10 Banging on the Divide
Cultural Reflection and Refraction at the Zoo

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Scholars who look at humanimal[1] relations often aim to raise awareness about the ways communication serves to structure, discipline and transform these relations. The core assumption in doing such work is that "how people communicate about animals helps inform the way they think about animals and shape the way they experience animals" (Milstein, "Human Communication's Effects" 1044). This chapter focuses

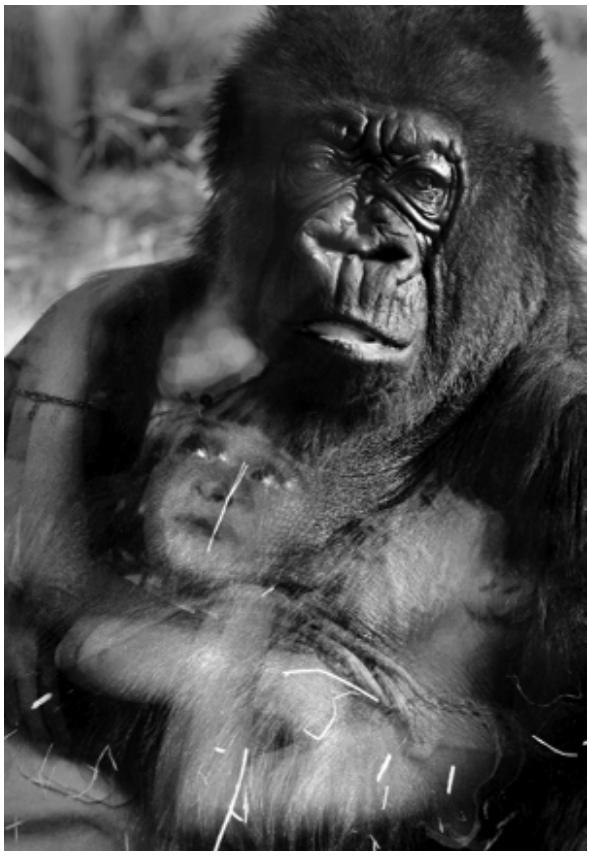

Figure 10.1 *Girls and Gorilla*. Photo by Ethan Welty.

specifically on ways communication functions to construct human relations with animals at the zoo. I look at the contemporary Western zoo to illuminate dominant discourses at animal exhibits and the subtle and not-so-subtle discursive resistances.

In particular, this study focuses on communication at the gorilla exhibit. In my research, I have found that gorillas, a major zoo visitor draw, elicit more human communication than many other exhibited animals, and this communication is filled with dialectical cultural tensions. Many of my observations are in league with Donna Haraway's argument that humans use other animals, and especially other primates, as a mirror we polish to look at ourselves and contemporary society. In zoo communication, I find various forms of struggle over meaning making that both reflect and refract clearly cultural lenses.

As intensive, public humanimal condensations, zoos as institutions strive to reflect animals in particular ways that are both culturally coherent and serve to justify zoos' continuing existence. While zoos engage in polishing particular views of exhibited gorillas—for example, that they are comfortable, playful and familial—visitors may engage in their own refractions that deflect the zoo's preferred images and construct very different views of gorillas based on connection, equivalence and emancipation. In addition, gorillas themselves engage in and influence humanimal communication. In this chapter, I focus on a particular moment when one gorilla refracts communication by the eloquent act of banging, insistently, on the zoo's human-animal glass divide.

In what follows, I explain my analytical framework, including concepts from discourse, ecolinguistics and environmental communication studies, as well as previous work on the humanature dialectical framework of mastery vs. harmony, othering vs. connection and exploitation vs. idealism (Milstein, "Somethin' Tells Me"). I situate the present study in the context of zoos as discursive sites that inform and are informed by particular cultural histories and tensions, and I describe the Western zoo site, my methodological approach and the once-celebrated naturalistic gorilla exhibit that is specific to this case study. In closely analyzing an emblematic yet exceptional humanimal communication event, I tease out reflections and refractions and discuss the ecocultural tensions and implications inherent in reaching across the symbolic-material human-animal divide.

DISCOURSE AND HUMANIMAL RELATIONS

Along with Arran Stibbe and others, I argue that human power exercised over animals and nature is materially coercive, but that this coercion is justified, reinforced, resisted and transformed in minds and institutions via discourse. Norman Fairclough, in *Discourse and Social Change*, suggests that "discursive practices are ideologically invested in so far as they

incorporate significations which contribute to sustaining or restructuring power relations" (91). Discursive practices that construct animals who are subject to human control, such as zoo'd[2] animals, are thus deeply ideologically invested.

To assist in illustrating ideology within zoo communication, I use the theoretical framework of three dialectics introduced in a former study on zoo discourse (Milstein, "Somethin' Tells Me"). While the present study focuses on interpersonal communication at animal exhibits, the former focused on zoo discourse at institutional scales. Employing dialectics that emerged from an institutional-scale examination to explore interpersonal scales of communication may add a depth of dialogic understanding to the multifaceted and interlocking ways humanimal relations are constructed in zoo settings.

Examinations of humanature discourses at the interpersonal and even intrapersonal scale often reveal multiple ideologies in dialogue (Marafiote and Plec). As dominant discourses assert themselves, counterdiscourses often interweave within the dominant ones, at times challenging dominant perceptions and practices. Similarly, I argue that the three tensions within zoo institutional discourse, the dialectics of *mastery-harmony, othering-connection* and *exploitation-idealism*, may be found at the interpersonal and intrapersonal scale. I briefly define how these dialectics serve as a context for analysis.

The first dialectic's dominant pole is *mastery*, an ideology that takes human control over nature and other animals as both a given and a precondition of societal progress. Mastery's counterdiscourse—*harmony*—values holistic cooperation and positions so-called progress, such as industrialization, corporatization and neoliberal globalization, as damaging ecological balance and any possibility of harmony. The second dialectic's dominant pole is *othering*, differentiating humans from other animals, nature and at times Othered humans. In this fundamental dualism of Western cultures (Carbaugh; Plumwood, "Androcentrism and Anthropocentricism"), the center (e.g., humans, whites, socioeconomic elites, men, heterosexuals) subordinates the other (e.g., animals, minorities, poor people, women, nonheterosexuals), justifies oppressive views and practices and obfuscates knowledge that humans are, in fact, animal and natural. The counterdiscourse is *connection*, which refracts dualisms and positions humans as interdependent forces interacting with other ecological, sensual, emotional and comprehending forces. The final dialectic's dominant pole is *exploitation*, in which nature's value is in its instrumental commodification for human gain or pleasure. The counterdiscourse is *idealism*, which circulates desires to create alternative realities by preserving, restoring and respecting humanature for its intrinsic value. In its damaged form, blindered idealism can allow for rationalizations of exploitation, but in its creative ecocentric form idealism can override the logics of domination that "create 'blind spots' in the dominant culture's understanding of its relationship to the biosphere . . . " (Plumwood *Feminism* 194).

These three dialectics—mastery vs. harmony, othering vs. connection and exploitation vs. idealism—centrally inform Western discourse, yet the dialectical poles do not receive equal public discursive consideration. Dominant profit-driven Western cultural practices, such as excessive mass consumption, largely rest upon capitalization of nature, nonhuman animals and marginalized people via material-symbolic practices of mastery, othering and exploitation. Thus, even in cultural settings such as zoos (which, in their most recent iterations, are ostensibly dedicated to the sustainability of animals, humanature and the planet) the counterthemes of harmony, connection and idealism tend to be foregrounded yet ultimately subordinated themes.

To aid in my analysis, I also look to extant concepts such as James C. Scott's hidden transcript of the oppressed, which, spoken openly, disrupts dominant discourses and power relations; Val Plumwood's notion that humans at times are able to speak strategically in liberating ways for nature or for animals stripped of their voices ("Androcentrism and Anthropocentricism"); and Rom Harré, Jens Brockmeier and Peter Mühlhäuser's argument that Western syntax largely positions humanature relations as causal, with human as agent and animal and nature as objects, discursively obliterating nonhuman nature's agency and subjectivity.

ZOOS AS SITES OF MATERIAL-SYMBOLIC DISCOURSE

A dialogic dialectical lens suits zoo studies, as zoos are in-between places of tension in Western ecoculture. As public institutions, they occupy the liminal spaces between recreation and education, science and showmanship, high and low culture, remote nature and cityscape and wild animals and urban people (Hanson). David Hancocks argues that zoos present dichotomies of confused, cold, captive conditions vs. sensorial, emotional and even rehabilitating places of wonder. As such, zoos "reveal the best and the worst in us and are stark portrayals of our confused relationship with the other animals with which we share this planet" (xvii).

Zoos are also widely popular, annually drawing 150 million visitors in the United States, more than the combined U.S. annual attendance of professional football, basketball, baseball and hockey (aza.org). In order to maintain popularity, zoos have had to transform with the culture and critiques of their times. In the past forty years, zoos, to some degree, have reinvented themselves, particularly in the areas of animal exhibition, treatment and conservation. In the process, many leading zoos have recast themselves as quasi-natural, replacing viewing bars and concrete with glass-window divides and fabricated slices of simulated habitats.

These changes are as much, or more, for the human visitor as for the exhibited animal.[3] Visitors of naturalistic exhibits look through portholes into wild-like virtual habitats (Bostock). These views are intended to ameliorate any dissonance over viewing animals in captivity and to stimulate

respect and admiration rather than pity, superiority or displays of mocking cruelty (Hancocks). As such, contemporary zoos often actively endeavor to avoid positioning the zoo animal as spectacle, instead displaying animals in nature-like environments in which they appear to have privacy, autonomy and the ability to avoid the human gaze (Davis).

Yet the zoo is not merely shaped by the discourse of its time; the institution is also a discourse in itself, shaping the humanimal relations within. Beardsworth and Bryman outline the genealogy of today's zoos, illustrating how in historical and contemporary forms, the zoo has always carried two fundamental themes: gaze and power. In exhibiting animals, zoos' central function is a process of power wherein "almost total control is exercised by humans over animals' movements and activities, with minimal opportunity for the animal to exercise its own preferences or priorities" (88). As such, though some zoo visitors may intend and attempt subject-to-subject encounters with zoo animals, Kaplan argues the viewing gaze itself is inextricably linked to objectification, making the exhibited animal the object of constant scrutiny.

The naturalistic exhibits in themselves serve to disguise the inconsistency of dialectical impulses. Baratay and Hardouin-Fugier argue that the design of the contemporary zoo expresses the illusion of certain natural spaces and represents wished-for environmental ideals while the global plunder of natural habitats intensifies unabated. Wilson argues that, in zoos' transformations from spaces largely reflecting displacement and domination to spaces ostensibly more concerned with simulated habitat and environmental education, zoo concerns have shifted from a focus on the method of containment of zoo'd animals to an examination of human viewing of zoo'd animals, and of relationships among nonhuman species. This shift parallels ecocultural shifts in humanature and humanimal spheres outside zoo walls. Indeed, today's zoos "no longer represent the vastness of empire or the abundance of the natural world. Today the inhabitants of zoos are often the last remnants of a species or community. Their exoticism is an exoticism of imminent loss" (Wilson 247).

Yet power is still foundational in the process of exhibition, even at the most basic level: the human being is always free to leave and the zoo'd animal is always confined (Jamieson). The power of exhibition serves to favor and protect the human visitor in less obvious ways, as well. The zoo visitor views zoo'd animals, gains pleasure, knowledge and/or entertainment, regardless of the animals' preferences or desires. At the same time, due to the animals' captive state, the visitor generally remains entirely protected from feelings and realities of reciprocity or vulnerability in the humanimal intersection. Along these lines, Berger asserts zoo'd animals essentially disappear, incapable in the subordinated setting of equally reciprocating the visitor's gaze. While zoo'd animals' capability to reciprocate the gaze may be argued, elsewhere I contend it is apparent that in "their surveilled captivity, the vast majority of zoo animals have been immunized from engaging in actual encounters with visitors" (Milstein, "Somethin' Tells Me" 33).

ZOO WEST'S NATURALISTIC GORILLA EXHIBIT

The material-symbolic contexts of zoos outlined above and the dearth of subject-to-subject humanimal encounters at zoos make the communication event I analyze here intriguing as a point of analysis. The event, a zoo staff-guided elementary school tour of a gorilla exhibit at Zoo West,[4] both substantiates and complicates claims about zoos and animal-visitor encounters. This tour was one of many communication events I observed during two years of participant observation on the human side of the gorilla exhibit's glass divide. I chose this particular text as analytical focal point because it is both exceptional and exemplary of core themes and discursive struggles I observed in my fieldwork. What made this event unique, and in my opinion worthy of analysis, were the actions of one young gorilla, actions that initiated subject-to-subject humanimal encounters and a tension-rich dialogue among tour guide, children and gorilla.

My approach is informed by Donal Carbaugh's assertion that the case study enables comparative assessment of available human discursive means for understanding and evaluating nature as well as an analysis of the attendant attitudes such discourses may cultivate or constrain. In order to better analyze these cultivations and constraints, I use an analytical framework of *reflections* and *refractions*, two cultural counterparts rooted in the dialectical structure used here as theoretical framework. I apply these analytical terms to humanimal communication at the gorilla exhibit in order to draw out powerful pulls between dominant and counterdiscourses. In doing so, I attempt to illustrate the ecocultural tensions at play in interpersonal communication at the zoo.

In my interpretations, I found the tools of critical discourse analysis apt for examining the powerful ways humans symbolically cage or free other humans, animals and nature. Critical discourse analysis, like other critical methodologies, identifies its object of study within a web of interrelationships and power (Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse*). In looking at structural or situational concerns, analysts look at the social event in which the text is observed (in this case, a gorilla's initiation and complication of communication during a schoolchildren's tour at the exhibit), the genre in which the text is situated (the guided zoo tour), and the discourses, styles and identities drawn upon in the text, which I illustrate below in my analysis. I use tools of critical discourse analysis, such as a close look at lexicon, syntax and particular logics produced in discourse, to analyze my data.

The setting for this case study is a major urban zoo in the U.S. West, often viewed as an early pioneer of naturalistic exhibits that set standards for zoos around the world. Before such changes began in the mid-1970s, Zoo West had a traditional exhibit approach, grouping animals by species and exhibiting without ecological context to provide the best close-up views. In the 1970s, along with other leading zoos, Zoo West began immersing visitors in simulated landscapes with living and artificial flora that attempted

to approximate habitats. Zoo designers demolished some older moat cages, dropped visitors to equal or lower viewing levels, and replaced bars with glass or no immediately obvious barrier. One intention behind these changes was to reduce human-zoo'd animal power differentials.

In 1978, in a celebrated and, early on, controversial move, Zoo West's endangered lowland gorillas became the first zoo-confined gorillas in the world to move from small concrete cages to a naturalistic "habitat." Dian Fossey and other gorilla researchers assisted in the design of this first gorilla "landscape-immersion" exhibit, and for some time Fossey told audiences that Zoo West had the only zoo facilities suitable for keeping gorillas (Hancocks). Such exhibits, now globally popular, were intended to immerse visitors in a realistic illusion of wild gorilla worlds.

Zoo staff noticed differences in both gorillas and visitors after the exhibit change. The aggressive behavior of gorillas toward one another decreased and extreme inertia gave way to relaxation, exploration, play and apparent contentment. On the other side of the glass divide, human visitors

> who once had stood in the grimy corridor of the old ape house, passively gawking or mocking the animals with whoops and shuffling jumps, now stood in small clearings amid dense vegetation and did not shout or howl or, often, even talk, but occasionally whispered to each other, with wonder in their eyes. (Hancocks 134)[5]

Wilson describes some details of the groundbreaking Zoo West gorilla exhibit: a simulated tropical forest clearing that demonstrates the process of plant succession; a glass-window lean-to at one side that is the vantage point for visitors; a series of boulders heated by electric cables that in the cold of winter often make it necessary for the gorillas to sit directly in front of the window; more distant boulders and a stream and group of caves to which gorillas may escape—these relate to flight distance, the nonsocial space animals need to feel safe. Wilson states these developments were encouraging, but argues that questions remain: "Do the new designs somehow disguise the confinement that is the primary fact of the zoo? Do wild-animal displays conceal and mystify the ways some human cultures continue to dominate the natural world? Can we really see ourselves looking?" (254).

Similar questions guide this study, as does recent research on zoo-visitor knowledge and attitudes toward gorillas and chimpanzees. For instance, Kristen Lukas and Stephen Ross found no difference in visitor attitudes after zoo visits. As such, attitudes toward gorillas that prior to the visit were more negative than attitudes toward chimpanzees remained negative. The authors argue there is room for improvement in how zoos, via their exhibiting of great apes, engender a conservation ethic and motivate conservation action.

Forty years after Zoo West's gorilla exhibit became the model for zoos, Wilson's questions and the issue of whether zoo exhibits actually contribute

to sustainable human-gorilla perceptions and relations are still pertinent and help guide my interpretations of contemporary communication at the gorilla exhibit. Today, the silent or whispered contemplations Hancocks mentions are no longer the norm. Zoo visitors are acclimated to naturalistic exhibit design and largely take it as a given. A range of communication can now be observed at naturalistic exhibits, from mocking to respectful. Yet the immersive exhibits also appear to elicit more complex, nuanced and powerfully negotiated humanimal discourse.

THE TOUR

As mentioned, I analyze a particular instance of dialogic communication; in this event a young gorilla, along with child participants, initiates, interrupts and transforms the dominant zoo discourse provided by the tour guide. The naturalistic exhibit design can be seen as playing a large role in this exchange, plunging the tour into gorillas' simulated habitat and, via the glass divide, providing gorilla, children and tour guide at once both intimate access to—and separation from—each other. I provide the complete text from a transcribed tape recording of

Figure 10.2 Akenji Pounds on the Glass. Photo by Tema Milstein.

the class tour during its stop at the exhibit, followed by my analysis.[6] The tour guide (G), as employee of the zoo, director of the tour and lead adult among a group of mostly children, has extensive power as the social agent who textures the discourse. A few adults, both teachers and parent volunteers, are present with the children but do not speak. When the class tour arrives, Akenji, a two-and-a-half-year-old gorilla, does something unprecedented in my study observations. Whereas the gorillas generally ignored human visitors, casting a seemingly disinterested glance now and then, Akenji runs to the glass divide between her and the children and begins pounding on it. She does not stop until after the children have departed.

1 Children: ((bubbly laughter))
2 G: And we have another baby Akenji visiting with her mama and they may
3 knock on the glass that's ok it's *their* glass they can knock on it if they want but we
4 would never bang back right yes this baby's being really cute over here let's keep our
5 voices down
6 Children: ((bubbly laughter builds as Akenji stands facing them two feet away, hands
7 high, banging on glass))
8 G: The male is up and kind of moving around now sitting looking right at us with her
9 little cane in front of her there ((laugh)) with her tongue kind of sticking out a little bit
10 that is Nina and she is the grandmother so she's the mother of this mom and baby
11 lying right here on her back alright and Akenji is going to entertain us here or excuse
12 me Naku is going to entertain us here
13 Child: Who's that?
14 G: =And the one sitting down close to the glass over here that's Nadiri we call her
15 Nadi sometimes and she's about seven years old
16 Child: I'm eight
17 G: *Yeah* I think she's about ready to turn eight or maybe she just did ok now you get to
18 see the other baby for a second aww she's going to curl back up with mom (.) and
19 Akenji's over here just having herself a good old time yeah Nina just looks like a
20 grandma doesn't she
21 Child: yeah

G: Does she look like a grandma or what it's like she looks up she heard me say that
((laugh))
Child: <question about heat lamps>
G: Yes yes now these gorillas live in Africa and it's pretty hot there right
Children: yeah
G: Yeah do you think they would be very comfortable just out in the cold in our
climate in the winter
Children: no
G: So look up above they all have heating lamps and that's one of the reasons they
like to sit in this nice warm *dry* area and of course the keepers clean it for them
everyday it's *not* uh this baby over here's just playing up a storm on the window
Children: ((laughs))
G: If we gave her a drum set it might be really interesting to see what she'd do alright
let's see what dad's doing
Girl watching Akenji: Maybe he wants to be let out
G: Yeah you *think* so I think she's just playin'
Another child: So, she's trying to get the lock undone
Other children: eeeew ((laughter))
G: I think she's just showing off for you would you guys want to leave it's a *beautiful*
environment they get fed everyday=*hey* let's talk about what they eat now look around and
you can see in their exhibit you see some branches with some leaves on them and
they like to eat those leaves but [ ]
Child: *Hi* ((to Akenji))
G: We also give them celery and I think they get some carrots sometimes and
maybe some fruit now and again and occasionally they like a little bamboo
Akenji: ((continuing to pound on glass))
Children: ((bubbly laughing))
G: And she's just having a good ol' time here pounding away alright ALRIGHT my
eagles we're going to move along EAGLES this way alright we're going to go back
past the jaguar exhibit so you get one more look at him
Akenji: ((still pounding))

REFLECTIONS

I reserve my analysis of the discourse surrounding Akenji for the following section and focus in this section on dominant zoo discourse as constructed by the guide. Subject positioning in this text is persistent as the guide, with the authority deriving from her position as representative for the institution and as lead adult, has the dominant power to shape communication about the gorillas. The guide's talk is informally scripted, loose enough to shift a bit when surprises, such as Akenji's banging on the window, crop up. The guide consistently strengthens her authoritative voice by including the appearance of dialogism, introducing closed-ended questions that have automatic, obvious yes-or-no answers, which she either answers herself (e.g., lines 3 and 4 "they can knock on it if they want but we would never bang back right yes") or which children answer automatically with pat answers (e.g., lines 19 and 20 "Nina just looks like a grandma doesn't she" Child: "yeah"; lines 25–29 G: "now these gorillas live in Africa and it's pretty hot there right" Children: "yeah" G: "Yeah do you think they would be very comfortable just out in the cold in our climate in the winter" Children: "no"). This style incorporates a traditional pedagogical genre, in which lessons are given to students in a way that appears as if student voices are included, but in fact the children are mouthing forecasted answers.

The guide draws on the othering-connection dialectic, using pronominalization to divide gorilla from human with the exclusive "we" for humans and "they" for gorillas, differentiating gorillas (and what they may do with "their" glass divide) from humans (and what we may not do with "their" glass divide). Other pronominalizations occur in lines 27–31, in which differences are established between visitor and gorilla climates (e.g., "do you think they would be very comfortable just out in the cold in our climate"), followed by a statement of fact about what "they," the gorillas, like. The guide uses the logic of appearances to say gorillas "like to sit in this nice warm *dry* area." As such, she anticipates potential visitor connective concerns for gorilla welfare in a cold, wet climate. She eschews explanatory logic, which would represent gorillas as being far removed from their African tropical rainforest home, placed in this foreign climate and, therefore, forced to sit under heat lamps located only in front of the glass divide. If they are to keep warm, gorillas are constantly on display for the visitors' gaze. Here, we see the emergence of the exploitation-idealism dialectic. The guide's use of the logic of appearances falsely represents an ideal situation of gorillas sitting under lamps as a "like" instead of a "need," masking exploitive design elements of the exhibit and implying that gorillas want to be near humans—a conflicting and potentially dangerous message in terms of the zoo's overarching conservation packaging.

Lexicalization, or choice of words, also serves to conceal exploitive, mastery and othering discourses. Zoo discourse selectively represents human agency only in idealistic, harmonious and connective acts of looking out for

gorilla welfare. For instance, "we," or the human center, "give them" food, but "we" do not put gorillas in this captive situation to begin with through destruction of gorilla habitat, individual violence done to them by poachers or catching and caging. Instead, humans, as presented in the tour, figure as agents only as keepers and stewards making sure the gorillas' area is clean, warm and beautiful, and that they are fed.

Harré, Brockmeier and Mühlhäuser argue that Western syntax largely positions humanature relations as binary and causal, erasing nonhuman nature's subjectivity and agency. In the case of the zoo, passivization reflects a material day-to-day existence for captive animals cut off from agency. In lines 40–46, however, the guide mystifies this passivization via syntactical arrangement. Whereas foraging for food, as gorillas would in their ecological habitats, is impossible in exhibits, the guide strategically positions gorillas as agents with desires met by the zoo. Statements such as "[they] "like to eat those leaves" and "occasionally they like a little bamboo" signify a choice of diet these gorillas lack. Similarly, a sign, posted next to the glass of the exhibit, depicting two gorillas foraging in the wild and the singular term "gorilla," furthers this mystification, as do live plants inside the exhibit that do not serve as a food source.

The mastery-harmony dialectic again emerges in representations of the gorillas' social world. Gorillas are represented as members of a harmonious extended family which closely resembles a human family, with grandmothers, moms, dads and babies. The gorillas are one animal group in the zoo who are, in fact, mostly blood related. The oldest gorillas were wild and captured as babies and, now middle-aged, have long found themselves used as breeders in a planned nationwide zoo breeding program. However, this mastery-informed, human-controlled gorilla procreation is obscured. Unmentioned to the children are the absent offspring permanently removed to other zoos for breeding.[7] Harmony is also favored in avoidance of mention of birth control, though this exclusion is not surprising considering the child audience. Birth control does come up at times when exhibit docents speak to adult visitors, yet these references are generally too vague for most adults to understand that female gorillas are on birth control largely to keep from getting pregnant by their fathers in this unnatural population situation of the zoo. In addition, the moving of one baby gorilla from another gorilla exhibit because of adult aggression and violence is not generally discussed with visitors.[8]

As mentioned, Haraway argues that nonhuman primates serve as a mirror humans polish to assemble images of themselves and human society. A representation of a gorilla family that includes incest, violence, controlled breeding and offspring taken away from parents would provide a very different image, and hence reflect quite negatively on humans. The tour guide thus makes ideological lexical choices in highlighting relations in terms of harmonious familial relations (e.g., line 35 "let's see what dad's doing"), and excluding other poignant details.

Naming is also striking in this text. The gorillas are named with African human names, such as Akenji and Nadiri. The exception, ironically, is Nina, the only gorilla mentioned by name in the tour who was actually born in Africa. Nina was captured well before zoo naming practices favored names of humans who live in proximity to gorillas' wild habitats. Cultural differences are represented via these names, which is in line with the zoo's stated intention to help visitors see connections between gorillas and their natural habitat, and to encourage visitors to feel like protecting the animals' complete ecosystem of interrelations. However, these naming practices can also mask exploitation, mastery and othering with the idealism, harmony and connection dialectical poles, camouflaging born-in-Western-captivity gorillas by associating them with culturally marked people.

In contrast to Haraway, Morbello argues that humans are not invited to see themselves reflected in the zoo-animal mirror. Instead, visitors who look in the culturally themed zoo mirror see reflected back those people marked and exoticized as other. The design of naturalistic animal exhibits serves to further conceal obvious signs of Western zoo artifice or impact, such as keeper doors or locks. Such material-symbolic discourses leave the zoo'd animal othered and exotic, and leave the visitor immersed in untouched illusionary nature and with blinders to overseas gorilla habitat destruction.

Whereas the overarching genre of the text examined here is that of a guided tour, intertextuality and recontextualization are also at play. The guide switches genres, mixing a pedagogical genre and a kind of nature show genre à la *Wild Kingdom*; one can almost hear a hushed narrative being delivered as gorillas wander through the forest, such as in line 8: "The male is up and kind of moving around." In the next sentence, the guide switches to a more informal anthropomorphizing genre pointing out the "cane" of Nina, the "grandmother": "now sitting looking right at us with her little cane in front of her there ((laugh)) with her tongue kind of sticking out a little bit that is Nina." The hybridization of these genres helps legitimize the guide's anthropomorphizing statements, as most Westerners are accustomed to turning to zoo guides, teachers and nature documentary shows for information about nonhuman animals in their natural habitats, and these genres often incorporate anthropomorphism. The use of the nature show genre also mystifies the captive state of animals in a fabricated exhibit, shifting the visitor's gaze to look through the exhibit glass as though it were a giant television screen giving a glimpse into a wild habitat. I now turn to the reframing of this glass divide.

REFRACTIONS

Perhaps the most striking aspect of this text is the discourse surrounding the pounding of the glass by Akenji. The young gorilla draws a different kind of attention to the transparent divide between human visitor and

exhibited animal and, throughout the tour, relentlessly returns attention to this divide. Akenji's actions appear to jar the guide, who works equally relentlessly to represent Akenji's behavior in dominant zoo discourse largely steeped in mastery, othering and exploitation. At the same time, Akenji's actions appear to connect with the children, who discursively represent Akenji's actions quite differently, in communication steeped in harmony, connection and idealism. The dialectical competition between interpretations offered by the guide and by the children is complicated by their relative power within the discursive regime of the zoo.

The guide first represents Akenji as "visiting" the children's tour. This first humanimal connection framing, however, is then replaced by the guide's persistent discursive work to represent Akenji's actions as playful, fun and performative. In these repeated representations, the guide separates and distances Akenji as entertainer for the human audience: "this baby's being really cute over here" (line 4), "Akenji is going to entertain us here . . . " (lines 11 and 12), "this baby over here's just playing up a storm on the window" (line 32), "If we gave her a drum set it might be really interesting to see what she'd do" (line 34).

With all these dominant representations of Akenji's actions, it would seem that the guide anticipates the refractions just below the surface. The first refraction is provided by a child in line 36: "Maybe he wants to be let out." It is notable that this empathetic statement is in direct opposition to the guide's framing, as if the child heard too many of the guide's representations and finally burst out with an alternative meaning. The child's translation of Akenji's communication as possibly representing a desire for freedom implies connection to another being's desires and needs within a restricted world. The guide then does quick work in reclaiming the authority to represent, and to deny the child's authority, using her subject positioning to overpower the child's interpretation (line 38: "Yeah you *think* so I think she's just playin'"). The guide's positioning compared to that of the child and her verbal emphasis on the child's "think" and deemphasis on her own "think" differentiate the weight and accuracy of each of their statements, subordinating the girl's "think" (Akenji wants to be let out) to her own (Akenji is just playing).

As the children continue ascribing an alternative connection-based meaning to Akenji's actions, the guide uses her positioning and louder adult voice to continue the work of framing, using a damaged form of idealism and her superordinated "think" to do the work: "I think she's just showing off for you would you guys want to leave it's a *beautiful* environment they get fed everyday" (lines 40 and 41). And then quickly, without a pause, the guide changes the subject, attempting to redirect attention: "=*hey* let's talk about what they eat now look around . . . " (line 41). The guide's representation of Akenji's behavior as "showing off" for the children exhibits a mastery orientation of zoo'd animals' purpose, an exuberance for entertaining humans. At the same time, the guide attempts to shift the children's

gaze from Akenji to the less problematic docile adult gorillas and to shift the children's thoughts to what gorillas "like." Notably this interlude is the one time the guide asks a question—"would you guys want to leave"—for which she is not assured of the children's answer. The guide, without pause, then changes the subject, closing the space that might allow opportunity for a dissenting, or refracting, answer.

Interestingly and oppositionally, it is at this point that one of the children facing Akenji speaks from a harmonious stance as the guide speaks, directly addressing Akenji, to whom no one has thus far spoken: "*Hi*" (line 44). Both children introduce resistant discourses, re-presenting Akenji's actions and appropriate humanimal interaction. Each favors the harmony, connection and idealism poles of the dialectics in place of the mastery, othering and exploitation poles that better suit the psychic and capitalist needs of the zoo. The first child's refraction evokes recognition of captivity and desires for freedom. The second child's evokes equivalence and harmony with another animal, a respectful return or initiation of greeting.

Earlier in the transcript, another statement of equivalence is found in line 16, when a child responds to the guide's naming and identification of the age of a gorilla who is the child's age by stating, "I'm eight." This after the guide states differences as to who may touch the glass divide: "it's *their* glass they can knock on it if they want but we would never bang back right yes" (lines 3–5). While it is clear that the guide would say this in order to protect the gorillas, at the same time this statement preemptively others the gorillas while perversely also attributing ownership of the glass to them. While the children immediately and continuously react to Akenji's banging with boisterous and connective excitement, they are admonished to "never bang back." By not providing a way to respond (such as waving) and not acknowledging the children who make statements of connection, the chasm widens as the children are taught not to respond to the expressive outpouring of another animal.

Despite the children's reframing, the guide has the final human word (Akenji has the final zoo'd animal word, continuing to pound on the glass), as well as the physical mastery and control over the children in deciding when they are to stay in this humanimal space and when they are to leave. The guide's final reflection points one last time to the fun Akenji is having, legitimizing the guide's dominant representation and then removing the children from the sight and sound of Akenji: "And she's just having a good ol' time here pounding away alright ALRIGHT my eagles we're going to move along EAGLES this way . . . " (lines 49–50).

MAKING VISIBLE, UNSETTLING AND REACHING ACROSS THE DIVIDE

In reading the transcript, the first question might be: Why does the guide appear to be discursively working so hard? I argue that in banging on the

divide, Akenji sends tremors through the polished junctures of Western human-animal and culture-nature binaries. In simultaneously drawing attention to the divide and reaching across it with her young human interlocutors, Akenji reveals a material-symbolic gulf the zoo works to naturalize and maintain. In the face of Akenji's disruption and the children's responsive refractions, the guide struggles to reestablish discursive footing. In doing so, she navigates dialectical tensions, attempting to reassert zoo reflections of happy animals on exhibit over the unsettling refractions of children and gorilla.

Yet Akenji and the children appear to succeed in making the divide visible. And, by communicating through the divide to one another, they take the next step that could follow an awareness-raising action like Akenji's—they attempt and, one could argue at least discursively, effect change. Instead of emphasizing the mastery-othering-exploitation poles of the dialectics (as does the guide), in emphasizing equivalence, empathy and reaching across the divide, Akenji and the children favor and put forth harmony, connection and idealism.

As mentioned, according to zoo literature, glassed exhibits serve multiple purposes. Glass replaced bars in most contemporary zoos in part to deemphasize captivity for the visitor and provide the effect of a porthole into a habitat. However, the introduction of glass in zoos also further bodily and sensually separates human zoo visitor and animal detainee. In 1961, when a different era of cultural discourses were informing leading zoo decisions, early glass fronts added to interior cages were championed as serving to restrict "offensive odors" to the zoo'd animal space and human-carried disease to the human (www.zoo.org). The divide served both symbolic and material intentions, at once connecting and dividing. This is especially poignant when one considers the important role scent plays in much animal communication. It may be a kind of sensory deprivation torment to be largely cut off from the information provided by one's senses of smell, taste, touch and sound, and limited to one's sight to perceive the world on the other side of the glass divide.

Today, drawing attention to the divide, either symbolically or materially, is not in the interest of the zoo's livelihood, in which captivity is the elephant in the room, so to speak. Children and gorillas, however, are not culturally invested in zoo or wider humanimal reflections. Children are far more likely to perceive veracity and to voice injustice than are economically invested institutions or culturally invested adults. Indeed, children, in their innocence, often point to the obvious fact clothed in the cultural conceit, ranging from the naked emperor on parade to the captive gorilla communicating.

James Scott calls such disruptions of the dominant discourse open statements of a hidden transcript. Scott argues that the first open statement of a hidden transcript breaches the etiquette of power relations, breaks open an apparently calm surface of silence and consent, and carries the force of a symbolic declaration of war. Akenji's and the children's communication

comprise a hidden transcript in the sense that their refractory messages remain unstated by the vast majority of adults who visit the zoo; yet such messages are on many adult minds. In contrast to Scott's notion of the hidden transcript, which is spoken by subordinated humans about their own lot, when it comes to subordinated nonhuman animals, it is often humans who must speak if other humans are to hear.

In this case, as the guide repeatedly reasserts the dominant reflection, Akenji upsets the apparently calm surface and children voice the hidden transcript. In another study on endangered whale watching, I've argued that such strategic speaking for nonhuman animals is not limited to children (Milstein, "Nature Identification"). Adults, too, may use communication strategically to speak for animals culturally stripped of their voice, allowing for more sustainable or even restorative humanature refractions. In this case, however, the guide (and perhaps the other present but silent adults) is directly invested in the same dominant discourses in which the zoo and many other Western institutions are invested, discourses that largely pivot upon mastery, othering and exploitation.

While Akenji and the children bang on the divide, the guide mystifies ownership of the glass. The glass divide is not a human-emplaced barrier, but rather the gorillas' "glass they can knock on it if they want but we would never bang back right yes." The obfuscation of mastery, othering, exploitation and the passivized empowerment of gorillas is furthered by the guide's strategic syntactical positioning of zoo'd gorillas as agents, as opposed to unconsenting captives and victims of unsustainable global human practices. A slave-master narrative is evidenced throughout the guide's discursive reframing: Why would they want to leave? We're nice to them, give them a nice space, feed them, etc.

Via the zoo representative's mouth, gorillas remain unvoiced agents—with the safe exceptions being grandmothers with canes or young entertainers who would be better off with drum sets. Indeed, the guide, in her authoritative zoo voice, always has an answer to affix a particular reflection. Entertainment, not emancipation; separation, not equivalence.

I've chosen to build upon Haraway's notion of the mirror to elucidate a humanimal interplay among discourse, reflection and refraction. The material-symbolic presence of the zoo-exhibit glass serves at once as window, divide and mirror, a surface we discursively polish to shape the animals on both sides. While reflections such as the guide's can be considered the throwing back of a sought-after constructed state of being, Akenji's and the children's communicative refractions can be seen as deflections. The children and Akenji turn or bend dominant constructs much as refracted waves of light or sound can turn or bend when passing through one medium to another. Such changes in direction are potentially stronger than acts of outright resistance, as they do not simply push back against a force—a resistive approach that can often lead to standstill or defeat—but instead take existing shared energy and move it in a different direction.

Figure 10.3 Sleeping Gorilla. Photo by Ethan Welty.

NOTES

1. I use the compound terms "humanimal," "humanature" and "ecoculture" throughout my writing as a way to reflexively engage human and animal, human and nature, ecology and culture, in integral conversation in research as they are in life. These discursive moves are turns away from binary constructs and notions of humans as separate from animals, nature and "the environment" and turns toward a lexical reciprocal intertwining reflective of living symbolic-material relations. Milstein, Tema, Anguiano, Claudia, Sandoval, Jennifer, Chen, Yea-Wen, & Dickinson, Elizabeth. "Communicating a "new" environmental vernacular: A sense of relations-in-place." *Communication Monographs*. 78 (2011): 486–510. Print. The terms are in league with Haraway's use of "naturecultures" to encompass nature and culture as interrelated historical and contemporary entities (*When Species Meet*).
2. Changing the adjective in "zoo animals" to the verb in "zoo'd animals" is my attempt to do the discursive work of pointing to an active process in which humans are the implicit agent. Verbing passive adjectives that naturalize particular humanature relations (such as "zoo," "farm," "pet" and "laboratory") is one step toward making visible particular ecocultural relations as active constructions with material consequences and possible alternatives.
3. Simulated naturalistic changes to exhibits may have some impact on the animal's mental, biological and emotional health, yet zoo professionals point out that most zoo animals spend much of the day and all night in barren concrete and steel cages. David Hancocks states that conditions publicly criticized in the past are still the norm, but are now merely out of sight.
4. Pseudonym.

5. As such, Hancocks argues that zoo-exhibit design subconsciously affects visitor perception of animals. Yet very few studies empirically examine perceptual or behavioral changes linked to differences in exhibit. One exception is a study at Australia's Melbourne Zoo that found visitors viewing gorillas in a concrete pit cage in 1988 chose predominantly negative words to describe them, such as "vicious," "ugly," "boring" and "stupid," whereas, two years later after relocation to a large African rain forest–simulating naturalistic exhibit, visitors chose very different descriptors, such as "fascinating," "peaceful," "fantastic" and "powerful." Amanda Embury, "Gorilla Rain Forest at Melbourne Zoo," *International Zoo Yearbook*, vol. 31 (London: Zoological Society of London, 1992).
6. This particular tour took place on March 3, 2004, mid-day at the gorilla exhibit. There are two holding areas of gorillas at the zoo. I was at the west exhibit. Underlined words indicate emphasis on the part of the speaker.
7. With gorillas, the zoo usually moves male offspring as one adult male gorilla per group is the maximum possible in exhibit conditions.
8. Some docents shared this kind of information with me while I observed at the gorilla exhibit as a researcher (I wore a researcher name tag), likely because I expressed curiosity and often spoke to them at some length. As far as I was able to observe, however, zoo staff and volunteers rarely spoke of such things to regular zoo visitors.

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