



From Alphonso Lingis' *Dangerous Emotions* (Berkeley/
Los Angeles: University of California, 2000).

2

Bestiality

Sea anemones are animated chrysanthemums made of tentacles. Without sense organs, without a nervous system, they are all skin, with but one orifice that serves as mouth, anus, and vagina. Inside, their skin contains little marshes of algae, ocean plantlets of a species that has come to live only in them. The tentacles of the anemone place inside the orifice bits of floating nourishment, but the anemone cannot absorb them until they are first broken down by its inner algae garden. When did those algae cease to live in the open ocean and come to live inside sea anemones?

Hermit crabs do not secrete shells for themselves but instead lodge their bodies in the shells they find vacated by the death of other crustaceans. The shells of one species of hermit crab are covered with a species of sea anemone. The tentacles of the sea anemones grab the scraps the crab tears loose when it eats. The sea anemones protect the crab from predator octopods, which are very sensitive to sea anemone stings. When the hermit crab outgrows its shell, it locates another empty one. The sea anemones then leave the old shell and go to attach themselves onto the new one. The crab waits. How do sea anemones, blind, without sense organs, know it is time to move?

Ocean extends over seventy-one percent of Earth's surface, and ninety percent of the ocean is more than three kilometers deep. Below a depth of three hundred meters, living beings move in total darkness. Squid that live in the depths where light penetrates eject clouds of ink to hide behind before their enemies, but an abyss-dwelling squid,

Bestiality

Heteroteuthis dispar, ejects a cloud of fluid glowing with bioluminescent bacteria to light up the waters before itself and locate prey.

Small nomadic bands of people have long lived in the rain forests of the world. But until recently only two ways had been found for humans to commercialize the rain forest without destroying it: tapping rubber trees and collecting Brazil nuts. Rubber has many essential uses in industry, and Brazil nuts have always commanded good prices on the export market. But there are so many species of trees intermixed in the rain forest that rubber tappers and nut collectors often had to walk for an hour from one tree of a species to the next. It early occurred to settlers to cut down the wild forest and establish plantations of rubber trees and Brazil nut trees. The Brazil nut plantations always failed. The trees grew vigorously, flowered, but never produced any nuts. Only fifteen years ago did biologists figure out why. The Brazil nut flowers can be pollinated by only one species of bee. This bee requires, to feed its larvae, the pollen of one species of orchid, an orchid that does not grow on Brazil nut trees. When did Brazil nut flowers come to shape themselves so as to admit only that one species of bee? What we know as Brazil nuts are kernels which on the tree are enclosed in a very large wooden husk containing hundreds of them. The Brazil nut tree is hardwood, and the husk about its seeds is of wood hard as iron. There is only one beast in Amazonia that has the teeth, and the will, to bore into that husk—an agouti. When it bores through the husk, the agouti eats only some of the seeds. Through the bored hole the remaining seeds are able to get moisture and to push their roots into the ground. Without that rodent, the nuts would be permanently entombed, and Brazil nut trees would have died out long ago.

When did celled life, with nuclei, come to evolve? The microbiologist Lynn Margulis established that chloro-

Bestiality

plasts and mitochondria, the oxygen-processing cellular energy-producers in plants and animals, were originally dependent cyanobacteria and proteobacteria that came to live inside the cells of plants and animals. Colonies of microbes evolved separately and then formed the symbiotic systems that are the individual cells, whether of algae or of our bodies.

Human animals live in symbiosis with thousands of species of anaerobic bacteria, six hundred species in our mouths that neutralize the toxins all plants produce to ward off their enemies, four hundred species in our intestines, without which we could not digest and absorb the food we ingest. Some synthesize vitamins, others produce polysaccharides or sugars our bodies need. The number of microbes that colonize our bodies exceeds the number of cells in our bodies by up to a hundredfold. They replicate with their own DNA and RNA and not ours. Macrophages in our bloodstream hunt and devour trillions of bacteria and viruses entering our porous bodies continually: they are the agents that maintain our borders. When did those bacteria take up lodging in our digestive system, these macrophages in our bloodstream?

We also live in symbiosis with rice, wheat, and cornfields, with berry thickets and vegetable patches, and with the nitrogen-fixing bacteria in the soil with which the rootlets of all those plants enter into symbiosis in order to grow and feed the stalks, leaves, and seeds or fruit. We also move and feel in symbiosis with other mammals, birds, reptiles, and fish.

How myopic is the notion that a form is the principle of individuation, or that a substance occupying a place to the exclusion of other substances makes an individual, or that the inner organization, or the self-positing identity of a subject is an entity's principle of individuation! A season, a summer, a wind, a fog, a swarm, an intensity of white at high noon have perfect individuality, though

they are neither substances nor subjects. The climate, the wind, a season have a nature and an individuality no different from the bodies that populate them, follow them, sleep and awaken in them.

Let us liberate ourselves from the notion that our body is constituted by the form that makes it an object of observation and manipulation for an outside observer! Let us dissolve the conceptual crust that holds it as a subsisting substance. Let us turn away from the anatomical and physiological mirrors that project it before us as a set of organs and a set of biological or pragmatic functions. Let us see through the simple-mindedness that conceives of the activities of its parts as functionally integrated and conceives it as a discrete unit of life. Let us cease to identify our body with the grammatical concept of a subject or the juridical concept of a subject of decisions and initiatives.

The form and the substance of our bodies are not clay shaped by Jehovah and then driven by his breath; they are coral reefs full of polyps, sponges, gorgonians, and free-swimming macrophages continually stirred by monsoon climates of moist air, blood, and biles.

A pack of wolves, a cacophonous assemblage of starlings in a maple tree when evening falls, a marsh throbbing with frogs, a whole night fizzling with fireflies exert a primal fascination on us. What is fascinated is the multiplicity in us—the human form and the nonhuman, vertebrate and invertebrate, animal and vegetable, the conscious and unconscious movements and intensities in us. Aliens on other planets, galaxies churning out trillions of stars, drops of water showing, under the microscope, billions of squiggling protozoa—these are mesmerizing. What is mesmerized in us are the pulses of solar energy momentarily held and refracted in our crystalline cells, the microorganic movements and intensities in the currents of our inner coral reefs.

Our movements are not spontaneous initiatives launched against masses of inertia; we move in an environment of air currents, rustling trees, and animate bodies. Our movements are stirred by the coursing of our blood, the pulse of the wind, the reedy rhythms of the cicadas in the autumn trees, the whirl of passing cars, the bounding of squirrels, and the tense, poised pause of deer. The speeds, slowness, and turns of our movements come from movements we meet about us. Our legs plod with elephantine torpor, decked out fashionably we catwalk, our hands swing with penguin vivacity, our fingers drum with nuthatch insistence, our eyes glide with the wind rustling the flowering prairie.

These movements do not only extend space for us; they surge and ebb in intensity. They are vehement, raging, prying, incandescent, tender, cloying, ardent, lascivious. It is through its irritability, its fear, its rage, its languor, its exuberance that an octopus in the ocean, a rabbit caught in our headlights, a serpent in the grass, a cat on the couch become visible to us. Our movements become irritable with the insistent whine of a mosquito, fearful before the fury of a hornet whose nest we have disturbed, languid with the purring of a cat, exuberant in the sparkling of the coral fish in the tropical surge.

We assign special importance, in everyday life, to purposive or goal-oriented movement. Yet most movements—things that fall, that roll, that collapse, that shift, that settle, that collide with other things, that set other things in motion—are not goal-oriented. How little of the movements of the bodies of octopods frolicking over the reef, of guppies fluttering in the slow currents of the Amazon, of cockatoos flaunting their acrobatics in the vines of New Guinea, of terns of the species *Sterna paradisaea* scrolling up all the latitudes of the planet from Antarctica to the Arctics, of humans is teleological! How little of these movements is programmed by an advance

Bestiality

representation of a goal, a result to be acquired or produced, a final state! Most movements do not get their meaning from an outside referent envisioned from the start, and do not get their direction from an end-point, a goal or a result. Without theme, climax, or denouement, they extend from the middle, they are durations.

How even less do most movements represent initiatives by which an agent posits and extends its identity! They are nowise the movements by which a conscious being seeks to maintain, consolidate, and stabilize itself, still less to integrate itself.

In the course of the day, our bodies shift, lean, settle; agitations stir them; most of the movements of our arms and hands are aimless; our eyes glide in their sockets, continually buoyed up and rocked by the waves of sunlight. So many of the movements to which we assign goals start by being just an urge to move, to get the day going, to get out of the house. We go out for a walk in the streets, a stroll along the beach, a saunter through the woods. In the Ryongi Zen Garden in Kyoto, for five hundred years each morning a monk rakes again the sands into waves. His movements are themselves waves, and leave no traces in the mind, are lost in the winds that shift the sands as he moves. A campesina in Guatemala occupies her hands with the rhythms and periodicity of her knitting as she sits on the stoop gossiping with her friends. A now old Palestinian who will never leave the refugee camp watches the children play ball and fingers his prayer beads.

Every purposive movement, when it catches on, loses sight of its telos and continues as a periodicity with a force that is not the force of the will launching it and launching it once again and then again. A carpenter climbs up the roof to nail shingles; almost at once his mind lets loose the objective and the rhythm *dum-dum-dum-DUM dum-dum-dum-DUM* continues his movements. The force he feels in those movements is not the

Bestiality

force of his deciding will but the vibrant and vital intensity of his muscles on the grip of his smoothly balanced hammer. The rhythm of his hammering is composed with the rhythms of the passing wind currents and the falling leaves, and when he pauses he, alone in the neighborhood, registers the nearby tapping of a nuthatch on a tree trunk.

The movements and intensities of our bodies take up the movements and intensities of toucans and wolves, jellyfish and whales. Psychoanalysis censures as infantile every intercourse with the other animals, which it so obsessively interprets as representatives of the father and mother figures of its Oedipal triangle. But we are not aiming at an identification with the other animal. Still less are we identifying the other animal with another human.

The hand of a child that strokes the dolphin takes in the surges of exuberance that pulse in its smooth body, while the dolphin in close contact with the child's face takes in the human waves of intimacy. A woman riding a horse pumps with the surges of its impulses, while the horse's pace incorporates her shifts and pulls. The movements of her body extend speed and retardation, and feel the thrill of speed and the soothing decompression of slowing down. These movements extend neither toward a result nor a development. They are figures of the repetition compulsion; we stroke a calf each night on the farm, we ride a horse through the woods with the utterly noncumulative recurrence of orgasm.

Our skunk climbs up on our lap, folds her legs under her round smooth body, closes her mouth and eyes, and vibrates a glowing contentment. The postural axis that lines up our torso and limbs for tasks now relaxes, our thighs cease to be muscled levers for going places and turn into a soft warm cushion, our eyes cease to inspect and observe her and wander soft-focus, and our whole body becomes a nonfunctional mass where her content-

ment rumbling through it is undifferentiated from its pulsating sensuality.

When we watch the seals glide up and down the rocks and into the sea, we feel the tedium of the bodies we had to evolve when we left the ocean. A hundred seventy pounds, of salty brine mostly, in an unshapely sack of skin: what a clumsy weight to have to transport on our bony legs! We can certainly understand the dolphins and whales, mammals that evolved on land but long ago returned to the ocean. When we return to the ocean, we have to pull a layer of rubber skin over our bodies, strap on a buoyancy compensator, an air tank with regulator and gauges, weight belt, eye mask, and flippers. And then how ludicrous we look when we lurch our bodies equipped with all these prosthetic organs out of the dive shop and wade with flippered feet across the beach till we reach deep water! In the deep, all these supplementary organs only make our species-organs nonfunctional. We abandon our upright posture that we long ago evolved in order to free our hands for grasping, taking, manufacturing, and expressing. The swim-strokes we trained into our bodies to move across the surface of water are useless underwater; we fold our hands under us so as not to stir up the sand in front of our eyes. Our flippered feet take up the wave movements of fish, and we mostly do that only to descend and ascend when our air tank is used up. Underwater any coral head, the most biologically diverse environment on the planet, will occupy our mesmerized eyes the hour we have. We are reduced to just eyes, looking without surveying. We learn nothing, not even how to identify as species of fish the shimmering colors and undulatory forms silently streaking about us; back on the beach, paging through the *Guide Book of Tropical Fishes*, we can't be sure, looking at their static pictures, if what we saw was a Moorish Idol or a Heniochus, called "Poor Man's Moorish Idol." The pub-

lishers have taken to printing their guide books of tropical fishes on plasticized pages bound with plastic rings so that divers can take them down with them. I used to ask divemasters what that fish we had seen was, and was put out that they never seemed to know. It was only later that I realized, what they realized long ago, that the high-point of diving is not to distinguish some rare fish but to be observed by them. It is the pleasure of having a pair of angelfish accompany you the whole dive, swimming next to your goggles, peering into everything you stick your nose into. It is the exhilaration of having the great shark careen by or pause inches from your head, its small lemon-yellow eye fixed on you. At first it may take some effort to avoid doing something, trying to drive it off or to flee. But with familiarity, that comes naturally. (Sharks do not like the taste of Homo sap meat anyway. When they see surfers, stuffed into black wet suits, lying on surfboards with their feet in flippers, the sharks' poor eyesight sometimes mistakes them for seals, which some species of sharks do eat. They take a bite of a surfer and then—like Count Dracula in Paul Morrissey's sixties film, deceived into thinking that the Italian girl he sank his fangs into is a virgin—puke it out when they realize their mistake.) You feel your eyes and your big bloated body completely exposed to that yellow eye which reveals nothing whatever of its response to you. Sharks have skin like us, not scales, but no expression. No tremors of curiosity, distrust, repugnance, antagonism, or menace shiver or crease that skin. There is no cause for fear. Under the gaze of the shark, your eyes entirely cease to be organs for observing, cease to be organs, become only surfaces on your nonfunctional anorganic plenum. Time extends in a motionless span, coming from nowhere, going nowhere.

A tune is not launched by an advance representation of the final note, and its evolution is nowise purposive.

In singing a tune, or in patterning our finger movements through our hair into a kinetic melody, we are also not controlled by another movement. Tunes do not imitate but answer refrains that start and stop in the streets, in the fields, and in the clouds.

Crickets in the meadows and cicadas in the trees, coyotes in the night hills, frogs in the ponds and whales in the oceans, birds and bats in the skies make our planet continually resound with chant. Humans do not begin to sing, and do not sing, in dead silence. Our voices begin to purr, hum, and crescendo in the concerto and cacophony of nature and machines.

J. M. G. Le Clézio was long puzzled by the particular features of the singing of the Lacandon Indians in Chiapas—a music of cries and noises, without melody or harmony, repetitious, night music made clandestinely and in solitude, a music made with a monophonic bamboo tube, a pipe with but two holes, a drum, a scraper, a shell, a bell, a music that does not seek to be beautiful, that is not addressed to anyone. Then, during long rainy season nights, Le Clézio heard how their songs, leaving words and meaning behind, pick up and join the basso continuo of the frogs, the dogs, the spider-monkeys, the agoutis, the wild boars, and the sloths in the tropical night.

Insects sing with their torsos, their legs, and their wings; human animals sing with their throats, their chests, their torsos, their legs, and their fingers. Human animals sing with the terrestrial, oceanic, and celestial animals, and with the reeds and the ant-hollowed branches of didgeridoos, the catgut strings and the drum-hides, the brass and the bronze. Around the campfires of hunter-gatherers from time immemorial, humans have sung with their bodies, the dances of the Maasai composing visual melodies against the staves of elephant grass, people in the slums of Salvador in Brazil sauntering the samba, with the pulsating movements of

the cats and dogs of the alleys, into the staves the cars are drawing. In the imposed silence of university libraries, the bodies of students are bent over books, but how much of their bodies sing—their ant-antennae feet rhythmically tapping the floor, their hummingbird fingers dancing elegant melodies in their hair.

The parents of a first baby feel all sorts of feelings about that baby—astonishment, curiosity, pride, tenderness, the pleasure of caring for a new life, the mother's resentment of the father's inability to share the tedium of nursing and his unwillingness to share the changing of diapers, and the father's jealousy as the woman he so recently chose to devote himself to exclusively, as she him, now pours most of her affection on the baby. What does the baby feel, aside from hunger and discomfort? Whatever feelings simmer in that opaque and unfocused body are blurred and nebulous. Brought up in a state orphanage, the child would reach the age to be transferred to the automobile or tobacco factory assembly line with still opaque and blurred feelings. Brought up in a high-rise apartment where the parents stay home weeknights watching action movies on television while fondling their gun collection and go for rides weekends through a landscape of streets, boulevards, underpasses, and highways, seeing only other cars outside the window, the child would reach sexual maturity with the feelings of Ballard and Vaughan in J. G. Ballard's *Crash*.

Is it not animal emotions that make our feelings intelligible? Human emotions are interlaced with practical, rational, utilitarian calculations that tend to neutralize them—to the point that the human parent, finding her time with the baby dosed out between personal and career interests, may no longer know if she feels something like parental love, not knowing how much of her concern for her child is concern with her own image or her representative. It is when we see the parent bird attacking the

cat, the mother elephant carrying her dead calf in grief for three days, that we believe in the reality of maternal love. So much of the human courage we see celebrated is inseparable from peer pressure and the craving for celebrity, even the possibility of profit. It is the bull in the corrida that convinces us of the natural reality of fearlessness.

Is not the force of our emotions that of the other animals? Human infants are tedious at table, picking at their food, playing with it, distracted from it; they pick up voracity from the puppy absorbed with total Zen attentiveness at his dish. They come to feel curiosity with a white mouse poking about the papers and ballpoints on their father's desk. Their first heavy toddling shifts into tripping with the robins hopping across the lawn. They come to feel buoyancy in the midst of the park pigeons shifting so effortlessly from ground to layers of sundrenched air. They come to feel sullenness when they try to pet the arthritic old dog the retired cop is walking in the park. They contract righteousness and indignation from the mother hen suddenly ruffled up and stabbing with her beak when they try to remove a chick. They pick up feelings of smoldering wrath from the snarling chained dog in the neighbor's yard and they try out those feelings by snarling when they are put under restraints or confined. Temper in a human infant dies away of itself; it is from finding reverberating in himself the howling of dogs locked up for the night, the bellowing of tigers, the fury of bluebirds pursuing hawks in the sky, that his rage extends to nocturnal, terrestrial, and celestial dimensions. If an infant brought up in a highrise apartment, where all the paths he walks outside are paved and even dogs and cats are forbidden, still acquires feelings other than those which purring, growling, or roaring machines transmit to him, it is because he has contact with humans who have made contact with the living forces of nature.

The curled fingers of an infant ease into tenderness in holding the kitten but not tight, and rumble into contentment from stroking the kitten's fur with the pressure and rhythm that set it purring. Though the parrot can clutch with a vise-grip around a perch while sleeping, he relaxes his claws on the arm of an infant and never bites the ear he affectionately nibbles, extending his neck and spreading his wings to be caressed in all the softness of his down feathers; with him the infant discovers that her hands are not just retractile hooks for grabbing, but organs to give pleasure. In contact with the puppy mouthing and licking his legs and fingers and face, the infant discovers his lips are not just fleshy traps to hold in the food and his tongue not just a lever to shift it into his throat, but organs that give, give pleasure, give the pleasures of being kissed. Feeling the lamb extending its belly and its thighs and raising its tail for stroking, the infant discovers that her hands, her thighs, and her belly are organs to give pleasure.

Far from the human libido naturally destining us to a member of our species and of the opposite sex, when anyone who has not had intercourse with the other animals, has not felt the contented cluckings of a hen stroked on the neck and under the wings rumbling through his own flesh, has not kissed a calf's mouth raised to her own, has not mounted the smooth warm flanks of a horse, has not been aroused by the powdery feathers of cockatoos and the ardent chants of insects in the summer night, lies with a member of his or her own species, she and he are only consummating tension release, getting their rocks off. When we, in our so pregnant expression, *make love* with someone of our own species, we also make love with the horse and the dolphin, the kitten and the macaw, the powdery moths and the lustful crickets.

As our bodies become orgasmic, our posture, held oriented for tasks, collapses; the diagrams for manipulations

and operations dissolve from our legs and hands, which roll about as though dismembered, exposed to the touch and tongue of another, moved by another. Our lips loosen, soften, glisten with saliva, lose the train of sentences; our throats issue babble, giggling, moans, and sighs. Our sense of ourselves, our self-respect shaped in fulfilling a function in the machinic and social environment, our dignity maintained in multiple confrontations, collaborations, and demands, dissolve; the ego loses its focus as center of evaluations, decisions, and initiatives. Our impulses, our passions, are returned to animal irresponsibility. The sighs and moans of another that pulse through our nervous excitability, the spasms of pleasure and torment in contact with the nonprehensile surfaces of our bodies, our cheeks, our bellies, our thighs, irradiate across the substance of our sensitive and vulnerable nakedness. The lion and stallion mane, the hairy bull chest, the hairy monkey armpits, the feline pelt of the mons veneris, the hairy satyr anus, exert a vertiginous attraction. We feel feline and wolfish, foxy and bitchy; the purrings of kittens reverberate in our orgasmic strokings, our squirrely fingers race up and down the trunk and limbs of another, our clam vagina opens, our erect cobra-head penis snakes its way in. Our muscular and vertebrate bodies transubstantiate into ooze, slime, mammalian sweat, and reptilian secretions, into minute tadpoles and releases of hot moist breath nourishing the floating microorganisms of the night air.

Human sexuality is not just what priggish suburbanites call animal sex, the random and mindless copulation of their domestic dogs; it elaborates all the refinements of eroticism. Lust enlists all the Platonic eros which craves the beauty that looks immortal and the immortality of beauty; it elaborates the skills and the arts of seduction, the teasing and provocative usage of language, metaphor and metonymy, synecdoche and irony, the no

that is a yes and the yes that is a no, the specific pleasure in appearance, simulacra, and masquerade, the challenge and purely imaginary stakes of games.

In this the courtesan specialized in the rites of eroticism is in symbiosis with the resplendent quetzal whose extravagantly arrayed, glittering plumage serves no utilitarian function; the cavalry officer is in symbiosis with the coral fish whose Escher designs do not outline the functional parts and organs of their bodies and whose fauvist colors are no more camouflage than are the officer's white jodhpurs and scarlet cape. The ceremonies and etiquette with which courtship was elaborated in the palaces of the Sun King were not more ritualized than the courtship of Emperor penguins in Antarctica, the codes of chivalry in medieval Provence not more idealized than the spring rituals of impalas in the East African savannah, the rites of seduction of geishas in old Kyoto not more refined than those of black-neck cranes in moonlit marshes.

Humans have from earliest times made themselves erotically alluring by grafting upon themselves the splendors of the other animals, the filmy plumes of ostriches, the secret luster of mother-of-pearl oysters, the springtime gleam of fox fur. Until the gardens of Versailles, perfumes were made not with the nectar of flowers but with the musks of rodents. The days-long songs of whales and the dance floors cleared of vegetation and decorated with shells and flowers that birds of paradise make for their intoxicated dances exhibit the extravagant erotic elaborations far beyond reproductive copulation in which humans have joined with the other animals.

Today, in our Internet world where everything is reduced to digitally coded messages, images, and simulacra instantaneously transmitted from one human to another, it is in our passions for the other animals that we learn all the rites and sorceries, the torrid and teasing presence, and the ceremonious delays, of eroticism.