

Entanglements—Intimacy and Nonhuman Ethics

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Abstract

Drawing on ethnographic material from the Norwegian Arctic, this article explores issues of specificity, encounter, and emplacement in human-animal relations through the lens of modernizing indigenous reindeer pastoralism in the region. In turn, the main sections of the argument examine three things: first, the changing technological context of indigenous herding practice, focusing on the impact of mechanization and the emergence of “roundup corrals” in the second half of the twentieth century; second, the distinct modalities of specificity at work in human-reindeer relations, exemplified particularly in practices of enumeration; and third, how ongoing controversies over supplementary feeding bring into view a herding ethic of “liminality” that cultivates distance as a precondition for maintaining the autonomy and independence of the “semi-domesticated” reindeer—opening up the possibility of reframing apparent neglect (at least partially) as a practice of care. In closing, some questions are raised concerning nonhuman ethics at the intersection between visibility, presence, and encounter.

Keywords

reindeer, pastoralism, nonhuman ethics, semi-domesticity, liminality, biopolitics

Specificity matters, yes: but what *is* specificity? What counts as specific, what makes something specific, what does it even mean to be specific? The specificity of a cow grazing in a field differs in radical ways from the specificity of that same cow as she glides into view at your station on the slaughterhouse disassembly line. The ontology of this point could be labored at length (e.g., Latour, 2005; Law, 2004), but in its present context its implications are simple. Specificities are themselves specific, and contextual: the gesture of analysis thus warrants their specification. Initially at least, my interest here lies with

attending to the manner in which particular material sites and structures produce (and foreground) certain forms of specificity. I begin with a vignette.

It is September 2004 and I am attending the autumn roundup of the District Six reindeer herd at Krampen, outside Vadsø in Finnmark. One reindeer from the herd, a bull, has arrived at the corral with his antlers tangled up in a ball of metal wire, probably discarded leftovers from the construction of a fence, left behind on the summer grazing grounds. Lined up along the inner wall of the corral, the herders watch him with concern, discussing what to do. Left to himself the bull will probably get his antlers entangled somewhere, get stuck, and eventually starve. Worse and just as likely, he will entangle himself with another male while jousting, and both of them will die, heads locked and unable to feed—a death that entails suffering for the reindeer, and loss of property and value for their herders.

After some tactical deliberations, a group of men sets out to grab the entangled reindeer as he circles with the others in the central enclosure. Initially the bull offers resistance, balks, terrified, violently shaking his head; but working together, the men quickly pin him to the ground. While the others hold him down, one of the men begins the careful work of disentangling: undoing, coil by coil, the impossibly robust human thread that has wound itself around his antlers. Eventually, the reindeer is freed from the wire and released back into the enclosure, to circle with his peers.

In itself there is nothing remarkable about this scene: a routine incident, part and parcel of the roundup work (Reinert, 2009). Here, I present this figure of disentangling as one point of departure for reflecting on the valorizing tropes of intimacy and proximity that have become so commonplace in the literature on human-animal relations (e.g., Haraway, 2008). Treated as a synecdoche, this particular encounter draws out and highlights an ongoing concern that runs counter but parallel to the labor of creating closeness in the everyday reindeer relations of the indigenous pastoralists I worked with. They must work not only to ensure the proximity and pliability of the reindeer, but also—and simultaneously—to limit, keep in check, and neutralize the effects of that proximity. To develop this point further, I turn now to sketching out some background.

Machines

In the last few decades, the practice of indigenous Sámi reindeer pastoralism in northern Norway has undergone dramatic technological change (Paine, 1994; Reinert, 2009). Tools such as skis, bells, and herding dogs—which were

current only a generation or two ago—have largely been replaced by snowmobiles and four-wheelers, helicopters, mobile phones, and GPS tracking systems. Technological aids now enable herders to move faster, see further, and control their herds more efficiently and in new ways. Combined with far-ranging economic, demographic, and social shifts in the post-war period, these developments have displaced the ancient pastoral convention of living, moving, and traveling with the herd.

Herders today still generally keep a vigilant eye on their reindeer, maintaining daily patrols to the herd and herder cabins on the wintering grounds, but most or all of them now also live at home and commute to the herd, crossing, in short spans, distances that in living memory were still impossible (Paine, 1994; Pelto, 1973). Over the course of the twentieth century, an “intensive” model of nomadism based on cohabitation with the herd has thus increasingly come to be replaced by a larger-scale, quasi-industrial “extensive” form that is based on mechanized transport, larger herds, high labor and capital investments, as well as a more or less irreversible dependence on the fossil fuel economy (Beach, 1981; Ingold, 1980; Paine, 1994). This has had a significant impact on relations between herders and their reindeer.

Hand in hand with the adoption of motorized transport, however, from the 1960s onward, came a parallel and much less discussed technological transition: the more or less universal adoption of roundup corrals. Built and maintained by the herders themselves, with state support, these structures are used in seasonal roundups (usually in autumn and winter) to gather up the reindeer for management practices such as inspection, marking, flock separation, slaughter outtake, and medical treatment. The corrals are extensive and often labyrinthine compounds made up of wooden enclosures, cubicles, and separating fences, contained within the larger perimeter of a grazing area. Their use in herding immediately precedes the introduction of snowmobiles (Pelto, 1973), with the earliest complexes constructed in the 1950s, in the post-war period.

Prior to this, historical records and verbal testimony indicate that reindeer roundups were generally conducted in the open, using ropes, temporary structures, and natural features such as frozen lakes or cliffs (e.g., Vorren, 1951). By all accounts, this was a very time-consuming and labor-intensive method, demanding long hours and extended periods of close proximity to the reindeer. Excessively “wild” or “feral” reindeer were difficult to assemble and control, increasing labor costs and incurring risks such as injury or dispersion of the herd. Such methods, consequently, both required and reproduced (through their regular exercise) a degree of acclimatization between herders and reindeer.

As roundup corrals became more prevalent, however, this changed. The work of keeping the assembled herd together could now be delegated to the

physical structure of the corral, while numerous pens, cubicles, and holding enclosures lightened the work of separating out individuals for marking, slaughter, or medical treatment. The reindeer required less habituation, as they could simply be driven into the corral using snowmobiles or four-wheelers, or even by just running after them; and wooden walls replaced a perimeter of ropes and human labor. This, in turn, prompted one of the classic feedback spirals of pastoralism (Beach, 1981). Corrals made the habituation of reindeer to humans less important while simultaneously new driving techniques and noisy motorized vehicles also rendered it more difficult to achieve, as herds became skittish and increasingly wary of close human presence. The resulting “de-domestication” of the reindeer marks not so much a loss of control as the ascendancy of control in an alternative mode.

Writing about this, the anthropologist Ivar Bjørklund identifies a shift of emphasis in recent decades from “control over individual animals” to “control over the herds as such,” and a new predominance of “management forms where [herders] only exercise control over individual animals when it is necessary,” noting that “[t]hese occasions are when herders earmark the calves, separate the herds, and select animals for slaughter” (2004, pp. 134-135). In other words, herds may be driven across the land with motorized vehicles, but control over individual animals is increasingly, even exclusively, exercised through and within the roundup corral. Forms of individual control exercised through habituation and long-term familiarity yield, increasingly, to forms of control that are exercised episodically, with the roundup corral as their main locus and instrument.

What, then, is the nature of these control practices? Specific descriptions follow that draw on the practices of an indigenous extended family group I worked with during my doctoral fieldwork in the Finnmark region in 2004 and 2005 (Reinert, 2009). At the beginning of the autumn roundup, at least as it was practiced in my area, most or all of the herd is gathered from its state of dispersion, across the summer grazing grounds, and assembled in the area surrounding the corral (*beitehagen*). From there, a part of the herd is then driven into a large holding area, which is connected by a corridor to the central enclosure. Driven by the youngsters of the clan, small groups of reindeer are then moved through the corridor and into the central circular area, where they can be observed, handled more closely, and separated out. Here individual reindeer may be earmarked, vaccinated, medically treated, castrated, moved into holding cubicles off the side of the central area, selected for slaughter, or sometimes taken out by their owners and slaughtered directly on the grass or snow outside.

Within the corral, individual reindeer bodies are made present in such a way as to display particular characteristics: age, health, gender, and other

physical traits or defects are easily determined, as are behavioral traits such as aggressiveness. Decisions regarding the desired composition and ratios of the herd can then be made on the basis of these observations. Certain relationships between individuals are also rendered observable in and through the corral; for example, by separating the calves from the mothers into different enclosures then reuniting them, herders can use the structure of the corral to observe which females the calves move toward. This determines filiation, and helps establish correct ownership of new and unmarked calves. Through a series of successive steps, the corral thus funnels, divides, contains, and separates out the individual reindeer that constitute the herd, rendering reindeer unto humans, and vice versa, in particular ways, permitting and giving rise to specific forms of interaction. Permit me now a brief shift of scales.

Since its beginnings, the industrial slaughterhouse, and by extension the agroindustrial complex, has been invested in a sort of asymptotic reduction of nonhuman animals to living objects, only minimally or barely alive (Noske, 1997; Reinert, 2007; Wadivel, 2002). Within the agroindustrial processing apparatus, distinguishing traits for these “living objects” are given as a measurable: processed animals are specified in terms of quantifiable attributes such as age, gender, size, lifespan, growth rate, feed-to-weight ratios, fertility, offspring survival rates, productivity, and meat yield (Reinert, Reinert, & Mathiesen, 2010). Individual animals are thus rendered as commensurable with each other and, as a consequence, interchangeable in specific ways. Here, the paradigmatic substitutability of the industrial meat-worker echoes the pure fungibility of the living objects he or she handles: objectified, replaceable along every one of the axes mapped out by their quantifiable attributes. The most exceptional milking cow can be replaced by any animal that provides the same yield of milk; the difficulty is only finding that animal.

This fungibility is refracted onto the slaughterhouse floor, where the non-human body is reduced to a series of repetitive identical operations (Vialles, 1994). Under such conditions, engagement through physical encounter both produces and depends on a simultaneous detachment: from the slaughtered animal as a suffering being and, more generally, from aspects of the animal presence that exceed the parameters given by the industrial context. In other words, within its coordinates, the agroindustrial complex short-circuits animal specificity qua radical or irreducible individual singularity, eclipsing it with an always already-commensurable, already-comparable specificity given in numbers, and routinized practices, by which the animal is always already-substitutable.

Others have pointed out an obscure affinity here between the faceless, anonymizing rationality of the industrial slaughterhouse and the logic of human-

animal relations in extensive, large-scale animal husbandry premised on the ranching model (Giedion, 1948; Ingold, 1980). By dint of the manner in which it structures time, practice, and relations, the roundup corral partakes, at least seemingly, in the same anonymizing logic. Its adoption, in this light, would mark a step within the overall industrialization of pastoralism. There is more to this, however.

Presence and Absence

Let me return now to the corral, in another capacity, and to another incident which took place (or rather, did not take place) later the same year during the first winter of my fieldwork in Finnmark. My car had recently broken down, and I was stuck at the farmstead where I was renting a cabin. The situation was particularly frustrating as not 30 miles away, the entire district herd—consisting of several thousand reindeer—was being moved through the winter corral, and the census takers were conducting the annual reindeer count. Luckily, a retired herder from the neighboring district who lived in the village offered to give me a ride up to the corral, as he was headed there himself to look for one of his reindeer: a distinctive young animal with a pure white pelt he had found injured the year before and (unusually) raised himself. Despite retiring from herding, he was still involved through the animals he had passed to his son—a common form of traditional transmission, which has survived in the current administrative regime.

Now he was attending all the roundups in the area, to see if he could spot this reindeer, “his” reindeer, and find out if she had survived. Though he had no intention of killing her himself, he was concerned; the pure white pelt was valuable and distinctive, it might well have marked the animal out to poachers. Supposedly, as another herder told me, pure white reindeer were also less physically resilient, genetically prone to succumb to the often hostile environment of the tundra. Intrigued by the story of the herder, I joined in his search. After hours perched on the fences, however, scanning the dark mass of animals circling through the thickly falling snow, under the enormous floodlights set up to light the corral, we still had no success. Eventually we gave up. Our white-pelted reindeer may or may not still be “out there,” in the dark, but she was not to be found there and then.

As we peered over the wooden walls, trying to discern a white pelt among the grunting animals circling in the enclosures, our quest stood in marked contrast to the other practice of observation or scanning that was taking place simultaneously, in the same corral: namely, the annual reindeer census.

Reindeer are difficult to count precisely, particularly in large herds. In some circles, the practice was until recently considered uncouth, even impolite: an insult to the herd (Oskal, 2000). At the same time, the state administrative apparatus depends on the production and circulation of exact numbers for the purposes of establishing quotas, allocating subsidies, applying incentive systems, determining population ceilings, and so on. The roundup corral is the point at which the normally unruly, elusive, and geographically dispersed multiplicity of the herd becomes visible to the state optic, in a (potentially) countable form. This counting is undertaken by the census takers: herders brought in from other districts to oversee the passage of the herd through the corral, establishing exact numbers by counting individual reindeer and reporting them to the appropriate bodies.

The census in the district where I worked occupied the same space as other management practices that took place at the winter roundup, such as marking leftover calves and supplementary slaughter, and the course of events resembled that of the autumn roundup. In small groups, the reindeer were let from the holding spaces into the central enclosure, to circle in view under the bright floodlights overhead. Aligned around the inner wall, clad in bright reflective vests and armed with clipboards and pens, the census takers counted the animals, taking note of marks and statistically relevant details (age, gender, and so on) as they passed through. When all the present reindeer had been counted, they were driven out and a new batch was let in—and so on, until the entire present herd had been accounted for.

The relationship between census herders and herders of the district had a certain tug-of-war quality to it. In one sense at least, the census herders were potential rivals. Since they came from other districts, they were in competition for the total share of resources allocated under the subsidy system, and—particularly in the light of government de-stocking policies—it was often in their interest to inflate or escalate the number of reindeer in the district they were counting. Numerous strategies exist for hiding animals from the “eyes” of the state, particularly during the move between seasonal pasture grounds (Paine, 1994).

In the context of the census, the structure of the corral made individual reindeer present, visible, as the countable elements of an inferred larger aggregate: the herd that was “out there,” normally invisible, inaccessible in its totality to the eyes of the state. Conversely, the administrative reality of that aggregate “out there” is established through local enumerations of individual reindeer: the practice of census not only underwrites, but effectively *creates* the enormous populational figures that circulate as the constant social reality of an overpopulation crisis, enabling and legitimizing discourses of state

intervention (Reinert, 2009). In other words, the corral serves as a “massifying” technology through which the complex and uncountable multiplicity of the herd is first disaggregated into individually countable bodies, then reconstituted, through enumeration, as a distinct, administratively “real” or substantive type of multiplicity: an additive one, composed of discrete, individual bodies. The census was rendering the reindeer as counted bodies, possessed of a basic specificity of numbers, within the additive multiplicity of an administrative herd: a beast of quite a different order than the embodied herd, as it circled through the falling snow in front of us. Through the census, the space of the corral was thus made to operate as a sort of transformative interface: a surface through which the herd not only became legible to the eyes of the state, but through which it was reconstituted as a manipulable, intervenable entity.

Flowing through the snow and the bright floodlights of the corral, this mass of countable individuals stood in stark contrast to the singular, unsubstitutable specificity of the white-pelted individual my herder associate and I were looking for. Where the former were multiple, our quarry was singular; where they were impersonal, known only as a disaggregable mass, the latter was known, familiar, recognizable as an individual with biography and personality. Parsed through the metaphor of an ontological choreography, the difference could be staged as a play between absence and presence: precisely in their presence, as specific bodies made visible and encountered within the corral, the former were absent as individuals. Conversely, the singular individual we sought was very much present, precisely in her absence.

To sum up then, so far I have described at least three quite distinct modes of nonhuman specificity at work in the corral: first, the quantified, commensurable and substitutable specificity of the industrial animal, measured through productive attributes; second, the anonymous numerical specificity of countable bodies, produced through the census for synoptic manipulation within the coordinates of state agency; and third, the specificity of the white-pelted reindeer we were seeking: a biographically known, radically singular, unsubstitutable entity. All three existed through and in relation to the corral—the first two because the corral enabled the close-up practices of observation and measurement by which animals were identified and specified; the third, in the form of an *exception*, which through its absence confirmed, in a certain way, the everyday mechanism and operation of the corral. Evidently, the patterns of distance and proximity, intimacy and detachment at play here are complex and ambiguous: all the more so, as in the next section, when we move beyond the herder-reindeer relation itself and take into account the role of other human actors.

Liminality

As a result of their mobile and largely free-ranging life, reindeer occupy an ambiguous position, on the side of conventional models of livestock rearing: particularly so, in the case of agroindustrial models premised on complete control of captive livestock. Outside periods of intense contact such as the roundup, they spend much of their time grazing in the open, with limited supervision. In the process, they move through landscapes that are increasingly saturated by the interests and spatial claims of nonherders. The claims they stake by grazing often intersect the bounded or exclusive territoriality of real estate developments, nature reserves, windmill parks, hydroelectric dams, electricity grids, road infrastructures, and military firing ranges. Reindeer, consequently, tend to figure in local debates as a disruptive, even hazardous presence: consuming crops, breaking fences, disturbing livestock, disrupting gardens, invading urban space, colliding with cars or buses, and so on. In turn, this leads to accusations that herders are losing control, leaving excessively large herds to run rampant, stripping the tundra to a “desert” through overgrazing. The default structure of these controversies positions the roaming, “free-range” condition of the reindeer in purely negative terms, as a loss or absence of human control. This apparent lack of control is variously interpreted as resulting from greed (herders want too many reindeer), laziness (herders reap profits without work), negligence (herders do not care about their reindeer), or cruelty (herders care only about profits and ignore the welfare of their reindeer).

Seeking to preempt such accusations, herders engage in a form of constant boundary work, to keep the reindeer out of human spaces such as roads, cities, gardens, and fields. This work plays out as a sort of public performance of responsibility through regional media, political debates, local policies, and everyday conversations. The controversies hinge on the *liminal* quality of the reindeer: appearing neither fully domesticated nor fully wild, the animals slip between descriptive and normative categories, according to the tactical agendas of the speaker. The boundary work of herders aims at preventing their symbolic lapse into a feral condition, by which they increasingly come to resemble pests, subject to the logic of hunting and intervention (Reinert, 2009, pp. 46-58). As I have indicated, there is some substance to the complaints of nonherders: shifting patterns of technological and structural change within the industry have transformed human-reindeer relations and thrown traditional practices into precarious reassemblage. At the same time, the apparent lack of control also represents more than an absence: it involves active effort and the extension, into new conditions, of a positive ethical

commitment on the part of herders to the reindeer they herd. Unpacking this claim requires a brief discussion of pastoral Sámi animal ethics.

A few years ago, in a report for the Norwegian parliament, a group of Sámi thinkers differentiated between three categories in traditional Sámi animal ethics: domestic, free, and completely free animals (Magga, Oskal, & Sara, 2003). The first category includes animals such as dogs or cattle, who live entirely within the coordinates of human control: they are effectively dependents, bound to humans through informal contracts. The third category includes animals such as insects, wolves, and other predators, who live entirely outside the sphere of the human: they demand no sovereign responsibility from humans, merely the recognition of certain intrinsic rights and protocols between equals. Relations with animals in the category between these two however, which includes reindeer, are complex: governed by situationally specific rules that take into account both the mobile, liminal quality of the animals themselves, and the variable degrees of control humans can (and should) exercise over them. Appropriate human conduct toward reindeer must thus take into account their location, the sort of space within which they are encountered, as well as normative ideas concerning the balance between these spaces.

One traditional axiom of herding states that the best place for a reindeer to be is in nature, in the wild (*luohtu*). Ill, hungry, or otherwise unwell, the reindeer seeks to return to this state, outside human control; in this it is more like a wild animal, and herders do well to recognize that fact. Along with responsibilities attendant on care under conditions of captivity and control (in other words, those human obligations, such as care and avoiding injury, that are incurred through temporarily disciplining reindeer bodies), there is also a framing overall responsibility, to protect the autonomy and independence of the reindeer; that is, to preserve their ability to exit the coordinates of human control and return to their state of *luohtu*. Behavior that damages this ability, figuratively closing the exits of the corral, is understood, to some degree, as a violation of the unspoken pact between humans and reindeer.

The most evident practical manifestation of this ethic I saw during my own fieldwork was the reluctance of many herders to begin providing animals with artificial feed, even during hard winters. Human feeding is promoted as a stop-gap solution during critical winters, to prevent starvation when grazing becomes scarce or inaccessible and reindeer are unable to secure sufficient feed on their own. There are practical problems associated with such feeding, including additional costs, insufficient availability, difficulties with ensuring appropriate feed composition—and not least among these is the fact that reindeer themselves do not necessarily take easily to it; human-fed reindeer sometimes die of starvation, their stomachs full of feed (Josefsen, Sorensen, Mork,

Mathiesen, & Ryeng, 2002). Herders I worked with all argued that supplementation must begin early, well in advance of critical conditions, to ensure that the reindeer have time to accustom themselves to their altered diet. This issue went beyond logistics or physiology, however. Artificial feeding, herders argued, also risked making the reindeer excessively dependent on humans, depriving them over time (through excessive care) of their ability to fend for themselves in a difficult, frequently hostile environment. This would not only be detrimental to their survival, but also be a sort of disrespect, or violation, which risked transforming the reindeer into something they were not, jeopardizing their integrity and independence.

Excessive human control would be a practical problem, as well as a moral transgression and a sort of indignity (Reinert, 2009, pp. 122-143). This reluctance exemplified an ethic of distance and circumscribed control, ruled by conditions of episodic proximity: an ethic in which necessary and desirable contact was counterbalanced by deliberate gestures of distancing, severances that neutralized domesticating effects. This was not an ethics of intimacy, or even necessarily one of trust—at least not as conventionally recognized. Effectively, it patrolled and delimited the presence and influence of the humans, in deference to the maintenance of a partial entanglement: an entanglement whose partiality, vitally, must be preserved. Distance was managed here, and cultured, as an element of moral obligation toward certain nonhuman others: in other words, as an attribute of moral responsibility, and as a practice of care in itself.

From the critical perspective of most animal activists engaged with herding issues, at least in Norway, such self-limitation and cultivated distance could only appear as criminal negligence. Every few years, usually with a hard winter, images of starved and emaciated reindeer begin to circulate in the media. The reindeer are rendered as symbols of abandonment and abrogated responsibility: left to themselves, exposed to starvation and death. Activists accuse herders of neglect and reckless greed, direly forewarning about “famine” and “catastrophic mass starvation” that will result from excessive pastoral accumulation (Aslaksen & Maso, 2010). In the context of scarce grazing, feed supplementation is advocated on the basis that reindeer are controlled by herders, and therefore they are also their moral responsibility—and that *not* feeding the reindeer can only constitute a lack, or absence, of appropriate action.

Of course most herders agree with the need to ensure the survival of their herds, and they go out of their way to do so. At the same time, such accusations also obscure an existing ethic of care, premised on maintaining the autonomy of the reindeer, their status as “free, mobile and independent” beings (Magga et al., 2003)—a fragile quality that ensures their survival, but which could also be damaged through inappropriate, “domesticating” human action.

In other words, two perspectives on feed supplementation are in uneven play here, underwritten by distinct notions of care: one stipulates that reindeer are fully the wards of their human herders, who are therefore also fully responsible for feeding them; the other stipulates that the reindeer are (also) independent agents, subject only partially or episodically to human control. Moving from the former to the latter, “care” and “neglect” become reversible, each transforming into its opposite: the apparent neglect of leaving the reindeer to fend for themselves becomes a practice of care, while practices of immediate care (such as human feeding) acquire a dimension of neglect—neglect, that is, of the self-sufficiency and independence of the reindeer, qualities which must be preserved through self-conscious limitation and the cultivation of a certain distance. Where “relation” is equated with closeness or presence, intimacy even, this latter ethic becomes perforce problematic. Where copresence and proximity operate as the unspoken basis for “appropriate” human-animal relations, the sovereign autonomy that herders afford to their reindeer, through distance, appears rather as a lack of concern than as a form of care.

As advocacy and media campaigns become enshrined in regulatory change, such assumptions in turn become self-fulfilling, and pastoral practice is reorganized in accordance with them. An unintended consequence of this is that it forces the progressive extension of certain kinds of herder control over their reindeer: the reindeer will be “domesticated” by default, through shifting expectations and a regulatory context that assumes they already *are*, and legislates accordingly. This is a vital matter, close to the heart of the challenges that reindeer pastoralism faces—not the least of which are the ineluctable transformations that confront the herder-reindeer relationship—but to judge by the tenor of current debates, there is little prospect of constructive resolution in the near future.

Conclusion

Let me return now to the figure of disentangling I began with. I have sketched out one situation where physical copresence is a precondition, not an antidote, for the objectification, depersonalization, and standardization of nonhuman animals: the space of the corral renders reindeer in terms that dovetail both with the requirements of an industrial, market-oriented system of meat production, and those of a large-scale, massifying biopolitical state apparatus. At the same time, an ethics of liminality governs (at least partially, supposedly) the terms of their oscillation between this temporary confinement and a state of free, autonomous sovereignty “out there,” on the tundra. In

other words, the corral cannot be considered in isolation: morally, it stands in a constant symbiotic relation to the open spaces of the tundra.

The balance of this sacrificial tradeoff (temporary reification and slaughter in exchange for a largely mobile and sovereign life) is precarious, however: the landscape and spaces of herding are transforming, ever more densely populated and congested, and the “out there” grows ever more elusive. The question, with the Arctic and its resources becoming more and more attractive to an expanding human population, is just how long this nonhuman “outside” can continue to exist. How long before a thousand spatial developments swallow the tundra—leaving nowhere to come out of, nowhere to return to? What then should we make of this disentangling? These questions are still hypothetical, if just barely: their time approaches.

Beyond its specific ethnographic setting, the material I have discussed here points toward problems that are quite basic to human-nonhuman relations. A very widespread assumption, axiomatic in nonhuman studies as in many areas of social thought, is that increasing distance is associated with impersonality, depersonification, a desubjectivation of the nonproximate Other. As Bauman (2003) succinctly phrases it, “the moral attribute of proximity is responsibility; the moral attribute of social distance is lack of moral relationship” (p. 184). Social here is (all too) easily conflated with physical, specific distance subsumed under a more general heading. Tropes of embodied encounter and copresence come to serve as a supposed antidote to the isolation, violence, and alienation produced by the “human-animal divide.” Distance becomes loss, a loss of intersubjective understanding and relational personhood that degrades the intimate and total responsibility presented, as Levinas (1969) might put it, by the face of the other: a responsibility which, to some of us at least, obtains whether that other is human or not (Calarco, 2008; Reinert, 2012).

Conversely however, if a glimpse of the face of the other is what births ethical obligation, the encounter which exposes us to that face becomes valorized as the keystone of an ethical relationship: in its simplest sense, the face as fetish (Taussig, 1999). Seeing is a form of copresence, and an ethics built on visibility is an ethics of presence: an ethics turned toward the other that is present (and known), whether through the face or otherwise. Presence, encounter, and visibility form a nexus, a person-shaped knot in the fabric of ethics—but if sight is tactile and the act of seeing is haptic (Haraway, 2008), visibility may be a form of exposure and, in a sense akin to what Foucault (1977) intended, a trap (p. 469). The human presence itself, even mediated by lenses and telemetry, is often disruptive: a fact that hides behind our species ubiquity. Where, then, are the ethics of distance and the unseen, of *not* encountering, of absence and withdrawal as practices of care (Reinert, 2013)?

As I write this, in July 2010, the Deepwater Horizon spill has just been temporarily capped. Still, the jungles burn and the seas die, emptied of fish, choking in weeds and gyres of plastic. Human agency extends beyond the human line of sight: birds die out on islands where no human sets foot, entangled in indestructible ghost-nets. I write, in other words, from the heart of the Anthropocene, safe in the eye of a storm of extinctions, on a globe saturated by the human presence. Perhaps the questions that press most urgently, on this all-too-human age, concern not so much the seen as with our effects on what remains undetected; not so much our relationship to the face as to the faceless; not so much the rendering visible as the protection of the unseen. Discourses such as animal care, stewardship and conservation may encode the tenets of a powerful sovereignty, unwittingly reproduced (Bell & Reinert, 2009; Smith, 2011). One such tenet is precisely the human entitlement to *presence*—an entitlement granted quietly, implicit in the assumed visibility of the nonhuman other (Mills, 2010). How may we begin to rein in that power which assumes this constant rendering-visible of the nonhuman not just as desirable, but as a human birthright? The Enlightenment project itself is at stake here.

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