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Parasitic pedagogies and materialities of affect in veterinary education

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ABSTRACT

The present article contributes a critical post-humanist analysis of emotion, education, and human–animal relations, including a reinterpretation of previous research on "shared suffering" (Haraway, 2008; Porcher, 2011) in human–animal instrumental encounters. Considering how formal education, particularly a professional education program such as veterinary medical education that relies heavily on scientific "facts" about animals and biotechnology, recruits bodily and sensory affect to mediate techniques of animal exploitation, the article asks how we can begin to make sense of such an affective animal didactics? Drawing on ethnographic material from three events in theoretical and practice-oriented veterinary education, the article explores how bodily and sensory human/animal/technology intimacy enters education as a pedagogical device *and* as a subtle reinforcement of bio-economic parasitism on farmed animals' productive and reproductive capacities. The article reworks the notion of "shared suffering" into forms of modulation and distribution of affect to conceptualize a particular didactics of incorporating human/nonhuman interaction in the bio-economic microphysics of education.

1. Introduction: education, emotion, and animals

On a field study visit to a poultry farm, where I joined a group of veterinary students as an education researcher, our teacher suddenly encouraged us to get closer to the hangar where the chickens (36 kg/m^2) were crowded and feel how it smells so that we will remember it, remember how a "normal" poultry farm smells (field notes).[2] This and other similar occurrences during ethnographic fieldwork in veterinary education alerted me to the ways formal education, particularly a professional education program such as veterinary medical education that relies heavily on scientific "facts" about animals and biotechnology, recruits bodily and sensory affect to mediate techniques of animal exploitation. What kind of expected response is implicated by the teacher's remark? It suggests that students' presumed emotional reactions to this particular smell are, at some level, an integrated part of the knowledge base of the veterinary profession. How can we begin to make sense of such an affective animal didactics? In this article, I will draw on previous research in body studies, affect theory, and animal studies to begin to explore a critical post-humanist approach to the study of emotion, education, and animals. Education research is, by tradition, a largely anthropocentric business (Pedersen, 2011) and scholarship on emotion and education is no exception. Even post-structuralist and post-humanist approaches to education and emotion, such as those informed by Deleuzian ontology (e.g. Ringrose, 2011; Zembylas, 2006, 2007), tend to focus on teaching and learning either as exclusively human activities, or as events formed with various artefactual or technological compositions, thus overlooking human–animal relations in education and their shifting affective modalities and economies.

The present article takes a critical animal studies focus on the exploration of affect and emotion as a particular didactic mode of the scientific-educational apparatus (Pedersen, 2012b),[3] highlighting the close ties of veterinary education with the animal

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[2] See Pedersen (2012a) for an analysis of this study visit.

[3] With "scientific-educational apparatus," I refer to the complexity of institutional relationships between the formal education system, the research enterprise, animal science, and agribusiness that contributes to organizing the social reproduction of animal exploitation. Compared to Althusser's (1971) notion of the school as the dominant Ideological State Apparatus (ISA), the scientific-educational apparatus is more closely linked to Foucault's (1980) elaboration on the "apparatus" as "/…/a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements." (194) However, I also want to stay with Althusser's (1971) analysis of the educational ISA as operating through different modalities of materiality.

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production sector. Critical animal studies, with its origins in the radical animal liberation movement, emerged formally in the early 2000s as a response against the increasing mainstreaming and apolitical developments in academic animal studies at large. Although it shares with animal studies a cross-disciplinary approach to the study of human–animal relationships, it deviates from it by being grounded in two different, but overlapping, forms of critique: first, a critique against animal studies itself and its often accompanying detachment from the actual life conditions of animals; second, a critical theory approach to human–animal relations, with close attention to concrete forces and effects of power and resistance (Best, 2009). Thus, "critical" in critical animal studies refers not only to an engagement with critical theory (understood as a historical-material and discursive conflict perspective on human–animal relations), but also a normative commitment to ending the exploitation of animals for human consumption and pleasure (Stănescu and Pedersen, 2013).

Informed by these perspectives, I will explore how the emotional didactics of veterinary education subtly organizes the range of positions possible to take in relation to a specific object of learning – in this case, so-called "production animals" and their use – and aids the smooth incorporation of both animals and students into the animal production machinery. The ways in which these emotional didactics work on and through human–animal relationships require a different framing of emotion in education than as something that is either suppressed, disciplined, ignored (Zembylas, 2005), or, if engaged wisely, can benefit learning (celebrated as something inherently positive and desirable), or even political transformation (Zembylas, 2006). They also complicate historical accounts of (medical) science education as a form of character education oriented towards instilling a certain callousness in students when facing others' suffering, so as to acquire the abilities necessary "to rise superior to the trials of life" (Osler [1889], 1999: 9; cf.; Boddice, 2012). As my analyses will show, neither the "disciplinary," the "beneficial," nor the "desensitizing" account of emotion in education is sufficient to capture what goes on in veterinary education pedagogy. What is needed is a framing of a different kind; a framing that brings to light complex and perhaps more sinister dimensions of emotion in education that work in subtle ways to guide veterinary students into a professional practice of animal exploitation. The framing I want to propose here draws on Sara Ahmed's (2004) analysis of the cultural and social life of emotions suggesting that all actions in essence are *re*actions; responses to affective forces of some kind. In contrast to the approach to emotions in psychology, where emotions largely work as a way of *centering* the subject (cf. Edwards, 2012), emotion should, according to Ahmed (2004), rather be viewed as a social form that organizes (or disorganizes) lived experiences, such as learning, across human and nonhuman actants and unfold (or block) alternative routes for living. Emotion, understood in this way, does not "reside" in subjects, but moves through subjects and objects; objects that may become "sticky," saturated with affect, and create sites of personal and social tension. Thus, emotion is not viewed as emanating from the individual subject, but rather as a force that holds and binds the social body together – a form of worldmaking. As such, it works on the self as well as on society, through, for instance, institutions such as formal education.

Informed by Ahmed's analysis, and guided by Deleuzian concepts and socio-material approaches to education, this article pursues questions such as: Where are the emotional "edges," the moves of affect in veterinary education? Where do they pick up speed, gain or lose in intensity? How do their plateaus look like? (cf. Massumi, 1987; Bergen, 2010) How do they bring humans, animals, and materialities together, and to what effects? More concretely, the article investigates how affect shapes and reshapes educational messages, and how it may be recruited in the formation of certain subjectivities. In these ways, the article thus explores "worldmaking" within veterinary education by analyzing the workings of affect in the production of professional knowledge. Following Blackmann and Venn (2010), I attend to the dynamic and energetic character of affective processes that are commonly viewed as an "excess" to the practices of the "speaking subject" (15) and have a capacity to create meaning beyond the logocentric domain of articulated language.

As one recent issue in animal studies, the notion of "sharing/shared suffering" has emerged, developed by Haraway (2008) to analyze human–animal relations in the context of laboratory animal science and by Porcher (2011) in pork production. Haraway's employment of the term in particular has evoked critique from critical animal studies on the grounds that the idea of sharing suffering, without direct translation into work for the abolition of violence against animals, is little more than a discursive exercise and an apology for systemic animal abuse (Weisberg, 2009). The present article can be seen as a contribution to, and development of, this debate by suggesting how the idea of "sharing suffering" may do *pedagogical* work, and to what effects (see also Pedersen, 2012c).[4]

In the present article, "sharing suffering" is intimately interwoven with the notion of "becoming"-animal. "Becoming"-animal, although commonly addressed as a Deleuzian concept in much recent animal studies scholarship, marks in this study a sharp analytic and political shift from Deleuzian ontology to critical education theory. I will argue that in education studies, notions of "becoming" cannot be understood in isolation from the "becoming-human" project of education at large; a project largely at odds with critical posthumanist notions of subjectivity. "Becoming-human," presumably achieved by cultivating certain cognitive, social, and moral abilities in the human subject has even symbolized the idea of education as such in Enlightenment philosophical traditions (cf. Biesta, 2006). In Foucauldian terms, this is a biopolitical endeavour (cf. Sloterdijk, 2009). To situate the biopolitics of education in the context of animal studies, I refer to Livingston and Puar (2011) who, citing Foucault, define biopolitics as the process by which humans become a species: thus, in the present study, becoming-animal emerges not primarily in a Deleuzian sense as mutual transformation through symbiotic interrelation (Birke and Parisi, 1999), but as particular didactic *investments in the human form* (Livingston and Puar, 2011: 8, emphasis added). As I will show, the posthumanist repertoire through which I explore the three specific educational situations in this article does not offer a liberatory alternative to, but *feed into* these investments as well as the bio-economic rationale of the veterinary education–animal production alliance, as a crucial function of the very same apparatus. It is also within this analysis my evocation of the notion of "parasitism" should be understood. Having particular and concrete effects on real animal bodies in veterinary medicine (in terms of the spreading of disease), in the education context I will draw on Michel Serres (2007) as well as on recent critical animal studies scholarship conceptualizing non-veganism as parasitism (Watson, 1945; quoted in; Cole, 2013) and argue that parasitism works in a *material-discursive* manner connecting students and animals to the biopolitical and bio-economic rationale the formal education

[4] I explore the notion of "sharing suffering" as one route through which emotion moves in veterinary education. My point is not to claim that "shared suffering" is something that actually "occurs" between students and animals, nor that this is a purpose made explicit by veterinary educators. As I explain below, I am interested in the meaning "shared suffering" produces in the pedagogical events I investigate, and how the notion itself may be reworked in light of these events.