In this example many things happen in a short time and the human is forced, if she wants to continue a good relationship, to face her own actions from the point of view of a much smaller animal. Cats are not just hunters, they are also prey, and while Mindi can expose her belly when she stretches on a couch, to just turn her over and touch her in this area is intrusive. Her feline dignity was offended even if she, at some level, perhaps still trusted me (continued purring).<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> The functions of purring are certainly manifold and not enough known.



Shame, a theme that Derrida approaches from the experience of being stared at, naked, by his (female) cat,<sup>37</sup> is here a shame about what I did. While shame about nakedness in front of the animal's gaze could be a projection of an interest that is not there my shame hit me from the other's side. With her bite Mindi disapproved, two times, and I responded like a giant idiot.

The example casts a light of vulnerability on the 'ferocious' and 'unpredictable' character of cats, and exposes human-feline emotional interdependence in a domestic relationship. Finally I would like to add some reflections on the asymmetrical basis of all relationships to domestic animals, however close, as we are the arbiters of their life and death. This is emphasised with production animals that are put to death when they no longer earn their living, or earn their living through death. My own experience of cattle goes back to working on a dairy farm with roughly 100 animals. Responsibility, worries and mourning are an integral part of caring for the cows, whose health and wellbeing are keys to productivity. What attracts us to them is however, as with other mammals, emotional, mutual attachment, fascination and admiration. With cows the collective aspect of belonging, to some extent, to a herd; and the perception of how human and animal life unfold in parallel, at best harmoniously and for mutual enhancement of daily life, comes to the fore. Attachment to the herd is, in addition, also attachment to a particular environment and to the cycles of nature which become significant in new ways.<sup>38</sup> My body remembers walking with the herd, inhabiting the land with them, sharing rhythms, at best in an atmosphere of peace and generosity, in symbiosis and individual appreciation. Those moments

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<sup>37</sup> Derrida, *L'animal*, 18–21.

<sup>38</sup> Pauline von Bonsdorff, 'Agriculture, aesthetic appreciation and the worlds of nature,' *Contemporary Aesthetics* 3 (2005), accessed 15 September 2015, <http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=325>.

are precious as life is finite. Despair, sleeplessness, self-accusations, memories of pain and suffering are part of that life as well.

#### 4. Aesthetic Imagination

Perhaps we need not imagine in order to perceive mammals as individuals. Perhaps we simply recognise the animal's agency, at least if we have freed ourselves from cultural prejudice that suggests otherwise. While this may be true there is still reason to describe many processes of understanding and interacting with mammals in terms of aesthetic imagination; and reasons why such an approach is fruitful in a process of self-education aiming at animate peace. In this section I first point to aesthetic elements of human-animal interaction, and then suggest that we can fruitfully understand the thought processes that are involved as aesthetic imagination.

First, the communication between humans and animals is often disinterested in the sense of not being focused on particular practical or cognitive goals.<sup>39</sup> The human does not ask the animal to perform, nor does the animal ask for particular goods. Curiosity, sympathetic responses and playfulness are part of such communication, with reciprocity through improvisation and shared rhythms in a being-together that is also a transformation and modulation of feeling. Second, communication is multimodal, with looks, movements, and vocalisations, not to forget touch and, probably, sniffing. Both the sensuous and the emotional are integral parts of an aesthetic mode of experience which is also thoroughly embodied and concretely worldly. We

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<sup>39</sup> Disinterestedness has been a hallmark, although disputed, in modern aesthetics since its inception; Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1990), 39–48. Against Kant I understand aesthetic experience as embodied, even material; and giving rise to a pleasure that can be informed, even fused with affective or other interests while not being driven by instrumentality. See von Bonsdorff, 'Agriculture.'

connect to the world through sharing sensuous practices and affirming sensuous and emotional – rather than narrowly rational, let alone verbal – forms of agency with animals.

Third, aesthetic admiration and value are central ingredients of the love of animals.

Animals indeed do more than suffer: they show grace, joy and dignity, and many more ways of being. They are admired for strength and beauty; in all mammals shiny furs and lively eyes are appreciated. While domestic animals are evaluated in competitions and for breeding purposes on the basis of how they look, the look is never separated from performance. The kind of beauty varies with species and kinds but performance and personal character are, as a rule, evaluated together with apparition. An inclusively aesthetic take on life and the living is thus already in place – in practice – as an alternative to the philosophical perspective on the subject which, as Derrida argues, has missed life, the animate and the animal by focusing on thinking only.<sup>40</sup> Animate beauty is primarily a beauty of actions and processes, not objects; and it needs to be analysed from that point of view.<sup>41</sup> This beauty is also expressive of feelings – like joy, intense concentration, curiosity, relaxation – and helps us realise what they are, and what is involved in a flourishing life. Animals bring values and awareness of values into the world.

Fourth, reflectivity<sup>42</sup> is part of the appreciation and interaction with animals in at least three ways, all of which can be memorable. The first is admiration: we are struck by the animal's

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<sup>40</sup> Derrida, *L'animal*, 104, 173.

<sup>41</sup> For accounts of beauty that emphasise movement and life, see Friedrich von Schiller, 'Über Anmut und Würde,' in *Über das Schöne und die Kunst. Schriften zur Ästhetik* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984), 44–93; Guy Sircello, *Love and Beauty* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); or Lars Spuybroek, 'Charis and Radiance: The ontological dimensions of beauty,' in *Giving and Taking: Antidotes to a Culture of Greed*, ed. Sjoerd van Tuinen and Joke Brouwer (Rotterdam: V2 / NAi Publishers, 2014), 119–49.

<sup>42</sup> For Kant aesthetic judgement is fundamentally a form of reflective judgement; *Kritik der Urteilskraft*.

expressive beauty and pause, even briefly, to appreciate it. This kind of appreciation takes a distance, if not physical, then at least mental, to its object. Second, reflectivity is involved when humans and animals address and respond to each other – whenever there is response rather than just mechanical reaction. Co-creating situations we recognise the other’s initiatives and responses; we touch and are touched. This can take place in a situation without major challenges, as in riding on a forest path in mutual modulation of care and courage, informed by rhythms of stepping, breathing, and singing. Here I am with the animal, and the constant reciprocity as such makes me aware of my position. Third, we become reflective when animals surprise, frustrate or challenge us: when things do not run smoothly. This is where interpretation and self-scrutiny step in, and such situations can haunt us for weeks, months, or a life-time. Remembering and recalling, we return to the situation and try to capture what happened and what we might have done differently. The potential for doing differently provides space for imaginative self-formation.

While the aesthetic element of admiration is hopefully evident, the necessity of conceiving the two other kinds of reflectivity as aesthetic may be less so. I shall however argue that we draw upon aesthetic imagination in order to reconnect and find ways of living with the other animal. Already questions of how they are like us or different demand imaginative acting. Our understanding is informed by biology; yet scientific explanations, especially if simplified, can hamper our understanding of particular animals. For example, all animals perceive the world according to sensorial styles affected by the placement, sharpness and functions of sense organs, which condition how the world appears. But each domestic animal’s style of being is also contextually shaped in relation to humans, and for some humans the reverse is true as well. Memories, narratives, images need to be engaged in addition to facts.

Many theories of imagination emphasise its cognitive value for the exploration and study of phenomena, and the creation of novel questions and solutions.<sup>43</sup> Imagination is then typically described as intentional: the subject relates actively to objects of thought. It is also independent from reality. Imagination is a mental activity, unaffected by actual contexts, where sensuous and emotional aspects are part of the content rather than providing its very structure and space. With animals we need another emphasis, since we typically imagine in the situation, whether present or past; and also future-oriented imaginings are affected by real contexts of experience. Imagination is informed by feelings and by the sensuous feedback of our own and other's bodies; it is both active and passive. It is about actual experience as well as novel interpretations and possibilities of acting differently. Not knowing the other animal – i.e. the difficulty of rationalising, explaining or predicting behaviour – invites imaginative and intuitive thought with practical rather than theoretical hypotheses. Therefore aesthetic imagination with the animate other is an embodied practice while also a mental activity. It is a practice often driven by love; or at least by the desire to become more skilful and have more enjoyable interactions with animals, and fused with actual interactions with the other. In addition it is a practising of imagination as such.

We need then to understand imagination as more open, dialogical and rooted in the world than cognitively biased theories suggest. Gaston Bachelard's work offers some resources for this. Following Bachelard, imagination is a process of activity and passivity where thoughts are interdependent with and affected by previous experiences, cultural ideas and our existential

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<sup>43</sup> E.g. 'propositional imagination' in Shaun Nichols, ed., *The Architecture of the Imagination: New Essays on Pretence, Possibility, and Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006). Paul Crowther is closer to my approach, yet limited for the purpose of this chapter, 'Imagination, language, and the perceptual world: a post-analytic phenomenology,' *Continental Philosophy Review* 46 (2013): 37–56.

situation as singular, embodied creatures. His discussion of ‘material imagination’ is particularly fruitful in its emphasis on how ‘images of matter’ affect us, put our thoughts into motion, and are dreamt ‘substantially, intimately’.<sup>44</sup> Bachelard’s conceptualisation of imagination as reverie emphasises children and childhood; and suggests that imagination is more fundamental than language.<sup>45</sup> On these lines and with Derrida we may venture to think (or imagine) that precisely the imaginative mode of thought might be shared among verbal and non-verbal mammals.<sup>46</sup> Yet whether we accept this or not, looking at imagination’s material and sensuous dimension helps us see how it places us in the world, with other animals, and confirms our existence as situated, topological subjects.

Bachelard also indicates the close connection between imagination and poetry. The arts of language in particular shape our ideas because language serves many functions, including philosophical and political. As Irigaray argues, words shape our imaginings and values. Thus ‘bovine’ is commonly used as a derogatory term, and ‘cattle’ suggests lump-like matter rather than living individuals.<sup>47</sup> In the connotations voices that do not know, like or care for the family of cows overpower the voices of those who admire and respect them. This comes in the way of building peace *with* nature. But poetry also gives room for animals, articulates and invites naming

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<sup>44</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *L'eau et les rêves. Essai sur l'imagination de la matière* (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 2003), 8.

<sup>45</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *La poétique de la reverie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999). That imagination precedes language is confirmed by infant research, see Malloch and Trevarthen, *Communicative Musicality*; also Crowther, ‘Imagination, language,’ 4n 7.

<sup>46</sup> Derrida, *L'animal*, 23, 90–100; see also Oliver on Merleau-Ponty, *Animal Lessons*, 212–3. Space does not allow me to go deeper into animals’ imagination here.

<sup>47</sup> In addition, to call someone a ‘cow’ sadly reveals misogyny, and is also an offence towards the animal. As Oliver writes: ‘As it has been used in patriarchal literature, the term *female* is an insult to women and female animals alike.’ *Animal Lessons*, 155.

and addressing, and helps us imagine the animal that addresses us. I call my horse friends the guinea pig and the hamster, and the nicknames cast light on their fears and vulnerability in the face of imagined predators and real human violence. Imagined mammalian overlaps play with what we take to be real, and transform it.

According to Bachelard, the imagination of childhood is an exploration of the world that finds values.<sup>48</sup> If imagination is material, felt and sensed, then it is not axiologically neutral. Aesthetic qualities invite us to imagine. Lars Spuybroek argues that beauty creates ‘spheres of action and cycles of exchange’:<sup>49</sup> it is a gift economy of giving and receiving, and it invites us to participate. In interactions with companion mammals this applies to situations where the clarity of the animal’s gestures creates in us feelings of joy, surprise, admiration and curiosity.<sup>50</sup> We react positively, not so much in affirmation as in making ourselves available. Beauty is then animate and animating, and animals invite us into their world, which is parallel to ours although often not perceived by us.

## **5. Conclusions: Imagining Conviviality**

I have argued that engagement with domestic animals provides opportunities for reciprocal interactions that call for imagination; and that this imagination is aesthetic in being informed by the expressive behaviour of animals that address and touch us physically, mentally and existentially. This gives insights that can sustain life enhancement and animate peace in our personal world. But does this affect the war between humankind and non-human nature on the

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<sup>48</sup> Bachelard, *La poétique*, 84–123.

<sup>49</sup> Spuybroek, ‘Charis and Radiance,’ 132.

<sup>50</sup> As Haraway puts it, ‘we might hope for the creative grace of play’, *Companion Species Manifesto*, 98.

species level, or does the war continue while some of us enjoy the company of inter-species families? I can think of three ways to respond to this worry.

First, while the path towards animate peace that I have indicated may not be sufficient it, or some equivalent, might be necessary for change towards it. If the present crisis has a fundamental moral dimension we need change on that level. Remember now that while animals attract us through grace and joy the relationship has darker sides as well. Our failures and shortcomings become precisely ‘images of matter’ that, with Bachelard, ‘have a weight [and] are a heart’.<sup>51</sup> We may find here a key to moral motivation if we accept the call to extend our life and responsibilities towards the nature that we are and the natural world we inhabit. The second point is precisely that while our relationship to animals can sustain us in self-education towards animate peace, this process needs active work from our side. Education is never mechanical; peace does not just happen. Something similar is true of imagination. If we want animate peace we need to practice imagination towards flexibility and situational wisdom, relying on intuitions and experiences of trust and non-violence.<sup>52</sup> Practising imagination is thinking and dreaming, acting and experimenting, perceiving and reflecting in alterations of ‘doing and undergoing’.<sup>53</sup> The third and final point is that benevolent imagination, its intuitions and insights, needs to be communicated more widely, for only if the imagination of people who know and like animals is made common and culturally legitimate can it influence the societal and global balance between human and non-human nature.

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<sup>51</sup> Bachelard, *L'eau et les rêves*, 8. Enzensberger suggests that narratives might be the way for steering culture away from violence; *Civil War*, 70–71, 87, 115.

<sup>52</sup> Violent imagination construes the other as an adversary. A juxtaposition of imagination as either violent or non-violent however runs the risk of simplification. Imaginative processes often include conflictual elements.

<sup>53</sup> The expression is from John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Perigree, 1980), 50ff.



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