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An Exemplary Iberian Peninsula for an Ethics of Life

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Many times throughout history humans have comprehended the earth as a discrete body separate from their own. But no day was as momentous as May 18, 1969, with respect to human recognition of the earth as discrete. On this day, the Apollo 10 shot a legendary photo, a picture that captured the entire Earth from outer space. The photograph, first published by *Life Magazine,* circulated widely and would be adapted for a wide range of purposes, including an image of the Earth flag. The taking in of the Earth in one glance with a single photo bended human consciousness and inspired an epistemological paradigm of an ethics of life.

The ethics of life paradigm occurred when humans comprehended the earth body as the absolute other and, paradoxically, the absolute self.[1] To take the photograph, a human body went to space beyond the bounds of the earth and looked back. The photo detached the Earth from the human body, now bound in a photographic frame captured with a click of the camera, transforming it into a photographable object. The astronaut taking the picture—and subsequently those that saw the picture—placed themselves absolutely outside of the earth's atmosphere, living and breathing without the need of earth and its oxygen.

But the othering of the earth—its objectification through the technology of the photograph—also inspired a diametrically opposite sensation. As psychoanalysis teaches that the wholly other also ironically inhabits the most familiar, the absolute othering of the Earth enabled an inevitable paradox: the human is at once *not* the Earth, but also *is* the Earth. Anthropomorphosis, the giving of human life to the Earth body, is not a backwards vision of an angel-like soul shaped like a human fluttering in the being of every tree or stone or mountain or the earth itself. While some might disparagingly conceive earth anthropomorphism as pre-modern or animist, I do not see it as retrograde but part of an epistemology that places the idea of the Earth at the forefront.

The simultaneous distancing of the Earth as object and its subsequent closeness as subject stimulated an earth epistemology called variously Gaia or Pachamama and plays a role in shaping some the most profound, broad-ranged thinking in science and economics. Following chemist James Lovelock and then microbiologist Lynn Margulis, philosophers of science coined the Gaia hypothesis (or Gaia theory or Gaia principle) to propose an epistemology in which all organisms and their inorganic surroundings on Earth are closely integrated to form a single and self-regulating complex system. Gaia, as science's *object* is also the scientist's *subject*, that is, it is a human body, a complicated life system, capable of suffering from disease, and capable of, yes, even emotion.

Beyond the realm of science and in terms of economics, some sustainability scholars, most notably, Arturo Escobar, do not use the name of the Greek goddess, but rather Pachamama, the world mother from Incan thought, to characterize the earth epistemology. Closely linked to the Gaia notion in which the Earth is a single and self-regulated system, Pachamama has also taken on the meaning of a complicated life system and, in the field of economics, it signals the biocentric turn away from the anthropocentrism of modernity—that is, a life worth living is not exclusively the human's. Concretely, scholars such as Escobar point to the notion of *buen vivir*, a Quechua and Aymara concept that upholds a philosophy of life that subordinates economic objects to ecological criteria, human and animal dignity, and social justice.

In short, the capturing of the Earth in the photo—as a picture of a discreet world that lives and breathes *separate* from the human and paradoxically as the first great selfie, a picture *of* the human—the Apollo image of the earth initiated critical thought towards a reflection upon the consequent ways that humans undermine the sustainability of the living planet. Put slightly differently, the Apollo image initiated the visibility of the hyperobject—the earth being the model hyperobject—and, in turn, impels responsibility toward the need to repair a geological moment constituted by humanity, a moment in which human's impact on a long past and present tragically collide, especially with respect to animal extinctions.[2]

The volume, *Ethics of Life: Contemporary Iberian Debates*, makes a convincing argument that the study of the Iberian Peninsula is a fruitful way to practice and theorize living in the light of this evolving Earth epistemology. In the following essay, I offer a series of reasons that justify the exemplarity of the Iberian Peninsula as model for that epistemology born from the earth-human body paradox. Ultimately, my choosing to study this space is wholly unsubstantiated: it has to do with an unarticulated, but real, persevering emotional attachment to Iberia, especially Galicia. If the picture of a geographical entity exists as a memory and a space within the human mind, then Iberia is my Earth photo, the always-never other.

In an easily accessible and well-circulated video, Jane Goodall opens a cage and a chimp returns to the wild with emotionally-charged, melancholic music playing in the background. The video, entitled "Wounda's Journey," can be found on the Jane Goodall Institute's Web page and is reproduced widely across the web, including the highly popular One Green Planet Web site. In the video, Jane Goodall, the renowned primatologist, accompanies Wounda, a rescued female chimpanzee, as she is released on to the island of Tchindzoulou, a protected, but semi-wild habitat in the Congo. First, the chimp steps out of its cage making a jubilant run forward, smelling and looking around in its new-found freedom. It initially does not run off into the bush, but returns to its handlers and human companions and stands on top of the cage. It looks indifferently up toward the trees, smelling, and lets a woman handler—the subject of my telling this story—hug its backside. The chimp then amazingly looks at Jane Goodall and gives her a long heartfelt hug. It hugs her profoundly.

The short implied narrative of this emotional short is to suggest that Jane Goodall has done something remarkable: the animal has been saved and returned to the wild; it is supposedly off to its rightful place away from civilization and humans; it is back to the wild ready now to run and play and fight and love with others of its own kind. For those in the English-speaking world and beyond, the video will bring tears and, hopefully, more economic support for the Goodall chimp project. For those in a neighborhood in a coastal city in Galicia, Spain, the video may inspire these emotions and actions, but its impact also reaches beyond a sympathy for the animal and Jane Goodall. The video is a source of family and regional pride. The name of the unidentified woman handler with an accent who Wounda first hugs in the video is Rebeca Atencia. She is from Ferrol, the industrial shipping town on the Galician coast. This singular city in Galicia hails some of the most profound men that would influence the shape of politics in Spain and beyond in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including Pablo Iglesias, not the founder of Podemos, but the founder of the Spanish Socialist Worker's Party in 1850, and the Fascist dictator Francisco Franco.

As one of the authors in this groundbreaking study on Iberia and the ethics of life, I salute and value a person from Ferrol—not these politicians—who is part of a new twenty-first century Iberia and international animal activism. Rebeca Atencia is responsible for daily management of the Institute's Tchimpounga Chimpanzee Rehabilitation Center, the largest chimpanzee sanctuary in Africa, which is located within the Tchimpounga Nature Reserve in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In the video, Goodall and Atencia call the place where Wounda goes a paradise, giving the impression that the island is a faraway, pristine wild. They do this to solicit donations for the Institute. Goodall and Atencia as well as many others that worked hard to fabricate this wild space know quite

well, nonetheless, that the land pictured in the video is not a pristine wild space. It is not a fantasy island in the middle of some ocean untouched by humans, but on a river in the heart of the Congo. The architectural design of the area of Wounda's fabricated paradise island is complex. More than trees and bush, it includes an education center, tourist office, armed protection at a variety of the so-called ecoguard posts, and even animal cages.

Calling attention to the complicated combination of human resources and ingenuity in the constructing of a wild space does not diminish its importance. Spanish newspapers over the last few years describe animals in Iberia in the wild and continually call attention to how the wild depends on humans interweaving themselves into that space. My essay in the volume, *Ethics of Life*, presents an overview to some of these cases found in the Spanish press in recent years. The themes from the survey articles demonstrate that "Spain," that is, the Spanish treatment of animals as it informs the thinking of people like Rebeca Atencia, is much more complex than simply, say, the treatment of the bull in the Spanish bullfight. Articles from Spanish newspapers reveal that beyond Atencia's formal veterinary training at the Complutense University in Madrid, local interventions toward animals in Spain both inform and reflect broader international concerns. Articles show that human interventions in the supposed wild in Iberia include: the tracking of and traffic collisions with the indigenous lynx; the installed webcam recording an endangered pair of black vultures in the depths of the National Park in Guadarrama; and many examples of the resurrection of nearly extinct indigenous Spanish animals, including many types of birds, the brown bear in Asturias, and the Iberian wolf.

These examples show that both extinction and the creation of spaces that seek to end extinctions depend on the human interventions. One image of a primate underscores that the space of the animal is not wild, but mediated by human technology. One image from the press of a primate rescue facility evokes an image of hospitalized character from the one of the *Planet of the Apes* series, but it also, given its context on a page devoted to companion animals, suggests that apes not only find a home, but also medical care in Spain. No pretense is made that the abandoned animal would end up in some idyllic Tarzan-type African wilderness.

Spanish newspapers print all sorts of images that inspire its viewer to help the animal discover a fabricated place where it is free to roam outside of human cages. Aside from a growing number of articles dedicated to domestic pets, one article is especially noteworthy since it positions the primate as living in the modern detention camp. From a local perspective, this article, "El Guantánamo español de los simios" (The Spanish Guantánamo for Apes), demonstrates that, even on the Iberian Peninsula, the popular media treats issues of simian captivity. But the theme of the animal in the camp as described in this article is not just an important similar and

contrasting space to the Tchimpounga Nature Reserve, but it deserves broader academic attention because it is an example of a fundamental paradox of the animal-human camp that philosophers still lack a theoretical language to describe.

Can animals be in a camp and what are the philosophical implications of stating that animals live in a camp? Writers such as J. M. Coetzee began to confront the issue of the camp and animals such as when the character Elizabeth Costello in the novel of the same name suggests that the Nazi's learned from the industrial and transportation techniques related to animals in the construction of the internment camp: "it was from the Chicago stockyards that the Nazis learned how to process bodies" (97). On one hand, the Coetzee character provides an argument that the animal is the human: that the lives of animals in slaughterhouses somehow equates with the lives of animals in the concentration camp. On the other hand, Coetzee also creates the character who points out that the animal is the other—and not the human. The character Abraham Stern states that the link between the Jews of Europe and slaughtered cattle is reductionist word play that "insults the memory of the dead" that "trades on the horrors of the camps in a cheap way" (94).

In the light of Coetzee's fiction, the philosopher Georgio Agamben asserts that the modern camp, whether it be the concentration camp or a detention facility like Guatánamo, is a site that realizes the state of exception, that is, where individuals lose voice, citizenship, and agency. Many times, popular media describes this loss with language that depends on the classic human-animal divide: the human in the camp in this antiquated logic is nothing more than animal. The article "The Spanish Guantánamo for Apes," goes beyond traditional media in that it presents a question that is much more than simply an incendiary idea for the popular reader, that is, a reductionist comparison between *real* Guantánamo prisoners and those apes kept in cages in Tarragona Spain. It forces the reader into a tautology and to find a vocabulary to an answer the searing ethical question of what language exists to describe these animals who are supposedly animalized in the camp.

Philosophers still do not have the conceptual vocabulary to understand how to describe the animal in a camp and the article, found in the national newspaper *El Mundo*, is an example of how the case of Iberia is exemplary for thinking about the issue of the animal and human. The article stimulates productive controversy. On one hand, readers will flatly disagree with associating any animal captivity setting with a detention camp. For instance, the human rights worker, attending human beings stripped of rights across the world, will sympathize with Coetzee's Stern and feel that such articles seek to equate the animal other with the human only insults and cheapens the lives of millions of people both from the past and in the present across the

world. In contrast, the animal rights activist, attending the idea that animals are part of the broader life body—a part of the earth life system—will sympathize with the animal-human connection and argue, like Elizabeth Costello, that animal lives must be understood as one part of that system.

The case of Iberia, specifically this article on Guantánamo, asks its readers to find the metaphor or the common ground between these radically and apparently absolutely non-intersecting arguments. One such argument stems from the question of under what grounds is it legitimate for the media to portray animals living in what is considered by most to be exclusively *human* detention camps. If animals exist in such camps, what terms exist to discuss what was thought to be the *animalization* of the human inhabitant of the camp? Broadly, *Ethics of Life* takes on the theoretical and more practical challenge to find the vocabulary to discuss how contemporary Iberia offers solutions for these questions.

Iberia is a prism through which to understand popular conceptions that reflect a new sort of earth epistemology. With respect to traditional notion of wilderness, my essay looks to how Spanish newspapers portray the interconnectedness between human and animal species within what people still understand as a supposed wild space. With respect to Galicia, John H. Trevathan in the volume examines the simultaneous local and global implications of ecological collectivism surviving the oil spill from the Prestige disaster in 2002. Moreover, Daniel Ares López's essay for the volume is about another version of the wild—the traditional notion of the wild man or child. His essay discusses the fascinating case of a man now living in Galicia, Marcos Rodríguez Pantoja, who lived for twelve years in isolation from other humans in Sierrra Morena. Marcos's life and Ares López's discussion most directly force the reader to reconsider popular legends such as Mowgli, film versions of the feral child, and anthropology's methodology at attempting to describe such cases.

More broadly, Ares López performs the difficult, admittedly impossible, critical work that is necessary as scholars articulate the contours of the posthumanist epistemology first inspired by the earth photo back in 1969. Specifically, Ares López examines aspects of how the story of Marcos's life as recorded by the anthropologist Gabriel Janer Manila disrupts (even as it reproduces) deeply-rooted anthropocentric world views and humanist discourses that perpetuate the ideological "Great Divide between the human and everything else" (234). While obvious and apparently not ground-breaking, when Ares López notes that Marcos understands friendship outside of anthropocentrism—for instance he writes that Marcos considers the wild boar as "the only animal that makes no friends with any other living creature" (*Wild Child* 34 qtd. in Ares López 239), Ares López breaks the notion of friendship from the chains of its long philosophical history bound to anthropocentrism. In calling attention to Marcos's story as "a non-

anthropocentric oral life history" (238), Ares López performs the important posthuman critical work that calls attention to how knots of species co-shape each other. He also shows how the Iberian space is an important locus for taking on the work of making the classic anthropocentric dichotomies obsolete such as nature versus culture, the human versus the animal, or wild versus domestication.

One permutation of these dichotomies—wild versus civilization—is as old as the Romulus and Remus story of the founding of Rome—the two boys suckled by the wolf that leave the wild and founded the first great civilization. The story of Marcos retells the age-old version of events in which civilization only occurs *after* and separate from that wolf wilderness experience. Ares López uses the Marcos story to find a post-binary, posthumanist narrative that others, such as Georgio Agamben, have also started to tell. Like Ares López, Agamben significantly dismantles the wolf metaphor when he disassociates himself from the classical animal metaphor that characterizes the supposed natural state of humanity: we are all out to get each other and that we live in an animal state like wolves preying on one another. Agamben dismisses contentions made by political theorists like Thomas Hobbes who argue the necessity of a wild versus civilization dichotomy, that is, the advent of the sovereign and orderly government must follow and remedy the supposedly natural wolf-like state of humanity. Like Agamben, Ares López's focus on the Marcos story abandons political metaphors of the wolf and retells the animal story of man living like a wolf among men. The animal, especially the wolf in the Ares López chapter, is simply an animal in the mundane—part of an everyday encounter who should be treated with politeness.

With respect to my personal connection to Iberia, I find it especially important that Marcos found acceptance and a home in Rante, a rural town in Galicia. The essay about Marcos in this volume, and even the video depicting Rebeca Atencia with chimps in the Congo, has no need for a classical abstract metaphor of the wild. These Iberian human and animal stories signal a broader epistemology of the political that seeks to understand humans imbricated with a notion of the wild in which the animal is no longer a political metaphor but is what it is. They illuminate the materially entangled web of encounters in which animals and humans shape each other.

Iberia teaches to what degree all extinctions and resurrections are human bound and how humans, animals, and, yes, even the Earth, are part of an interspecies relationship that demands a life of mutual caring. Ultimately our scholarly engagements with Iberia—and even with the image of the earth—mean concrete pedagogical interventions at the local level. In my case the region where I teach—West Texas—informs my understanding of Iberia, just as the Iberian example informs what and how I teach my students about their region. This volume offers a wonderfully refreshing perspective on

how to communicate important Iberian issues with relevance far beyond the Iberian geographical space by asking its reader to look to Iberia with a new vocabulary about life as related to animals, humans, and the Earth.

Notes

1. My assertion that the othering of Earth also made it more familiar and more part of the self is drawn from a tradition from psychoanalysis starting with Freud who connected the uncanny with the familiar. This notion is developed by Joseph Hillis Miller. See his *Others*.
2. Many studies exist on extinction. Note Thom Van Dooren's excellent study on birds.

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