

Feeling Animal Death

Being Host to Ghosts

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Chapter Ten

Hos-Pet-Ality

Handmade Selves and Transspeciated Femininity

Ashley King

This is an experimental chapter and a dog memoir about my departed companion, Zoey.¹ This is both a study in grief and an account of my encounter with my body—a body that is transgender—that occurred during and after my relationship with Zoey. The felt matter that passed between us persists into the present and gives both of us a future. Or I am haunted by her, and that haunting is part of the condition of my enfleshment. For to be a subject is to be host to the ghosts who will haunt you.

To proceed requires an adjustment to the terms commonly reserved for understanding human/animal difference. To think past the (ironically short-sighted) ocularcentrism of animal studies, which has hitherto privileged seeing, being seen or “*seen seen*”² by nonhuman animals, I offer the concept of *hos-pet-ality*. Hos-pet-ality privileges touching and being touched (and perhaps “*touched touched*”) by another animal—even an absent one. In other words, if the hospitality ethic implies a rigorous formulation of the established roles (“host” and “guest”) that engender relationships of reciprocity among unequals, hos-pet-ality is a “low” ethic that attends to the tactile dimensions of the pet relationship. I use this concept to illuminate the moments when binaries blur and identities break apart and reassemble. Hos-pet-ality emerges in and through *transness*, or such ambiguous states of becoming that trouble the cultural organization of difference with regard to gender, species, and the boundary between life and death.

Centering touch in this way is not an attempt to sidestep the issues of power and domination that the studies of visibility have uncovered. Throughout the history of human interactions with other humans and animals, the career of touch is inextricably entangled with power and domination. We may covet or experience touch as a means to heal or restore feeling to ourselves, but that ideal can easily veer into, or even coexist

with, violation, appropriation, and destruction.³ By returning to the archive of my own body, the tissue where Zoey's memory is preserved and upon which her ghost continues to work, my language is dragged by the poetic challenges of writing about the intimacy of the pet relationship in its sticky and visceral moments—moments that include not only play, joy, and affinity but also disgust, anger, and misunderstanding.

Nevertheless, *hos-pet-ality* comes closer to describing the processes by which embodied selves are improvised through sensory rather than sense-making regimes of perception. That our bodies are *handmade* in this way—a term I will use to get at the intimate, expressive, and individually creative ways we commit to the materials on hand to craft bodies that work for us—means they will contain oddments, substitutions, and perceptible flaws that tell so much of the story. The handmade works as a metaphor for the “work of crafting identity” and as a “methodological orientation” to the social and psychological texture of identity, shaped by collaborative processes and DIY aesthetics.⁴ Throughout this chapter, I will describe how my relationship with Zoey helped me understand myself as transgender and how, even after her death, she materializes with(in) my transfeminine body. This “transspeciated” femininity, to borrow Eva Hayward's term, is a strategy for embodiment, assembled from available scraps and repurposed materials, that makes a place for me in the world even as it helps me “recognize as precious the boundedness of *my flesh as part of the world*.”⁵ Similarly, I hope this chapter will provide a topology for others to understand themselves and their gender troubles—whatever shape those troubles may take, whether cis or trans—as being materially entangled in the world.

NAMING AND SEEING ANIMALS

I was eight years old when my grandmother brought her to us. A vibrant bundle of breath like any puppy, the black folds in this one's face gave her a prematurely wizened look. “Like an old man,” my brother said.

She was energetic then, given to tearing through the house while dragging the damp towel or dirty sock she just liberated from the hamper, or punting an old soccer ball with her stunted snout, or racing the neighborhood's terrier along the chain link fence outside. Rarely would she stay still long enough to let me take her picture with my toy Polaroid camera.

But I remember stillness, the ache of quiet. We were playing in the yard and a shift in the wind took the sound of birds with it, like their calls were a curtain the air had just drawn open to let the silence in. She would stare off into that silence with one paw raised for as long as the pause lasted. Only



Image 10.1. *Zoey, three months old, Ashley King, 1998.*

when the birds' din faded in and she moved again did you realize that you had been holding your breath with her.

We named her Zoey. I doubt any of us knew that the name came from the Greek *zoe*, meaning life. But the significance is no less striking to me now for having been an accident.

In *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, Jacques Derrida offers an exegesis on the Book of Genesis that focuses on the act of naming. In the second creation myth, Adam names the animals (and later “woman”) as an extension of divine sovereignty. Derrida argues that from this first act of naming flows all sacrificial histories, including the present one that is marked by the despotism of “Man” (a gendered and racialized term) over what it calls *animal*.⁶ And one could argue that by naming her Zoey, we were exercising this same nominative power to appropriate some private part of her. And yet when we called her, she came running. She said “Yes” to her name. *Her* name—a personal name, apart from the word “animal,” apart from the species classification and

the determination of her “breed.” Zoey was our name for the *her* part of her, which was rightfully nameless, the kind of name that gives one to the other. She claimed the name and gave it meaning: Zoey, life.

Naming is closely tied to the visual field; naming supplements different regimes of looking.⁷ Naming is part of how we slice up and apportion the visual field, which, though potentially infinite, is circumscribed by individual sensory limitations and sense-making regimes. These coalesce into a gaze, a point of view, that cuts into the flesh of the world and the embodied beings that inhabit the world. For example, the male gaze, the point of view originally theorized by Laura Mulvey to explain how the camera lens presents female bodies as objects for heterosexual male consumption, is a visual grammar of sexual domination.⁸ And certainly the male gaze feeds into the feeling of mastery certain classes of humanity enjoy when regarding nonhuman animals (including “Man’s best friend”).⁹

There are other perspectives. Just before the discussion of Genesis, Derrida includes a, by now, infamous scene in which he writes about how “the gaze called ‘animal’ offers to my sight the abyssal limit of the human.”¹⁰ In this scene, Derrida is standing naked before his cat, who has just followed him into the bedroom only to regret it when she finds the door closed behind her. The cat flashes Derrida a withering look as his robe falls open. Derrida’s gaze “intersects” with that of the cat, and in this moment, he is not only “seen” in uncoverable and unrecoverable nudity, but he is “*seen seen*”—which is to say, *visually addressed* by his cat, even brought to account.¹¹

This kind of scene is doubtless familiar to anyone who ever shared a home with a pet. It has a quotidian quality, yet it is crucial for understanding the pet relationship. Such moments of mutual (in)comprehension open and reclose and congeal in an instant, returning us to ourselves while forming the shared tissue of understanding that binds this human to this animal. Derrida, like all companion humans, must also struggle with the fact that the tissue of understanding includes a respect and appreciation for each other’s opacity. We are not always able to anticipate a pet’s needs because neither she nor her needs fully come to the surface.

As Derrida notes, such scenes of recognition have not been the subject of serious philosophical treatment or theoretical speculation, even in the branches of philosophy and theory supposedly devoted to understanding the animal; such discourses are, above all, “anxious about, and jealous of, what is proper to” humanity.¹² Nevertheless, this scene has been incredibly generative for the field of animal studies to rethink ethics from the vertiginous intersection of these two axes of sight, human and animal—an intersection that engenders shame at our treatment of them. Matthew Calarco, for instance, positions such moments as “proto-ethical” because being *seen seen* “precedes

and gives rise to the possibility of any recognition.”¹³ Calarco argues that the “shock” of this encounter with the Other “leaves a trace within me, and how I respond to that trace—whether I affirm or negate, avow or disavow—constitutes ethics, properly speaking.”¹⁴ Calarco’s intervention is thus to synthesize Derrida’s discussion of the animal gaze with Levinas’s hospitality ethics. For Levinas, the privileged “face-to-face” encounter with the Other, the *absolutely* other, is that proto-ethical moment in which the subject is ordered and ordained to serve; hence, to be a subject is to be host, and to be host is to be a “hostage” whose selfhood is literally held by the other.¹⁵ Levinas argues that the human face alone introduces the transcendence that stops us in our tracks and makes demands upon us; the animal face is *cat*-egorically denied.¹⁶ Calarco counters that the scene with Derrida’s cat shows how these demands can and do move across species lines. After all, if I am not the one who decides when and how I am called to serve another, why not hold open the ethical to admit *any* being that has the potential to transform *my* being?¹⁷

It was never my intention to get embroiled in debates about “what constitutes ethics, properly speaking.” But I am struck by how this critique of anthropocentrism has preserved largely intact the primacy placed on visibility. These dominant optical metaphors occlude other senses that might be just as valuable in rethinking ethics. Indeed, the face-to-face encounter seems like an especially poor choice of metaphor when talking about dogs, who, unlike cats, shrink from direct eye contact.¹⁸ And most animals express themselves more clearly elsewhere than the face, through body language for example. (Perhaps we should follow the lead of dogs and start, instead, at the other end of things?)

My relationship with Zoey was expressed more through those “lower” senses that Levinas, Derrida, and Calarco deemphasize, including, especially, *touch*—another means of supplication, another catalyst of response, written on the flesh. Loss is written there, too, in all the sense impressions and little tugs of memory that recall me to everything I lost irrevocably when I lost her, and to the world ghosts leave without really leaving behind.

HANDMADE SELVES: RECONSIDERING THE PET RELATIONSHIP

If the hospitality ethic discussed earlier can be characterized by an utter aversion to touch, even after we adjust its parameters to include nonhuman animals, clearly that limits its usefulness in reconsidering the pet relationship. Levinas himself argues that touch is a tool of possession and effacement that consumes the other, and, not coincidentally, he identifies the intimacy of

touch with the erotic—and the feminine.¹⁹ Clearly, we cannot take Levinas at face value; indeed, it is hard to dismiss the suspicion that this preclusion of touch is necessary to *straighten out* ethics—to simplify or reduce the complications introduced by touch, in which power can operate more ambiguously and identities can be queered, thus putting “the subject” at risk for serious reevaluation.

To think about the pet relationship along the lines of hos-pet-ality, we must include a careful reconsideration of the erotic. We might think, for example, of Audre Lorde’s classic reclamation of the erotic as female power that “comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person. The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers *which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference.*”²⁰ Or we might think of Luce Irigaray’s own critique of Levinas, in which she argues that the infinite, the transcendent, be found not in viewing the human face but in touching upon and being touched by the other who exceeds our grasp. She writes of the “fecundity,” even the overabundance, produced by touch, which is “witnessed in the uncalculating generosity with which I love, *to the point of risking myself with the other.* . . . Together, the lovers becoming creators of new worlds.”²¹ I am wary of these respective attempts to define the erotic as essentially (or at least archetypically) “female” or “feminine.” Being transgender has taught me to be suspicious of *any* form of gender essentialism, even when there are strategic gains to be had, because (in my experience) it can and will be used against you. Nevertheless, both authors provide an invaluable way of thinking about subjectivity in and through the shared sensation of touch. Consequently, they invite a “generative turn to the material”—a turn to the handmade.²²

As a metaphor for the work of crafting identity and a materialist orientation to the selves that emerge from relations of tactility, the handmade might repurpose material from both of these conceptions of the erotic. Following Lorde, we can say that identity is sensually enacted with different kinds of objects, and the process matters at least as much as progress. Consider, for example, the eroticism of knitting, alone or in groups—the way it engages your whole body until the process takes over and your hands dissolve into the motion of the needles and the feel of yarn; loops enmesh and rows accumulate into soft, pliable texture; your hands start to “see” better than your eyes. Think about how intimately you know the scarf or beanie as it comes together in your hands, even when the pattern does not turn out as planned. Are you not also creating a self to be wrapped around or covered by that scarf or beanie? And following Irigaray, we can say that the handmade always implies a commitment to the material you are given—the type and color of

yarn, for instance—such that you can lose yourself in the creative process yet still come away with more than you started with. And though the handmade is generative, it can be posed in opposition to the reproductive onus of heterosexual society and capitalist industry. The handmade instills an appreciation for intimate collaboration and mutual support, allowing us to harness our creativity for unique projects rather than perpetuating an unsustainable order of things. And is it not the case that a handmade object means more when it is shared, either as a collaborative endeavor or as a gift given without desiring anything in return?

These reflections on intimacy and creativity return me to Zoey.

I grew up with her. She grew old. I saw her nearly every day of her life. What, then, can I tell you, if I want to tell you about her, about what passed between us?

I can tell you that she almost never barked. Only when she was startled by a mouse in the house or an open umbrella did she emit a low, rusty sound, something like a truncated howl, to voice her worry. Only the kindness of our hands could calm and reassure her.

I can tell you about her sloppy way of drinking; how her tongue curved into a fleshy ladle that darted in and out of her mouth, slapping against the water with such force I could not muster.

I can tell you that she preferred table scraps to the kibbles in her red dish and that she gained considerable heft as she grew older. On several occasions, in her overeagerness, she bit one of our hands instead of the morsel we were offering.

I can tell you about the gluey stain of saliva she left on the couch after she chewed a stick down to splinters.

I can tell you about administering her weekly baths and how much she appreciated them; how the warm water splashed from her glossy coat onto my forearms and face and trickled down the surface of my skin in little rivulets; how her sturdy, vulnerable body heaved a contented sigh as I massaged the soap into her fur, and her dog smell seemed to fill the bathroom.

I can tell you how she would fall asleep on my stomach, face to snout; how her lungs swelled against mine with each breath as my flesh seemed to enfold her thudding heart in a sheltered lake; how I would look down at the paw that lay between where my breasts would be; how it dawned on me that my breasts, having failed to bud at puberty, were *missing*.

It was while holding Zoey that I first began to understand myself as trans-feminine—not because the caress is an inherently feminine mode of perception, but because it was through touching and being touched that I came to recognize and embrace the fluidity of my gender identity. Looking down at her paw and “seeing” my absent breasts, I sensed something was amiss; this

is when I first felt a crucial *lack* to which I needed to assign names. Such intimate moments with Zoey doubled and redoubled through our time together, so even today they do not supply a fictive point of origin or promise a fully formed arrival; they are moving spaces in my memory for the continued staging of a self that is more improvised than planned, more gestural than understood. This is why I still see a distinct, handmade connection between my love of Zoey and my self-determination as a trans woman; this is why I still experience my identity as process rather than progress.²³ I am reminded of how people sometimes add an asterisk to the word “trans” to make it “trans*.”²⁴ One can read the asterisk as a kind of visual symbol for an ongoing process, suggested by its limbs going out and reconverging, even spinning around the axis of the relational “self,” while supplying the raw sensory data for other, possible embodiments to emerge.

I will also say that being transgender has revealed so much to me about how our flesh is shaped into workable forms and how thoroughly enmeshed we are in relation to others: humans, animals, and objects. And these examples, together with the previous discussion of the handmade, further draw out the erotic dimension of the pet relationship. The erotic, following Laura Marks’s description, is a matter of opening and closing the distance between self and other. Marks writes, “What is erotic is being able to become an object with and for the world, and to return to being a subject in the world; to be able to trust someone or something to take you through this process; and to be trusted to do the same for others.”²⁵ This oscillation, I would argue, is at the heart of the pet relationship, where we are not only *seen seen* but also *touched touched*. We guide each other through such amorphous states of becoming while remaining somewhat opaque to each other. We never fully subsume each other but we always return each other to each other. Humans and dogs *need* this experience, and the process of domestication—yet another handmade, collaborative activity—has meant that we often rely on each other for it.²⁶

Many animal advocates have offered “companion animal” as a replacement for the word “pet” because this latter term smacks of oedipalized control or the uneasy dialectic between dominance and affection. This is understandable because wherever there is vulnerability, there is a thin line between affection and exploitation. Nevertheless, I worry that by replacing “pet” with other, putatively equalizing terms we mute the queer potential of touch embedded in the word “pet,” by which I mean the binary-blurring affectivity of being *touched touched* by another animal. I do not blanche at the word “pet,” so long as we remember its alternate usage as a verb, and therefore its transitivity, rather than its compression into an inert noun—so long as we remember that we are here to be pet too.

This is not to trivialize the real violence people do to their pets or to minimize the ethical ambiguities of keeping pets in the first place. In that sense, when activists and scholars introduce new terms like “companion animal,” they are trying to get us to rethink the way we relate to nonhuman animals by drawing attention to the ways our behavior affects their quality of life, often for the worse. Jessica Pierce explores these issues in the book *Run, Spot, Run: The Ethics of Keeping Pets* and concludes that there is not really a satisfying answer to the question of whether humans can do right by their pets.²⁷ Economic conditions frame animal lives, even the most sentimentalized among them, as disposable human property. Mostly, we acquire them; we are not often acquired *by* them. And in addition to outright abuse, neglect, and exploitation, there are subtler human behavioral patterns that affect animals’ quality of life. For example, pets can become emotionally and physically unhealthy from being subjected to extended periods of captivity, a lack of attention, or unbalanced diets.

Becoming erotically attuned to pets and making ourselves available for them to enact their desire for company and embodied affection means experiencing not only joy but also quite a lot of guilt for how often we fall short or fail to provide the care they need—for how often we end up hurting them in trying to help them. In *Afterglow (A Dog Memoir)*, the poet Eileen Myles narrativizes this guilt in the form of a letter from someone claiming to be their dog’s lawyer. The lawyer represents Myles’s dog, Rosie, in the event that Rosie should wish to “press charges against her owner for a variety of abuses and crimes against dog kind.”²⁸ After reading the letter, Myles asks whether their “entire relationship [could] be framed as blame.”²⁹

I never received a letter from Zoey’s lawyer; I do not know if she ever thought of seeking legal counsel against me. But I have asked versions of Myles’s question. I think about having to restrain Zoey when we wanted to clip her nails. The nail clipper looked and operated like an obscure torture device: you fit the dog’s nail in through a steel loop and, holding it at an angle, squeezed the handle to make the sharp blade slice through her thick black nails. The internal spring made an ugly, mechanical sound every time you clipped a nail. Zoey had sixteen (or eighteen, if you count her dewclaws). She was a small but solid muscular dog thrashing against her tormentors. When we let her go, she would run to the other side of the room and regard us with a wounded, accusatory look, ready for anything.

That clipper now rusts in a musty kitchen drawer with her old red harness. We should have bought a different clipper. Even though we rarely cut her to the quick, by using these clippers we still caused her real pain and distress. But the question I have never been able to resolve, is this: When we are sources of pain and distress to our pets, does it always mean we have wronged

them? Zoey's nails needed to be trimmed because she lived in captivity; and she was *bred* to live in captivity. For her, to live was to be subject to potentially harmful practices that made her life possible at all.

I include this example of clipping Zoey's nails to illustrate how intimate relationships with pets are often the source of lingering guilt and ambivalence. These feelings of guilt and ambivalence are crucial for understanding how our relationships extend past bodily death, a thread I will return to in the following section. And it is in this sense that pet relationships can be just as complex and layered as interhuman relationships. Relationships, Constance Furey writes, include the whole spectrum of feeling: "not only love but also hate, not only growth but also loss, and not only nurturance but also violence."³⁰ Because relationships include all of this and more, they are important sites for the (re)negotiation of norms and the construction of identity as a handmade, relational thing. Crafting intimacy "reiterates convention" even as it serves as "the space for imagining or enacting alternatives."³¹ Because the erotic encompasses both depth and surface in turn, it is an essential source of self-understanding; it is a space where we can begin to come to terms with the self in all its relational complexity and lack.

And as the work of crafting an identity for myself has extended beyond Zoey's bodily death, the felt matter that passed between us continues to fold and refold into new shapes. I feel her paw pad pressing on my chest even now, between the new, growing tissue of my breasts—better acquired late than never, I suppose. In this way, my future is handed to me. In this way, I have tried to give her a future.

THE RESIDUE OF ANIMAL DEATH: ATTENDING TO THE REMAINS

As Zoey aged, her vision and hearing dimmed. Retreating into the circle of the familiar, she became more dependent on us. Part of her must have resented this because she became increasingly stubborn in her old age. She became intolerant of even the slightest interruption to her routine. She contented herself with a world that seemed to shrink to accommodate her own humble proportions, until it consisted of little more than her bed, her favorite spot on the couch, the cool kitchen floor, the brown patch of grass where she relieved herself, and, on the rare occasion that she could be so roused, the sidewalk that encompassed our block.

Mostly she preferred to sleep. She turned away from the lights and slept without lidding her eyes, long since clouded with cataracts.

It, when "it" came, was an infection that age had emptied her body of the strength to fight.

On her last day, she had been sleeping fitfully when she woke with a start and shit there on the living room floor. She stood angled awkwardly toward the cedar chest, unnervingly remote, as I scrubbed the carpet.

She hardly responded to our touch. It was as if the last invisible fiber that had kept her tethered to the earth, to us, had been cut.

She was feverish and disoriented, stumbling around a house she failed to recognize. She could no longer recall all the paths around corners and furniture that she had committed to memory to compensate for her dimming vision.

I looked at her without really seeing *her*. Instead I saw all the time accumulated on her body: the grayed face, the fur brittle and thin around the neck and tail, the fatty lumps on her legs and her legs wobbling, the slow tentative movements of lessening bones, trying to find footing clear of the waves that turned under her, wanting to carry her out where plumes of ash collect like thickening godlessness. What is burning?

We knew from the way she failed to respond to our touch. We knew because her body, which normally tensed with stubborn assurance when we tried to correct her path around some obstacle, no longer offered the slightest resistance to our guiding hands. We knew, but we wished someone would tell us we were wrong.

She spent her final hours in such pain that bewildered her and ripped our faces apart. *It's time*, is what we probably said, though I do not remember anyone saying it.

Then we were holding her in a waiting room curiously full of life, the dogs and cats that got to go back home afterward.

We could do nothing for her but hold her as the veterinarian prepared the syringes. So we held her as she withdrew from our arms. Something sank, fell through the room and down into the body. Down there, the slackened body. Grief washes lashes.

Now we were hugging each other in a room suddenly emptied of the future tense, until we were done with the room. Grief watches, latches.

Cinders sent her.

But we did not take her ashes home. In the days and weeks following her death, I obsessed over them. I was disturbed by the thought that they were mixed in with all the other ashes of all the other dogs who were killed there. The proper handling of residue—the disposal of ashes—became a ritual problem. Her ashes were missing, yet the residue of her was inescapable.

I am using the word “residue” to get at the diffuse corporeality that recalls us to our dead: residue, from the Latin *residuum*, meaning “something remaining.” Residue is the substance of absence that sticks to you. I am talking about the tufts of hair embedded in her brush, the splinters and nubs of sticks she left in the crevices of our couch, the stains we couldn't scrub out—the

assorted, scattered material deposits of her life that followed us everywhere. I wanted to treat this leftover matter like something between evidence and relic. I was like the character in Lydia Davis's story "The Dog Hair" who keeps finding stray bits of fur after putting her dog to sleep and cannot bear to throw any of it away, nursing this impossible hope of "put[ting] the dog back together again."³² I, too, felt that strange sense of urgency, as if time was running out.

I am also talking about subtler pangs brought on by the sudden subtraction of elements, such as the viscous silence where her snores used to be or the floor that seemed like a black hole after her doggy bed was removed. Suspended in that unbearable exteriority yet unable to take part in it, my self was scattered among Zoey's sheddings yet also bottled up in this body that missed its essential connection to the world.

If residue glues presence irrevocably to absence, making each present in the other, we need to further interrogate the phenomenological problem posed by the materiality of immaterial (or perhaps more accurately *ex-material*) things like ashes. Another text by Derrida suggests a way to grapple with the question. In *Cinders*, a poetic, characteristically allusive piece, Derrida explores the relation of cinders and ashes to his concept of trace, or "something that erases itself totally, radically, while presenting itself."³³ The trace offers a glimpse of something burning beneath language—inaccessible but recalled in the furrows that wend their way through a text as words spark in the dark. Similarly, a cinder is a fragment of fire that quickly cools—it is brief—but "the innumerable lurks beneath the cinder" like "the fire lurking beneath the dust."³⁴ Derrida attends to and interrogates the materiality of the word "cinder," a word that insists he give an account of it. Derrida writes,

No doubt the fire has withdrawn, the conflagration has been subdued, but if cinder there is, it is because the fire remains in retreat. . . . Above the sacred place, incense again, but no monument, no Phoenix, no erection that stands—or falls—, the cinder without ascension, the cinders love me, they change sex, they re-cinder themselves, they andrognocide themselves.³⁵

Ashes haunt the author and intermingle to the point of obscuring their historical referents, which only draws more attention to them, to the way they are made to vanish. The text performs a haunting. The intermingling of ashes is suggested by this intermingling of words, the deliberate confusion of etymologies. The words cluster and fragment, turn over on themselves and recombust, and finally dissolve before our eyes.

If *Cinders* represents a struggle to deal properly with the materiality of ex-material things, it also suggests a way to "read" the problem of life and death through transness. Derrida's choice of imagery points to (ex-)matter

that specifically challenges the gentle fiction of a clearly delineated binary between life and death—matter that participates in multiple crossings this way and that. These crossings draw our attention to the disciplinary power by which life and death are clustered into “contingent structures of association with other attributes of bodily being and that allows for their reassembly”—a function that Susan Stryker, Paisley Currah, and Lisa Jean Moore associate with the trans* prefix.³⁶

Before, I wrote that the asterisk in “trans*” can be interpreted as a visual symbol for the handmade connections between bodies and identities that both cluster and disperse into new shapes and designs. But the asterisk might also appear like a cinder floating just after the “trans,” fire no longer but still able to combust into the next word, or dissolve. When approached in light of the earlier reading of the asterisk, it could hold open what Derrida elsewhere refers to as the “multiplicity of organizations and relations between living and dead” that have left their trace in the way we inhabit our flesh.³⁷ My own experience of transness is unavoidably entangled with the life and death of Zoey: her life dying, her death living in me. The life I have claimed for myself in and through her absent presence must continuously acknowledge the relational intimacy with her I still feel in my bones. For I am *of* the residue.

I mourn an animal, and that mourning surfaces me to the world. I love her, I forget her, I remember her. The heat of grief burns out and collapses like cinders cooling to ash and ash dissolving under my tongue. And it goes on. I receive them, and they hand me to myself. Ghosts, the ones who crowd my dreams and inject themselves under my skin. They move with me now. We become futures for each other. I am touched touched by them. They guide me through the metamorphosis. Everything I learned from their touch will go into what my touch teaches.

We might then ask, in closing, what kinds of handmade connections will allow us to become better hosts to the ghosts who haunt us? How can we, in our commitment to the material we are given, hold open these “organizations and relations between living and dead,” even multiply them, to create the conditions for new crossings, associations, and assemblies with animal ghosts?

It’s about time to get crafting again.

POSTSCRIPT

Years after Zoey’s death, I decided it was time to change my name to one that better matched my gender identity. After looking around for a while without feeling claimed by any of the names, I went to my mother for help. The name she originally gave me at birth, back when she thought I was going to be a

boy, *was* a beautiful name—for a boy—but I could never make it work for me. So I was hoping lightning would strike a second time. I asked her what she would have named me if I had not lost the chromosomal coinflip that condemned me to a girlhood straight out of an episode of *The Twilight Zone*. After a pause, she said, “Ashley.”

I laughed, “What, ashes *again*?” For I was then somewhere deep in the process of revising the text that grew into this chapter. Ashes were on my mind, so naturally they kept popping up where I least expected them. But even in my name?

I cannot say that writing this chapter has been therapeutic for me; rather, it seems that in the process of opening and reopening old wounds through multiple revisions, I kept discovering new wounds I needed to take care of. I miss Zoey more keenly than ever. But when I heard my name, I felt a certain unexpected gratitude for the life I was claiming. I knew Ashley was *my* name. And I could not imagine a better way of expressing the ambivalence I felt in claiming a life for myself after her death than by incorporating a small reminder into my name—another handmade connection, holding her to me.

This is for the part of Zoey that remains in me, and for the rest of her, whoever they may be by now. Thank you for my future.

NOTES

1. I should elaborate briefly on the textual history of “Hos-Pet-Ality: Handmade Selves and Transspeciated Femininity.” A few years ago, I took a graduate seminar on the long career of hospitality. Following the scriptural trail that leads from the flaps of Abraham’s tent to the knocker on Derrida’s door, my goal was to find out how hospitality, especially as it had been interpreted by twentieth-century philosophers, could inspire a rethinking of the human-animal relationship. The resultant term paper, though sloppy and cursory in its analysis, bearing all the shortcomings of an essay written in the compressed temporality of the quarter system, wrestled with what I took to be inherent shortcomings of the concept while trying simultaneously to reclaim it as a foundation for animal ethics. With each sentence, I felt myself being pulled to a place I was not (then) willing to go. Unresolved grief over the death of my dog, Zoey, cracked each page from top to bottom; her presence peered from the white space between words and pricked each letter until every time I typed the word “hospitality,” I inadvertently read the first two syllables as *house pet*. Nevertheless, to make the paper cohere as passable philosophy, I felt (wrongly) that I had to avoid any reference to Zoey or to my transfemininity. In a way, I was scrupulously writing myself out of my own story and, by extension, the very significance of my argument.

And then, somewhat like the ruminant who sends up a clump of cud to be chewed over again—or, less charitably, like the dog who returns to her vomit—I revisited and dramatically revised my essay into a sort of hybrid academic presentation/perfor-

mance piece, which I delivered at the American Academy of Religion Conference, Midwest Region, on April 2, 2016. In that version, I began to think about grief and the countless other named and unnamable feelings that flood me when I think of Zoey now. I began to think about my transgender subjectivity and Zoey's haunting presence and about the tissue through which I came to feel them both and which fuses them both—Zoey, my transness—through many metamorphoses. My performance sparked a conversation with Brianne Donaldson, also presenting on that panel, which eventually led to the opportunity to further refine my thinking about all these issues by turning the text of my performance into a chapter for this book. This version is not a perfect argument, but rather like a handmade object it bears the shortcomings of the crafter and the available materials she has to work with. I hope the dropped stitches and other mistakes that remain in the final manuscript do not cause especial consternation for the reader.

2. Jacques Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 13.

3. In a recent talk on the role of touch in American chattel slavery and its afterlives, Hortense Spillers offered the term “manhandled” to excavate the gendered and racialized dimensions of violence, in which “touch” is experienced as a violation of the boundaries of the self for people who are not afforded “subject status.” Hortense Spillers, “To the Bone: Some Speculations on the Problem of Touch” (lecture, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, November 15, 2018).

4. Jeanne Vaccaro, “Handmade,” *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, nos. 1–2 (2014): 97.

5. Eva Hayward, “More Lessons from a Starfish: Prefixial Flesh and Transspeciated Selves,” *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 36, nos. 3–4 (2008): 67.

6. Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, 15–18.

7. If visibility is the most privileged of the senses today, that is not to say that other senses are unimportant to the political project of modernity—consider, for instance, the biopolitical management of noxious smells, which caused slaughterhouses to detach gradually from urban centers over the course of the twentieth century. But the other senses tend to be correlated and sublimated under visual rubrics. Out of sight—out of mind. Do you see where I'm going with this?

8. Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 6–18.

9. See especially Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (New York: Continuum, 1990).

10. Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, 12.

11. Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, 13.

12. Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, 14.

13. Matthew Calarco, *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 125–26.

14. Calarco, *Zoographies*, 126.

15. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 112.

16. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 73. There are, of course, moments when Levinas's principled anthropocentrism breaks down. Calarco discusses the story of Bobby, a stray dog who regularly visited Levinas when he was being held in a German prison camp during World War II. Levinas called Bobby the "last Kantian in Nazi Germany"—which is to say, the last being who observed the categorical imperative to treat people as ends in themselves, though Bobby lacked the cognitive ability to "universalize maxims" (quoted *Zoographies*, 57–58). Calarco further suggests that Levinas might have had Bobby in mind when he admitted, in a late interview, that a dog has a face—albeit, a qualified face, without the metaphysical depth and subtlety of a human face (*Zoographies*, 68). For the original citation, see Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Seán Hand (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 152–53.

17. Calarco, *Zoographies*, 69–77.

18. Besides, when I think about Zoey now, I must rely on photos to remember her face. When I turn the picture over, her face is gone—I cannot recall it until I look at the picture again, but I see the fuzzy suggestion of a face that is constantly melting into other, half-remembered faces.

19. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 256–66.

20. Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing, 1984), 56; emphasis added.

21. Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 205; emphasis added.

22. Vaccaro, "Handmade," 97.

23. On transness and/as the psychological and relational "staging" of the self, see C. Riley Snorton, "'A New Hope': The Psychic Life of Passing," *Hypatia* 24, no. 3 (2009): 77–92.

24. See, for example, Jack Halberstam, *Trans*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018). Halberstam writes, "I have selected the term 'trans*' for this book precisely to open the term up to unfolding categories of being organized around but not confined to forms of gender variance. . . . [T]he asterisk modifies the meaning of transitivity by refusing to situate transition in relation to a destination, a final form, a specific shape, or an established configuration of desire and identity" and "makes trans* people the authors of their own categorizations" (*Trans**, 4).

25. Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), xvi.

26. This is similar to what Cristina Traina means by the term "erotic attunement," or touching that responds to the needs of the other and promotes her flourishing, which is crucial to maintaining ethical relationships between unequals and to human (and doggy) development more generally. See Cristina Traina, *Erotic Attunement: Parenthood and the Ethics of Sensuality between Unequals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

27. Jessica Pierce, *Run, Spot, Run: The Ethics of Keeping Pets* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

28. Eileen Myles, *Afterglow (A Dog Memoir)* (New York: Grove Press, 2017), 2–3.
29. Myles, *Afterglow*, 3.
30. Contance M. Furey, “Body, Society, and Subjectivity in Religious Studies,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80, no. 1 (2012): 25.
31. Furey, “Body, Society, and Subjectivity in Religious Studies,” 22.
32. Lydia Davis, “The Dog Hair,” in *Can’t and Won’t* (New York: Picador, 2014), 4.
33. Quoted in Ned Lukacher, introduction to Jacques Derrida, *Cinders*, ed. and trans. Ned Lukacher (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 1.
34. Derrida, *Cinders*, 59.
35. Derrida, *Cinders*, 61. Because the wordplay in this passage is not fully translatable, I will include the original French, included in the translated edition on the opposite page: “Sans doute le feu s’est-il retiré, l’incendie maîtrisé, mais s’il y a là cendre, c’est que du feu reste en retrait. . . . Au-dessus du lieu sacré, l’encens encore, mais aucun monument, aucun Phénix, aucune érection qui tienne—ou tombe—, la cendre sans ascension, des cendres m’aiment, elles changent de sexe alors, elles s’andrent, elles s’androgynocident” (*Cinders*, 60).
36. Susan Stryker, Paisley Currah, and Lisa Jean Moore, “Trans-, Trans, or Transgender?” *WSQ: Women’s Studies Quarterly* 36, nos. 3–4 (2008): 13.
37. Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, 31.

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