

JULIAN YATES

Sheep Tracks—A Multi-Species Impression



Moments of disorientation are vital.

Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*¹

By chance, I wrote these last words on the rim of Vesuvius, right near Pompeii, less than eight years ago. For more than

I should like to thank the audience of the “Animal, Vegetable, Mineral” conference for their questions; Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, Nedda Mehdizadeh, Lowell Duckert, and Jonathan Gil Harris for the invitation to participate and the inspiration their work affords. Special thanks go to Jeffrey Jerome Cohen whose gentle challenges to a draft led me to rethink things for the better and to Richard Burt for our conversations on Ginzburg and Derrida, which proved invaluable.

¹ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Objects, Orientations, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 157.

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twenty years, each time I've returned to Naples, I've thought
of her.

Who better than the Gradiva, I said to myself this time, the
Gradiva of Jensen and of Freud, could illustrate this
outbidding in the *mal d'archive*?

Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian
Impression*²

Here, in a postscript to *Archive Fever*, Jacques Derrida tells an autobiographical or pseudo-autobiographical story of how it is that he came to write these words. Covering his tracks as he appears to uncover them, back-tracking over the marks on paper that are now variously hosted in print and electronic media, he winks at us. Was he there on that rim, above that very volcano? Did his own *mal' d'archive* lead him to a supposed origin—an origin that reduces his Neapolitan jaunts to a repetition compulsion? As we read them, Derrida's tracks flicker in and out of being, and by that flickering they seem to speak for themselves, to be more curiously present, if only to the moment of encounter we name "reading."

Embarked on his own "outbidding" or rebidding of the archive that aims to discern the way Freud's archive fever, the fever that is psychoanalysis, comes into being, its constitutive metaphors caught in the mutual embrace of the substrates of handwriting and print, Derrida reads Freud's reading of Wilhelm Jensen's novel *Gradiva* (1907) [she who walks] as a signature. Freud competes with Jensen, in his view, 'claims again to bring to light a more originary origin than that of the specter . . . he wants to be an archivist, who is more an

² Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 97. Unless otherwise indicated, subsequent references appear parenthetically in the text.

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archaeologist than the archaeologist (97) of the novel (Hanold), who falls in love with a Roman bas relief of this woman who walks. Outbidding Hanold and Jensen, Freud wants, writes Derrida,

to exhume a more archaic *impression*, he wants to exhibit a more archaic *imprint* than the one the other archaeologists of all kinds bustle around, those of literature and those of classical objective science, an imprint that is singular each time, an impression that is almost no longer an archive but almost confuses itself with the pressure of the footstep that leaves its still living mark on a substrate, a surface, a place of origin. When the step is still one with the subjectile. (97)

Such an archive, he continues, which maintains no distinction between active and passive, between the touching and the touched, “would in sum confuse itself with the *arkhē*, with the origin of which it is only the *type*, the *typos*, iterable character or letter” (98). It would constitute

an archive without an archive, where, suddenly indiscernible from the impression of its imprint, Gradiva’s footstep speaks by itself! (98)

Derrida writes all this, apparently, on the rim of a volcano, a fossilized Pompeii, lively in its petrification, waiting below. And by this autobiographical or pseudo-autobiographical account he keeps his own tracks fresh, alive still, living on, even as they are variously remediated.

Derrida’s rendering of Freud’s rendering of Jensen’s rendering of Hanold’s rendering of the Gradiva, she who walks, herself a rendering or an

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impression, might be said to offer a particularly compelling enactment of the problem of the trace or the track as it is indexed to an ongoing set of relations between presence and absence, the organic and inorganic, the living and the dead. Posing a problem of translation to archaeologists and archivists or to readers of all kinds, the archive as sum of tracks or traces of things past / passed serves both as a repository that might be accessed and discarded ‘as if’ the “technical prosthesis [was] a secondary and accessory exteriority” (92) and as a restraint or condition on how we orient ourselves to these tracks. The substrate or material backing that constitutes the archive mediates, enabling certain orders of contact while disabling others. The substrate intrudes into the circuit that obtains between trace and archivist / archaeologist rendering each differently lively and inert, distributing life effects between them as the archive is put to use.

My aim in this essay is to respond to several sets of sheepy impressions or sheep tracks that I have been collecting as part of a larger project on what the likes of Donna Haraway might name the human / sheep / goat / dog (wolf) multi-species—a mutual capture of beings that constitutes a material-semiotic relay for making landscapes, human “persons” and animals.³ In doing so, I am interested in what it means to treat such animal impressions as a “contact zone,” a multi-species

³ Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008). Relevant essays from this project include: Julian Yates, “What was Pastoral (Again)? More Versions,” in *Early Modern English Literature and the Return of Theory*, eds. Paul Cefalu and Bryan Reynolds (New York: Palgrave, 2011), 93–118; “Humanist Habitats: ‘Eating Well’ with Thomas More’s *Utopia*,” in *Environment and Embodiment in Early Modern England*, eds. Garrett Sullivan and Mary Floyd Wilson (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 187–209; and “Counting Sheep: Or, Dolly does Utopia (Again),” *Rhizomes* 8 (2004): <http://rhizomes.net/issue8/yates2.htm>.

archive *qua* general or generative text out of which all manner of ‘sheepy’ and ‘not-sheepy’ or ‘human’ modes of being are generated. As my use of the term “archive” indicates, I remain interested in the orientation to the trace provided in deconstructive reading, finding therein a tariff or restraint on modes of reading or modeling the traces of things that have passed or which are “past” that treats this “contact zone” as a way of accessing other or occluded ways of being.⁴ I share in the excitement felt by many in the humanities who explore the interpretive or ethical gains to be had in deploying the figure of an associative or additive model of a network, infrastructure, contexture, ecology, grid, knot, or mesh on offer in other disciplines in order to render the complexity we name “world.” Such models enable us, for example, to question the primacy of human language as anything other than a subset of larger systems or codes of reaction and response (olfactory, visual, auditory, and so on), broadening access to the privilege accorded to humans by the order of finitude bestowed by language to include non-humans (animals, plants, fungus, stones, stars). Nevertheless, I am interested in what might be gained, still, even as we provincialize the “human,” from maintaining, as Cary Wolfe suggests, that part of what it means to “be,” for us, entails owning or being owned by

the radically ahuman technicity and mechanicity of language (understood in the broadest sense as a semiotic system through

⁴ Haraway uses Mary Louise Pratt’s term to great effect in *When Species Meet*. The chapters of this book constitute in very different ways inquiries into nodes or knots of contact. See Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 214–16. See also Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel, Writing, and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

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which creatures ‘react’ and ‘respond’ to each other).⁵

For me, this issue plays out as a question of orientation. How do I orient myself to the tracks I have been following? What does it mean and what is at stake in that orientation?

In what follows then, I shall be aiming to tread carefully, to walk within a set of sheepy imprints, alive to the fact that as I do so the impressions that I leave do not quite belong to me even as they are my own. Such a deconstructive lingering or slowness to reading I take to be what Jane Bennett advises as she wonders how best we might respond to what she names “thing-power.”⁶ Such “idiocy” (an ungainly track) is what Isabelle Stengers recommends when she asks us to slow down and consider the cosmopolitical cast of our practices.⁷ I begin with an iconic moment in the work of sociologist Bruno Latour that has led many scholars housed in the humanities to rethink or re-understand both their object and their expertise. I then offer a stenographic and highly partial inventory of sheep tracks, of impressions left by sheep in different media—sometimes all by themselves, sometimes with the help of human hosts. I then allow the sheep that have passed by to dog or worry me as I try to think about how best to orient myself to their tracks—a question I pursue by returning to a rich essay on clues, hoof-prints, symptoms, and gestures by Carlo Ginzburg read in concert with Derrida’s *The Animal That Therefore I Am*

⁵ Cary Wolfe, “Human, All Too Human: ‘Animal Studies’ and the Humanities,” *PMLA* 124.2 (2009): 571 [564–75].

⁶ Jane Bennett, *Vital Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 17.

⁷ Isabelle Stengers, “The Cosmopolitical Proposal,” in *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, eds. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), 994.

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(*More to Follow*) and Haraway's *When Species Meet*. I end by offering one example of a multi-species writing machine, a mode of inducting sheep into human discourses that attempts to own its zoo / auto / bio / bibliographic constitution.

A PARLIAMENT OF THINGS

Towards the end of *We Have Never Been Modern*, Bruno Latour imagines what he calls a "Parliament of Things," a step, perhaps, in the story of liberal democracy that would extend voting rights to those non-human entities or polities in our midst that our usual modes of thinking make nonsense of (the enduring example might be the way the fracture of nationhood renders the ozone layer essentially un-representable).⁸ To do so, he embraces a mode of description that refuses any separation between nature and culture, subject and object, and embarks instead on an ecological modeling or rewriting of the world as a network or mobile knot of times, places, persons, animals, plants, and so on—all understood to be differently animated material-semiotic actants. The role of human persons in this project of reassembly would not be to speak merely on their own behalf or that of their fellows but to serve as mouthpieces or as some other variously sonifying, visualizing, or animating prosthesis for the non-human entities whose existence and whose concerns we hope to make present or knowable.

The sole task of this parliament, even as it speaks of other things, would be to inquire into the boundaries of its own collectivity, to inquire into what or who remains essentially or catastrophically underrepresented and so to ask what modes of translation, what impossible tasks of translation, or "speech impedi-

⁸ Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 142–45.

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menta,” as Latour names then in *Politics of Nature*, still therefore need to be crafted.⁹ Latour is after a mode of composition that collapses the distinction between acts of making (*poesis*) and acts of knowing or taking cognizance of what has been made and who and what has been unmade in the process (critique / deconstruction).¹⁰ In order to cohere, the parliament needs to craft something on the order of a *Moebius Strip* between these two logically distinct categories—such that the black box of production can at least be monitored if not opened and the prospect or project of “hope” sponsored. All this labor is limited by the caveat, as Michel Serres maintains throughout *The Parasite*, that noise and death are necessary for the cascade of actants that we botch or screw up when we play the game of blindman’s buff that is the modeling of the world as “system,” “network,” “assemblage,” as “quasi-object” and “quasi-subject,” all of which are, necessarily, catechreses or faulty references.¹¹

The hope would be that by scaling the conversation so that the various metaphysics of non-human entities were not elided or reduced by what amounts to a failure of hospitality, we would create technically well modeled, which is to say, following Stengers, ethically well-modeled relations with other

⁹ Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 63–64.

¹⁰ For this modeling of deconstruction in relation to *poesis* as part of an ahuman system of communication, see Niklas Luhmann, “Deconstruction as Second-Order Observing System,” in *Theories of Distinction: Redefining the Descriptions of Modernity*, trans. William Rasch (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 94–112.

¹¹ Michel Serres, *The Parasite*, trans. Lawrence Schehr (1982; repr. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 1–14. As Serres points out, the figure of a “system” is an artifact of observation.

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beings.¹² If we ever manage to do this, of course, we will have solved some very big ticket philosophical problems for we will know what and who belongs and also what and who does not belong, what and whom we may put to use, abuse, even kill—and righteously so—and also what and whom to love. I am, on the one hand, captivated by this parliament and, by that same hand, held hostage by the questions of sovereignty that the parliament seems to propose to answer. For in a different vocabulary, it might be said that Latour's parliament sponsors a further rationalization of those procedures for remarking more and more subdivisions of 'bare life,' as the state takes upon itself the permanent project of sorting those entities which may be judged to be potential citizen subjects and so embarked on the project of finding 'a way of living proper to the individual or the group' (*bios*) and those that are merely 'bare life,' which simply exist (*zoë*), and so may be put to use or to death.¹³ I remain haunted then by the matter of tracks and traces and by the figure of a responsibility to which, no matter how sophisticated or brilliant our capture of the world, we will remain irresponsibly insufficient.

From the point of view of someone whose expertise is housed in the humanities, in the semiotic or rhetorical charnel house of the collective, and who's

¹² Isabelle Stengers, *Power and Invention: Situating Science* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 216. For a Latourian-inspired attempt to "sensitize" human subjects in precisely this mode, see Emilee Hache, Bruno Latour, and Patrick Camiller, "Morality or Moralism? An Exercise in Sensitization," *Common Knowledge* 16.2 (2010): 311–30. Thanks to Jeffrey Cohen for drawing this essay to my attention.

¹³ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998). On the right to kill see Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 112–16.

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trained to rake through the bones, to make the dead or the forgotten speak, to splice traces together in ways that produce effects of liveliness in our variously timed “presents”—the parliament of things might be said to represent a significant rewiring of our archive, overwriting our usual analytic terms, liquefying categories such as the social or the cultural, treating them as fractured remnants of a larger, irreducible process, and rejecting thereby the reduction of the shifting auratics of the multi-species to the aura of human exceptionalism bolstered by its great variety of memory devices and genres that enable it to forget. But, while the figure of the network, assemblage, or quasi-object offers us the appearance of a supped up regime of description that enables us to line up many more kinds of traces than we had previously imagined was possible—one can get pretty darned high doing a network-based reading—when the archive fever breaks, I find myself spat out and reterritorialized in a language object, in questions of rhetoric and genre—understood now as translational mechanisms by which we decline “things” so that they speak to and about ourselves.

Just when we seem primed to speed up, to refigure our archive and our expertise in the service of the past as a “contact zone” with other ways of being (which it is and which it may be), I want to remember the plodding slowness of “ANT” as Latour puts it, punning on the formic feel to the acronym for Actor Network Theory, and go slowly, inquiring into how our own practices are refigured by the arrival of new models.¹⁴ For when the specter of the non-human presences and provincializes human exceptionalism, I would argue that what occurs amounts to a breakdown to our various protocols of

¹⁴ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 23. Thanks go to Jeffrey Cohen for reminding me of the shared slowness of all flat ontologists.

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reading and crafting stories by way of our orientation to an archive. There's a pause. Our ability to line up actants to tell stories about the "past" falters. And rather than mend this breakdown, I am interested instead in holding open this hiatus and exploring other ways of configuring traces and tracks and of orienting ourselves to them lest old and familiar routines merely assert themselves and we find ourselves blissfully transported into a series of blighted repetitions.

So, I do not want to seek out ways of agitating things, of getting the show back on the road as we return to business as usual and continue telling stories about what's "past" / "passed." I should like to avoid finding a rejuvenated historicist settlement by which we positivize this or that trace to stand as or for the "past." I should like not to find the new code, key or "transfer ticket" by which we may, to borrow Paul de Man's terms from his essay "Anthropomorphism and Trope in Lyric," "grammaticalize" the "rhetorical complexity" of all the things we now take as our subjects.¹⁵ Let's remain, instead, ant-like, creeping our way within the paper, parchment, and variously "backed" or mediated trails that constitute the phenomena we analyze and inquire into the kinematics of our metaphors or forms, understanding that in the humanities we remain keyed to questions of the trace, of the impression, and so to a limiting / differently enabling question of media as that which may not be perfected or rendered instrumental. Such an insistence, I hope, may constitute a very soft, humanistic contribution to the conversations that take place in Latour's parliament.

In my case, a bit like the three shepherds at the beginning of the Wakefield Master's *Second Shepherd's Play* this means that I find myself counting sheep, but

¹⁵ Paul de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 239–62.

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like Mak and Gill, I am not opposed to a little bit of sheep-stealing. The difference may lie in the fact that I do not actually know what a sheep, a singular, historical sheep, or a single, historical flock is, exactly—though by the end of that play, I think it’s fair to say that they might not either. Instead, as primatologist-turned-sheep-farmer Thelma Rowell cautions me, I proceed on the basis that what we know of sheep derives almost completely from the way they have been rewritten. Rowell argues that the selective breeding of sheep, their modeling and manipulation as livestock or living capital has essentially rendered sheep “sheepish.” The traditions of primatology and animal behavior studies have dictated that those animals who lead interesting lives (that is lives deemed interesting to us) have tended to serve as privileged experimental subjects—especially if they may be grouped as among the relatives of a certain *Homo Sapiens*.¹⁶ Animals (and that is “most animals”) who “spend the majority of their time doing nothing” tend to be neglected or asked only the most boring of questions. “Sheep behavior studies are mostly to do with what they eat, and sheep are not, generally, permitted to organize themselves,” she writes.¹⁷ Rowell’s solution is to enable sheep to organize their own social structure and then to observe the results. She decides, in effect to “watch . . . sheep in the same way [she has] . . . been watching monkeys.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Thelma Rowell, “A Few Peculiar Primates,” *Primate Encounters: Models of Science, Gender, and Society*, eds. Shirley C. Strum and Linda Fedigan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 65–66 [57–70]. The key cultural study, unparalleled in its scope, is Sarah Franklin, *Dolly Mixtures: The Remaking of Genealogy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

¹⁷ Rowell, “A Few Peculiar Primates,” 69.

¹⁸ Rowell, “A Few Peculiar Primates,” 65, 69.

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What Rowell writes off as several thousand years of botched or abusive ethology amounts to the story whereby the human / sheep / dog / goat multi-species came to write the discourses of pastoral and pastoral care under whose rubric we still essentially make do. In effect, Rowell reads the long story of the bio-political capture of the living as an obstacle that a field science such as her own can short circuit by allowing sheep to decide which questions they find interesting and which they do not. One thing that Rowell's defamiliarizing of sheep makes legible is the way rhetorical routines we might figure as anthropomorphic play host to a mutually extensive zoomorphism. That is to say, the process that renders sheep "sheep," or "sheepish," and human persons "not sheep," or only sometimes sheep for a "not-sheep" shepherd or a "not-sheep" wolf, rebounds on us in all sorts of "sheepy" ways. The biopolitics of pastoral and the networks of pastoral care with which they are allied trade on a sheepy metaphoric in which all human persons oscillate between the roles of shepherds and their four-legged charges. Of what, then, consist their tracks—the tracks of this alliance?

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Tracks that I am learning to follow—always "more to follow," more and "more to follow"—to adopt the phraseology of the parenthesis to Derrida's "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More To Follow)"—a parenthesis which intrudes a second, more present, still more present, voice into the self predicating logic of the *Cogito*, tripping up therefore, thereby, the *ergo* that funds the ego, and unmooring the auto-reference of the "I," the *bêtise* of "ipseity" or selfness, hollowing it out, in advance of itself, by and in its exposure to an always "more to follow," an inexhaustible surplus of beings or tracks that one comes into being with, and which one

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finds oneself following just when one thought that there were no tracks, no more tracks, no tracks to follow.¹⁹

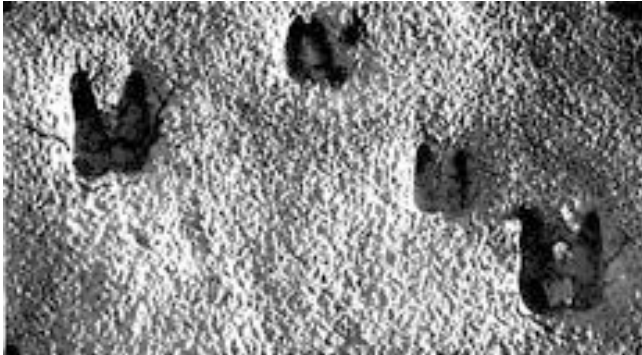


Figure 1. Image courtesy of the National Park Service. For a comparison of different mammal prints, see http://www.hunter-ed.com/wildlife/large_mammals.htm.

Sometimes hoof prints [Figure 1]—Dall and so not Romney, Big Horn, Texel, or Turki, to name just a few of what comprise nearly a thousand distinct breeds or kinds of sheep—it would take too long to name them all. Identify the print and you may, with practice, be able to summon an image of the sheep into existence, a single historical sheep standing for all, for the multiplicity of the flock, and disappearing into it just as soon as it appears.

¹⁹ Jacques Derrida, “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow),” is the first chapter of the collected lectures *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. Marie Louise-Mallet, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 1–51. See also Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, vol. 1, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

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No tracks [Figure 2]—no prints at least, just the image of a mountainside. The indentations become recognizable, if you are taught to see them, as a sheep track—the wear and tear of a multitude of hooves that obliterate their individual traces, carves a collective presence into the land. You may, as it turns out, be following sheep tracks even as you think you are not, etched into the sides of mountains, or through fields, coming into view or disappearing with the vagaries of weather or use. “Sheep tracks are never straight. The winding of trails allows sheep to observe their backside first with one eye, then the other,” an online shepherd-friend informs. “Sheep can spot dogs or other perceived forms of danger from 1,200 to 1,500 yards away.” Jogging left and right at intervals, you’ve been walking in step with the sheep.²⁰



Figure 2. Image capture from the documentary *SweetGrass* (Harvard Ethnography Lab, 2009).

²⁰ See “Flee, not fight,” *sheep101.info* [website], <http://www.sheep101.info/bahavior.html>.

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Figure 3. Image capture from the documentary *SweetGrass* (Harvard Ethnography Lab, 2009).

Tracks that won't take [Figure 3]? Well—they're also, in this case, sheep tracks, though their mode has shifted—hooves make no impression on tarmac and so the photograph itself, once upon a time the chemical effect of light on silver halogens now gone digital, presents as fact / faux / simile of the sheep's track—the only indication to a human observer that they were there.



Figure 4. Image capture from the documentary *SweetGrass* (Harvard Ethnography Lab, 2009).

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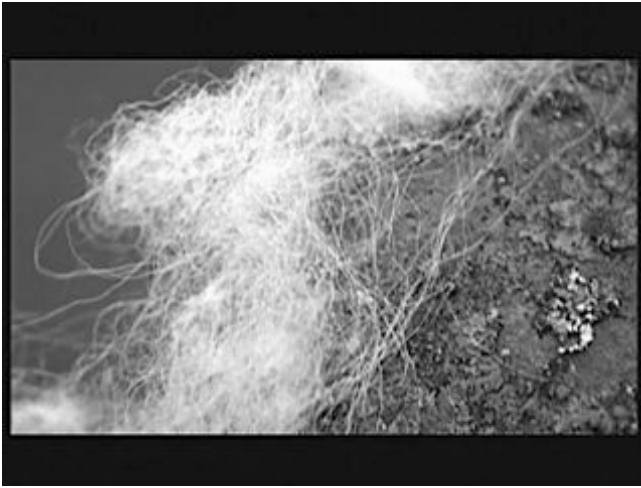


Figure 5. Image capture from the documentary *SweetGrass* (Harvard Ethnography Lab, 2009).

Covered tracks? A sheep in sheep's clothing [Figures 4 and 5]? Sheep, it seems, can, as is usually reserved to human animals, cover their tracks, deploy a feint, lie. With the help of a shepherd and the skin of a dead fellow lamb, one orphan attempts to fool the mother into allowing it to nurse.



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*Figures 6-8. Image capture and quotations come from the documentary *Rivers and Tides: Working with Time* (Metropolis Film, 2001).*

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Woolly tracks [Figures 6, 7, and 8]—an installation by the artist Andy Goldsworthy in his native Scotland, where, among other time and space bound art he cards wool, trailing it atop stone walls (Figures 6 and 7), momentarily encasing stones in a woolly coat (Figure 8), all in order to do away with or to divest sheep, so he says, of their wooliness and so to deliver up what he terms their “power” to make the land take their impression.

His installations aim to make present what he calls “the absence in the landscape” occasioned by the introduction of sheep. Retasking the wooliness of sheep in his present and generating thereby all manner of uncanny, hairy stones, stones whose inorganic bulk knows no sympathy with the living, Goldsworthy aims to make the erasures (no trees; no people) of what he reads as a sheepy writing on the land presence. The sheep have passed on. Their presence remains as an aching absence, a writing deployed by English colonizers in order to unwrite particular human persons and a place.

And so Goldsworthy uncovers tracks that have been covered over, that the present no longer recalls. Creating faux-hybrid-stone-sheep and enlisting the labor of wool-making in order to delineate or rubricate the sheepy author of the stone walls that carve up the land, Goldsworthy takes the commodity value that attaches to a sheep’s fleece and uses it to ‘write,’ to retrieve sheep tracks long since gone and so to remember a colonial past, people lost. Whatever relation obtains between wool and rock cannot be coded as sympathy. Instead, Goldsworthy’s installations recode wool (and stone) by and in their relation not simply to one another but as actants caught within the impressions made by one corrosive iteration of the multi-species.

Following Goldsworthy, we might attempt something similar in our own libraries and archives, break-

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ing in to the vault of the Folger Shakespeare Library, for example, under cover of night, with a list of differently bound and backed books, courtesy of its search tool, the porcinely named “Hamnet,”—and dress those books that have been backed in “sheep” and “goat,” rendering them woolly once more.²¹ The flickering presence of the animal that was would manifest here as a mode of commutative justice indexed to the sympathy between the substance of the book’s binding (its skin) and the missing fleece of the sheep or skin of the goat. Hold your breath. Listen carefully. Is that a book bleating? As absurd as this putative archival reanimation or hallucination sounds, its value lies in the insistence that our collective writing machines by which the human remembers or remembers to forget this and that remains bound to other creaturely lives. Every writing machine remains always a multi-species impression.



Figure 9. Image capture from *Modern Times* (Charles Chaplin Productions, 1936).

²¹ See “HAMNET: folger library catalog,” *Folger Shakespeare Library* [online catalog], <http://shakespeare.folger.edu/>.

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Whose tracks? Our tracks or sheep tracks? Courtesy of the time-image, a flock of sheep flicker into being within our being and then are gone [Figures 9 and 10]? Charlie Chaplin deploys the supposed sheepishness of sheep and the recalcitrance of a lone black sheep against the accelerated and attenuated temporality of the machine in *Modern Times* in a dissolve that makes the sheep in us presence on screen. The Little Tramp becomes a black sheep, who in human form, as you may recall, slows the capitalist machine right down. The film will enclose within itself pastoral vistas and utopian hiatus.



Figure 10. Image capture from *Modern Times* (Charles Chaplin Productions, 1936).

Wet Cement [Figures 11 and 12]. In an episode titled “Bitzer Puts His Foot in it,” the animators of Nick Park’s creation “Shaun the Sheep” imagine a scene in which sheep with their sheepdog turned co-conspirator run amok with a patch of wet cement, creating all manner of sheeepy impressions that do not present on or by the hoof. In one frame, Shaun the Sheep and friends have drawn a Hollywood star in the cement. The anthro-

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pomorphism to Shaun and his flock that enables the iterative scheme of this really fun zoomorphic children's show overcompensates perhaps for the supposed sheepiness of sheep. When the farmer / owner turns his back, the otherwise fairly stereotypical sheep get up to all kinds of crazy writing games.



Figures 11-12. Image capture from Shaun the Sheep: One Giant Leap for Lambkind (Lyons / Hit Entertainment, 2010), Episode #4 "Bitzer Puts His Foot In It."

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Does the name “Shaun,” which emphatically presents a denuded self, a loss, a coerced removal, speak to a desire to write sheep differently, a desire that the likes of Thelma Rowell shares—a desire for differently articulated tracks?

ORIENTATIONS

How then should I orient myself to these tracks—to which you or I could add or substitute others that would pose the problem or the phenomenon of taking an impression differently?

“The footprint [though we might add scent, or any other trace] represents a real animal that has gone past,” writes Carlo Ginzburg in his essay “Morelli, Freud, and Sherlock Holmes: Clues and Scientific Method.”²² Ginzburg is on the track of what he names a “conjectural model” or “semiotic paradigm” of reading and writing across the “borderline between natural sciences and human sciences” to its putative origins in hunter-gatherer societies. “For thousands of years,” he writes,

mankind lived by hunting. In the course of endless pursuits hunters learned to construct the appearance and movements of an unseen quarry through its tracks—prints in soft ground, snapped twigs, droppings, snagged hairs or feathers, smells, puddles, threads of saliva. They learnt to sniff, to observe, to give meaning and context to the slightest trace. They learnt to make complex calculations in

²² Carlo Ginzburg, “Morelli, Freud, and Sherlock Holmes: Clues and Scientific Method,” trans. Anna Davin, *History Workshop Journal* 9 (1980): 14 [5–36]. Unless otherwise indicated, subsequent references will appear parenthetically in the text.

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an instant, in shadowy wood or treacherous clearing. (12)

Such skills find their like, he argues, in the tricks paleontologists use to summon dead creatures into being from their foot prints; in the protocols of fingerprinting which summon human presences into being from their paw prints; in the talking cure that Sigmund Freud uses to discern the workings of the unconscious from the marks it leaves on conscious behavior; in the minute inventorying of “characters” (aspects of the human form—ears, hands, etc.) by art historian Giovanni Morelli who claimed thereby to be able to identify the “hand” of certain Italian painters; and in the adductive methods that Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes uses to solve a crime. Moving across time and disciplinary boundaries, Ginzburg posits a cryptographical basis to reading, a model of reading that relies on what is not there to be read (any longer), on reading between the lines.

Ginzburg would like there to be every difference in the world between deciphering a track and a pictogram or a text composed after the transition to phonetic writing systems (14). He should like the “cloth” he’s been “weaving,” “the paradigm” or “common epistemological model,” which “[he’s] . . . summoned up from way back, out of various contexts—hunting, divining, conjectural, or semiotic” (23-24) to be marked by or to respect the difference between nature and culture—but he can’t seem to catch an epistemological or discursive break. On the contrary, all his backtracking, his aligning of traces, performs the reverse. He is left with an epistemological quandary. “It is one thing,” he continues,

to analyse footprints, stars, feces (animal or human), colds, corneas, pulses, snow-covered fields or dropped cigarette ash; and another to

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analyse writing or painting or speech. The distinction between nature (inanimate or living) and culture is fundamental—certainly much more important than the far more superficial and changeable distinctions between disciplines. (24)

But by the end of his discussion, this distinction between nature and culture falls prey to the anti-anthropocentric turn to Ginzburg's own logic and to his answer to what he takes to be the key final question of analysis: "Is rigor [or what order of rigor is] compatible with the conjectural model" of tracking / tracing (28)? Ginzburg doubts that it is compatible—or that if it is, it must be an "elastic rigor"—one that is able to tolerate "factors in play which cannot be measured: a whiff, a glance, an intuition" (28). In short order, then, the project of weaving, as he calls it, of tracking and lining up this and that trace of the "conjectural paradigm" through Freud, Marx, Conan Doyle, medical semiotics, art history, cryptography, and so on, so that each trace constitutes a common track, turns into a question of magnitude and measure.

"Until now we have carefully avoided this tricky word, intuition," he confesses, as he moves to conclude,

but if it is going to be used, as another way of describing the instantaneous running through of the thought process, then we must make a distinction between low intuition and high. (28)

Not surprisingly, it turns out, a paragraph or so later, that this distinction, this desire for a qualitative difference in mode if not model, also proves untenable. "This 'low intuition' is rooted in the senses," he continues,

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(though it goes beyond them). It exists everywhere in the world, without geographic, historical, ethnic, gender or class exception; and this means that it is very different from any form of 'superior' knowledge, which is always restricted to an elite. (29)

"Intuition," Ginzburg concludes, high and low, "forms a real link between the human animal and other animal species" (29).

We should be *impressed*. For, in a relatively short essay, Ginzburg arrives at the insight that may be said to found Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, that there exists a history of technology, of the machine, the plant, and the animal, of life, that is simultaneously and necessarily also a history of what has been called "human," and that telling that story, without the aura of human exceptionalism, will produce an order of archival vertigo at the proliferation of tracks and the leveling of ontological categories.²³ But what of Ginzburg's figure and phraseology of the "link," this "real link" (29) that forms between the human animal and other animal species? This figuring of a "link" prepares the way for an insight regarding the coarticulation or mutual genesis of the zoo- and anthropomorphic. It is the product of the "path" or pattern to be discerned from the tracks of Ginzburg's own conjectural wager in his essay. Ginzburg's careful anti-anthropocentric reweaving of traces, his back tracking through semiotic systems ends by positivizing the aligning of traces that a non-species centered modeling of the archive permits.

It seems key, however, to notice that what he positivizes, by way of an end to his tracking or tracing (there are no more tracks, no more tracks to follow) and

²³ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans., Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 84–85.

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what he will offer therefore as a beginning or founding truth to writing systems, is not exactly “a real link between the human animal and other animal species” so much as his inability to decide on a ratio by which one might judge intuition as low or high. The “link,” the positing of, or provisional shaping of the form of an atemporal universal, constitutes instead the skin or fleece Ginzburg knits in order to cover over an epistemological quandary or nakedness that his composing of an archive entails—a quandary which might be understood to refer quite precisely to the difficulty that haunts Derrida throughout *The Animal That Therefore I Am* in deciding on the difference between what is termed “reaction” and that which is called “response” and which is said to be proper or reserved to the human.²⁴ It might be ventured that this question as to the threshold or internally divided and marked line between reaction and response, to what Derrida calls an “abyss” or “limitrophy,”²⁵ will tend to present to us and is perhaps allied to the question and composition of an archive, and that the question will, in one sense or another, be decided by the way in which we orient ourselves to it.

What are you following? How do you follow? What do you do if you think you might catch up with the being whose tracks you are following? Should you, as Latour invites but does not himself practice, catch up as quickly as you can and produce new orders of impression via the so very many “speech impedimenta” we will make in order to enable things to speak to and of us? I have been unraveling Ginzburg’s cloth, worrying his tracks—threatening, so it may seem, to turn sheep-biter, because he converts the tracks into a trail. Instead, I wish to own the quandary that gets palmed in the process, the way the limit to his ability to decipher

²⁴ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, especially 119–40.

²⁵ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 29.

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traces that finds what he calls an historical method, installs a trans-species model of reading that defers and so does not address the question of non-human responsiveness and human reactivity.

I am left straddling or perhaps skipping between two readings, two orientations to Ginzburg's tracks and to the trace. On the one hand, that might, as before, be the same hand, we may read his conclusion (as I do) as an electrifying insight to the biomaterial-semiotic basis of our archive, adducing also the provincializing of human language to one semiotic, syntactical, and rhetorical system among many. All animals therefore read and write—not with ink but with urine, feces, and so very many other substances.²⁶ But it is hard to know whether or not Ginzburg's knitting of this "link," a link that might be said to cover over the nudity that he has uncovered, does not constitute a disavowal or arresting of the possibility that what passes as "response" in humans might be perfectly assimilated to a cadaverous order of reaction, not the chimerical multiplicity of the *animot*, so much as to what, in passing, Derrida names the *animort*, the "non-animal" or "non-living."²⁷

As my skipping and straddling and the awkwardness of my feet signals, I have arrived at a parting of the ways, at a crossroads or crux. The instability to the relation between reaction and response might be said to fund Ginzburg's aligning of traces even as that alignment will come to settle the question, to provide a way beyond or around it. Maybe then I am simply stuck

²⁶ Such is a given for Michel Serres in *The Parasite, The Natural Contract*, trans. Elizabeth MacArthur and William Paulson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), and now in *Malfesance: Appropriation through Pollution*, trans. Anne-Marie Feenberg-Dibon (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

²⁷ On the inert, see Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 62.

in the same old tracks, the flagging tracks of a dead horse I am still flogging. For from a certain perspective, it will be difficult not to read my response to Ginzburg's forming of "a real link between human animal and other non-human animals" (29) as a knee-jerk reaction, a parsimonious or ungenerous failure of imagination, a failure to escape a track that the speculatively realistic might say was really just a "correlationist two-step,"²⁸ a post-Kantian imprisonment that ensures that all that philosophy may interrogate is the means by which we know the world and so not the world itself. Where Derrida might locate in Ginzburg the same structure of disavowal regarding the question of the animal that he finds in Descartes, Lacan, Lévinas, Heidegger, the likes of Bruno Latour, Donna Haraway, Graham Harman, Quentin Meillassoux, among others, might locate a different orientation from which to begin—an alternate modality of the archive.

"Positive knowledge of and with animals might just be possible," writes Donna Haraway just as she parts company with Derrida's *The Animal that Therefore I Am* (nothing more to follow) in *When Species Meet*.²⁹ Up until now, Derrida presences in Haraway's book as he who "tracks down" "the whole anthropomorphic reinstitution of the superiority of the human order over the animal order, of the law over the living"—and so as "guide" to the western philosophical tradition. The problem, though, is that however caring and considerate, however open to being with, he may

²⁸ For this critique, see Quentin Meillassoux's astonishing *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (London: Continuum, 2008). On "the correlationist two-step" and the "archefossil" that silently surplants Derrida's "arche-writing," see especially 1–50. See also Graham Harman, *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics* (Melbourne: re.press, 2009).

²⁹ Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 21.

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be, when confronted in the bathroom naked by his cat, and knowing full well that this historical cat could be said to respond to him, Derrida

did not seriously consider an alternative form of engagement either, one that risked knowing something more about cats and *how to look back*, perhaps even scientifically, biologically, and *therefore* also philosophically and intimately. (20)

“He came right up to the edge of respect, of the move to *respecere*,” writes Haraway,

but he was sidetracked by the textual canon of Western philosophy and literature, and by his own linked worries about being naked in front of his cat. (20)

The wrong track.

Derrida failed a simple obligation of companion species; he did not become curious about what the cat might actually be doing, feeling, thinking, or perhaps making available to him in looking back at him that morning. (20)

He did not inquire into the ethological literature on cats and so into what it may be that cats are already saying.

Parting ways is tough. Derrida, we learn, was a special kind of beast,

among the most curious of men, among the most committed and able of philosophers to spot what arrests curiosity . . . relentlessly attentive and humble before what he does not know. (20)

And so what happens or fails to happen in that bathroom is all the more shocking. For Derrida, that most curious of men, was insufficiently curious. He was “incurious.” We might even say therefore that, contrary to the adage, it was Derrida’s incuriousness and not feline curiosity *per se* that killed this singular, historical cat.

Again, as with Ginzburg, I am not sure which way to turn—I am left straddling even as I might wish to skip ahead with Haraway to the prospect of “new possibilities” on offer from ethologists with regard to human / non-human animal interactions. Haraway knows enough about sheep, courtesy of Thelma Rowell, to know that their orientation to predation, their assumption of predation as a fact of their world, means that even on an island that’s not seen a wolf in over a thousand years, they still check their rears every 1200-1500 feet.³⁰ What else could one expect Derrida to do—especially since he’s on the track not of a sheep, a cat, the animal, or even of the *animot*—but of the autobiographical animal, that set of disavowals by which the story of the other is transposed into a reassuring story of the same—all in order to produce a shelter for one iteration of the “human”? “Autobiography,” he writes,

the writing of the self as living, the trace of the living for itself, being for itself, the auto-affection or auto-infection as memory or archive of the living, would be an immunizing movement (a movement of safety, of salvage, and salvation of the safe, the holy, the immune, the indemnified, of virginal and intact nudity), but an immunizing movement

³⁰ Haraway uses Rowell’s work to excellent effect; see *When Species Meet*, 27–42.

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that is always threatened with becoming auto-immunizing . . . Nothing risks becoming more poisonous than an autobiography.³¹

Here, as elsewhere in the course of *The Animal That (Therefore) I Am*, Derrida places his feet very carefully, enacting therein the shape of an autobiography or better, a “zoo-auto-bio-bibliographing,” but always with an eye to his rear, lest that is the genre turns poisonous on him, gets the better of him, leads him down a path constituted by a disavowal.³²

One emblematic moment of this care, this curious care not to kill (by mistake) regards the western philosophical tradition itself, all that Haraway would like to box up and leave behind, without trace. Casting himself as a wrestler, a hunter, or a fisherman, with the “nervous system of a single animal body”³³ (the system of disavowals whereby response becomes proper to the human in Descartes, Kant, Heidegger, Lévinas, and Lacan), he writes that his project

is a little like someone who would claim to know which way to take hold of a cuttlefish or octopus, without hurting it too much, and especially without killing it, keeping it at a distance long enough to let it expel its ink. In order to displace its powers without doing anybody too much harm. Its ink or power would here be the ‘I,’ not necessarily *the power to say ‘I,’* but the ipseity of being *able to be or able to do ‘I,’* even before any auto-referential utterance in language.³⁴

³¹ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 47.

³² Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 34

³³ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 91.

³⁴ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 92.

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Derrida is out to combat this tradition but also takes care “not to sacrifice to it any difference or alterity, the fold of any complication, the opening of the abyss to come.”³⁵ Aiming to hold open the tradition to the traces it tries to forget and which may offer something entirely other, Derrida tries to walk within such tracks that there already are, taking care, if he may, to leave no impressions of his own.

Why such careful treading? Why such care to create no “new” tracks that might obliterate others? The difficulty lies, to reprise Ginzburg’s “rigor,” in understanding the ratio by which we will be able to know which “new or different possibilities” or “real links” do not themselves deploy the structure of disavowal that Derrida identifies, reacquiring all that inky power that he has been trying to expel from a philosophical cuttlefish that he wishes to keep a hold of? Haraway’s disappointment with Derrida’s in-curiousness regarding his cat, for example, represents one such crossroads, a moment when passing on to “new tracks” raises the possibility of a disavowal, a moment in which responsiveness, having acquired for so long an hypnotic scarcity value, is accorded to the living generally with such a surplus as to keep us all, human persons and not, responding for as long as we like. Such is the difficulty of the crux, the potential and the danger to the crossing.

HOSPITALITY

In this essay, I have been counting sheep tracks, tracks that lead me up to the crossroads or parting of the ways between two critical households. It is tempting, then to conclude by hallucinating both Derrida and Haraway hemmed in with their doggies and kitties by a flock of blithely indifferent sheep, sheep whom it may make no

³⁵ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 92.

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sense to differentiate from the larger entity, collectivity or polity that their flock constitutes—no more sense than it may for the animals we name “human.” Not missing a b/l/eat, I end, therefore, by suggesting that in Derrida’s tracking of a genre and its auto-immunizing, pro-life, agenda, I find a rubric for my orientation still to all the sheep tracks I amass—an orientation that I think may have some small value still in speaking back to those in the parliament of things who advocate for potentially more hospitable possibilities.

One such example might be that of Thelma Rowell and her Yorkshire sheep as she inducts them into the protocols of ethological research and they enjoin her to different gestures, thoughts, requirements, postures than those to which she is used, all in order for her to be what she considers a good scientist, which is to say, a good host. One such gesture that perhaps goes unnoticed or which simply puzzles most observers is the extra time Rowell appears to have on her hands. Visitors to Rowell’s farm remark in their otherwise quite scholarly essays and books that, in addition to everything else, Rowell is a wonderful cook—and that there’s always an impressive array of tea items on hand.³⁶ One of the reasons for this, I contend, as someone apt to appreciate a good cook and who aspires to deliver on this order of hospitality to others, is that to study the ruminating sheep with the equivalent protocols that one studies the sometimes hyperactive world of baboons, leaves the researcher

³⁶ In the Acknowledgements to *Dolly Mixtures*, Sarah Franklin comments warmly on the hospitality, conversation, and “homemade delicacies” that Thelma Rowell treated her to on visits to her farm [Franklin, *Dolly Mixtures*, ix]. My point in citing the cast of these comments is to discern the structure of politeness and hospitality that extends to humans and sheep alike on Rowell’s farm. This politeness, this attentiveness to the other, seems the key addition to Rowell’s experiments.

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with a lot more time on her hands—empty time that might once upon a time, have been named *otium*—the privileged and recurring figure in Giorgio Agamben’s *The Open*; the “malaise” of Derrida’s “more to follow,” the Heideggerian boredom or “*tiefe langweil*” in the last lecture of *The Animal That Therefore I Am* and the slowness of flat ontology.³⁷ The question for Agamben and Derrida will be whether anything of value persists or dwells in pastoral *otium*, in a deactivated, non-temporal *tempus*, something that may still be of interest to a common becoming, and vitally so.

As a reader tuned to pastoral motifs, I am inclined to read Rowell’s research as the latest chapter in the genre of bucolic poetry, and to see her as opening a space or an archive for that which sheep might be said thus far to have lacked—an aura. She offers them, in other words, an opportunity to manifest as historical beings, there and then, here and now, and for the impressions that they make to count as writing worth keeping. By doing so, Rowell will have, I argue, in effect, been writing epic for sheep—though what that epic will be remains as yet to be seen. Why epic—even as sheep may refashion that genre? As fellow ethologist Vincianne Despret records, Rowell’s

observations usually start in the morning, with the same ritual: she takes each of her 22 sheep a bowl of its breakfast. But what puzzles any outside observer is that there are not 22 but 23 bowls, that is, always one too many.

³⁷ On *otium*, see Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 63–70, 85–87. On melancholy and malaise, see Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 19–20. On Heideggerian boredom, see Agamben, *The Open*, 63–70 and Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 141–60.

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“Why this extra bowl?” asks Despret, “Is the researcher practicing a kind of conviviality?”³⁸ For the reader of pastoral poetry it is tempting to suggest that Rowell is further transforming the *ekphrastic* wager of Theocritus’s ivy-cup in the First Idyll, which in his hands, reader of epic that he was, became an ordinary bowl that his writing would adorn, extending thereby the forms of epic to everyday human life and concerns.³⁹ For Rowell, the ivy bowl materializes in even more humble garb as a feed bowl for a sheep, indeed as a feed bowl that is not used—somehow allowing these 22 historical sheep to refigure themselves and the *prosopopoeia* that once rendered them and us “sheepish.” The 23rd bowl is, as Despret hints in what seems like misdirection, about politeness—about offering to “sheep” the chance to transform the protocols of the observation. The presence of the bowl and so the surplus of food transforms the questions that Rowell poses of her sheep, removing or suspending an automatic question concerning competition even as it registers that the findings are inflected by her presence. The bowl “is intended,” Despret continues, “to expand the repertoire of hypotheses and questions proposed to the sheep . . . [but] to leave them the choice” of answering other questions than those posed to them. Like Theocritus, Rowell prepares the bowl, but it is her 22 sheep whose actions she records that *cowrite* the scene it depicts. For Despret, then, “this [now] emblematic,” we might say [idyllic / *eidyllion*] twenty-

³⁸ Vinciane Despret, “Sheep Do Have Opinions,” in *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, eds. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), 360. See also, Vinciane Despret, *Quand le loup habitera avec l’agneau* (Paris: Seuille, 2002).

³⁹ Here I rely on the revisionist reading of David Halperin in *Before Pastoral: Theocritus and the Ancient Tradition of Bucolic Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 211.

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third bowl becomes a way of entering sheep into a human / non-human writing machine or “zoo-auto-bio-bibliographing,” in a way which permits or requires the ‘human’ now merely to idle, to wait or attend.

The morphology of such figures as appear on the ivy cup, figures upon which that which was “human” now waits, remains to be seen, for the “human” has become an idling merely, a category held in abeyance, awaiting who knows what? If the project of common becoming that the parliament of things attempts to realize may be understood to require a cosmopolitan or cosmopolitical rewiring of abusive relays that disavow into joyful nodes of “becoming with,” then I at least remain skipping and straddling the crux of reaction and response, clued into ethological invitations to “new possibilities,” as best as I can, but also eyeing a cuttlefish which seems to have reserves of invisible ink. By now, all my straddling and skipping may have rendered me a figure of fun or an embarrassment, but such perhaps are the risks to be run by those who wish to tread within the double set of prints in one that constitute the mutual becoming of sheep and human person, our collective “sheep tracks.” Bah!