

Kinship with Piglets – Interspecies Intra-actions and Corporeal Yearnings

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Abstract

Our own animately e/motional bodies are yearning for relationships with other bodies of the more-than-human kind. To support this opinion, I describe an intra-action caring for three piglets that led to an awareness of human and animal relationships. The following questions are addressed: 1) What is involved corporeally, e/motionally, and sensorily in interspecies intra-actions? 2) What are the affects and telling effects of these intra-actions? I describe how my intra-action with the piglets manifested an awareness of the liveliness of other animals, and an understanding of interspecies kinship. To further understand interspecies kinship, I explore the role of the body, and the e/motional and sensory affordances of the intra-actions involving me and the piglets. The concepts of corporeality, inter-corporeality, and trans-corporeality are considered. In the second part of the paper, I describe tensions of human exceptionalism that were revealed in caring for the piglets.

Keywords: Interspecies, corporeality, intercorporeality, human - animal, kinship

Introduction

This paper is concerned with experiences and intra-actions between different yet in many ways alike bodies. Our own animately e/motional bodies are not only capable of but yearning for relationships with other bodies of a human and more-than-human kind. In the sections that follow, I describe a particular intra-action¹; caring for three piglets that ultimately led to a visceral awareness, a liveliness of human and animal² relationships, and the capability we have of feeling compassion for others of a more-than-human kind. The description I offer is intended to re-enchant our bodily senses with animals, and the wider the more-than-human world. It is a phenomenological description that focuses on our affinities, resonances, and sensory attunements to other living, breathing bodies.

¹ The term “intra-action” was coined by Karen Barad (2007). Intra-action is used in place of “interaction,” and suggests that action is not exclusive to a subject, instead, occurs as an intra-action between subjects (Barad, 2007, p. 41). Donna Haraway (2016) used the term to acknowledge the exchange and vitality of interspecies encounters.

² For the purpose of this paper, the use of “animal” refers to all nonhuman animals.

This interspecies, intra-actional and essentially corporeal yearning is the tactile-affective ground for understanding how to live well in a relational, and vitally interanimated³ world. In support of this claim I address two key questions: 1) What is involved corporeally, e/motionally, and sensorily in interspecies intra-actions? 2) What are the effects and telling effects of these intra-actions? Answering these questions will go some way toward establishing the ethical meanings to be gleaned from interspecies intra-actions with respect to how animals should be treated. I begin this paper with a personal anecdote of caring for three piglets. I describe how my intra-action with the piglets provided me with a touch and feel for interspecies kinship. In an attempt to further understand the very nature of this interspecies kinship, I tease out the role of the body, and the e/motional and sensory affordances of the intra-actions involving me and the piglets. The concepts of corporeality, intercorporeality, and trans-corporeality are used to highlight the bodily registers of kinship with these critters. In the second part of the paper, I describe tensions of human exceptionalism that were revealed in caring for the piglets, and ultimately, their affects and telling effects for interspecies relationships.

Direct contact, and viscerally felt intra-actions with the more-than-human world constitute primary kinship (Taylor, 2021). It is the animate, inter-animated, e/motional, and sensorial body which is our most basic way of being in the world. Our corporeal yearnings arise in the presence of others who evoke in us this capacity for interspecies kinship. Kinship lies within the body (Van Horn et al., 2021), and it is through intra-actions with other beings like three piglets that we glean interspecies kinship and our own animality.

Upon completing my first year of university, at eighteen years old, I returned to work in my hometown for the summer months. I found myself back in the farming community, pickup truck plagued, and everybody-knows-everybody kind of place that I had spent most of my life wishing away. A few months prior to my return, my mother had sent me an “in need of hired help” posting from the local advertisements— someone to complete farm work and operate a general store. I got in touch with the employer, a local farmer, entrepreneur, and no stranger to the community; the kind of person who always seemed to have one foot in the door of everything happening in the area. Either there were no other applicants, or I said something she liked, but I was hired on the spot.

The general store accompanied the church, library, and post office that gave the township its name. It was a quiet area with not much happening, and roughly twenty minutes from town. Down the road from the store was the farm though not a “working farm,” but rather a “hobby farm.” There was a barn for the horses, alpacas, and single cow, and surrounding the barn were smaller pens and sheds for the pig, goats, and chickens. On the land was also a farmhouse that served as a rental for city folks visiting the area in the summer months. The animals were part of the “country experience” marketed to the guests. I came to understand that the animals were not there because my employer had an affinity for them, but because they were a selling feature of the country experience.

³ The term “inter-animated” can be understood as influencing or animating one another, such as human-human, human-more-than-human, and human-animal and nonhuman-animal bodies.

A typical workday for me would begin at the farm; feeding the animals, cleaning the stalls, and collecting the eggs before making my way to open the store. A few weeks into my job, as I was completing the morning feed, I noticed that only three of the piglets that were born the day prior, were remaining in the pen. While staring in the pig pen, I contacted the farmer who casually explained that the blind sow had eaten her piglets, and seemingly expressed no interest in saving the remaining three piglets. Horrified, I hung up the phone and stood frozen for a second while I contemplated my next move, knowing however that I couldn't let the piglets die. So, I ran to the barn, and found an old blue Rubbermaid tub, and towel. Then I climbed into the pen, and removed the piglets; one black, and two pink. My hands were shaking, and I felt anxious given that I had not the slightest idea of what I was doing. They were smaller than the palm of my hand, and their eyes were not yet open. I finished the remainder of the chores at a faster than usual pace and proceeded to drive to my Gran's house. If I went home, I would have had to face my generational-farmer-hunting-enthusiast-father, who blatantly, I came to understand, thought I had lost my mind for attempting to save the piglets.

The piglets spent the first week or so under a heat lamp, and I prepared myself for them not to survive. I taught myself how to make piglet formula, a combination of cod liver oil, whole milk, egg yolk, and a dash of corn syrup. I was waking up roughly every three hours in the night to feed them, and was always relieved to find them still alive, nestled under the heat lamp. Despite their unusual, and rough introduction to the world, they were flourishing, and gaining strength each day. It wasn't long before the piglets were lively, and keen to explore. I got a sense of their individual personality. Louie was dominant, often pushing his sisters away to be in my focus, and the loudest of the three. Lila was a bit of a loner, quieter than the others, but the most affectionate. Lastly, Lacey was a wanderer, adventurous, and bonded to Louie. The piglets played with one another, and as siblings do, had their quarrels.

Once the piglets were strong enough, I brought them to work on the farm with me. The piglets would trail behind me as I completed chores, but always made sure to stop and visit the other critters. After work, the piglets and I spent time at the lakefront, and wandered through the fields behind my home. The piglets waded in the shallows of the lake, and galloped through the fields, kicking their legs up and to either side, their squeals growing louder than usual. Wherever I went, they went. When they squealed, I responded accordingly and vice versa. I felt an indiscernible bond, a profound connection with the piglets, and one that was unlike any other relation I had with animals.

Three piglets – Louie, Lacey, and Lila, to be exact – fostered my understanding of kinship and how the body is incorporated in interspecies intra-actions.

Interspecies Kinship

Caring for the piglets evoked what seems like an innate and timeless relationship between species. This relationship better understood as “kinship” not only exists between humans, but also with all more-than-human beings. In the book *Thinking Plant Animal Human*, Wood (2020)

eloquently illustrates kinship in stating: “We humans live together with other seemingly “distinct” creatures (fleas, cockroaches, pets, children, lovers, neighbours, colleagues [etc.]) [and] we may expect these communities to fan out in complex layering and overlapping ways” (p. 50). Kinship extends beyond human beings to include communities of feathered, hooved, short-haired, fleshy, and scaly types of beings. It is important to note that the differences that distinguish one species from another do not impede kinship. From the microbes in the soil, orcas in the ocean, our beloved companion animals, plants, and even planets, kinship means belonging to a *relational* world of different and distinct species whilst maintaining affinity with them. To be kin is to acknowledge distinction across communities yet see differences not as barriers but as opportunities to appreciate uniqueness within a vitally animated world. Kinship involves recognizing our belonging to a community of different yet in so many ways alike *others*.

Certain experiences or moments draw our particular attention to other beings and allow for a sense of kinship to flourish. Intra-acting e/motionally with the piglets involved existing relationally in the same world. To illustrate, it wasn’t long before the piglets gained enough strength to venture outside. I placed each one on the grass and sat beside them. At this moment, I was witnessing the piglets experience the outdoors for the first time. I observed their curiosity for the feeling of grass, their alertness to the sounds of the more-than-human world, and their joy in pressing their noses down into the Earth. While the piglets were having their own sensory experience, I was also taking in moments like this where I came to understand myself not as external to the piglets’ world but existing in much the same sensorial world. Although the piglets had their subjective experience that I can never fully comprehend, we also shared an intersubjective worldliness. I was part of their subjective experience, like they were of mine. Their squeals, sporadic movements, and nudges against my feet were moments of bodily dialogue between us. When I moved, the piglets followed. It was moments like these with the piglets that caused my mindset to shift. My prior assumption of pigs as an entirely separate species, as “its,” a product of agriculture, dissipated. I no longer saw our physical differences as barriers to our interactions and reciprocation. The piglets evoked for me a manner of becoming more-than-human that in my adulthood I had not encountered. Intra-acting with the piglets not only manifested an understanding of kinship but tapped into the ability of my body to *relate*, and my heart to *feel* with the more-than-human world.

In engaging with the piglets, kinship maintains that all beings of the world are fundamentally *related*, and being in *relation*, all beings of the world are inherently *relating* to one another within the more-than-human world. I experienced relating with the piglets as the motional movements of our bodies — squeals, oinks, words of human tongue, touching and being touched. Van Horn, Wall Kimmerer, and Hausdoerffer (2021) present “kinship-in-practice” as a verb, namely as “kinship-in-action” or “kinning” (p. 3). The authors write, “We are kinning as we re-connect our bodies, minds, and spirits within a world that is not merely a collection of objects but a communion of subjects” (Thomas Berry, 2006, p. 149 as cited in Van Horn et al., 2021). Directly interacting with the piglets, learning who they are, caring for them, kinetically engaging with their bodies, hearing their voices, feeling them, all brought my awareness to these other beings. As Taylor (2021) points out: “Direct, visceral, sensory experiences in nature—including experiences of awe and wonder at the beauties, mysteries, and sometimes terrors of nature, especially through personal encounters with nonhuman organisms—are common pathways to kinship sentiments and ethics” (p. 31). Such experiences, where bodies are intra-

acting and engaged in an embodied dialogue, are, I add, fundamental, and the very foundation of kinship.

This sense of kinship feels an inherent connection with the Earth within the body. We are inherently bound within the more-than-human world by being material bodies, but to recognize our belonging with many others is to actively engage our bodies kinetically-kinaesthetically and affectively (Sheets-Johnstone, 2000), “kinning,” (Van Horn et al., 2021) to make kin within the animate terrain. Donna Haraway (2016) articulates “making kin” in the “Cthulucene,” an epoch where humans and animals are inextricably bound (p. 102). The Cthulucene and kinship are described in the following way, “My Cthulucene...entangles myriad temporalities and spacialities and myriad intra-active entities in assemblages—including the more-than-human, other-than-human, inhuman, and human-as-humus” (Haraway, 2016, p. 101). Making kin necessitates “staying with the trouble” that, according to Haraway (2016), “requires learning to be truly present, not as vanishing pivot between awful or Edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as moral critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meaning” (p. 1). Accordingly, “kinning” as a practice, making kin, or becoming kin, is to be present, actively feeling one’s body in an inextricably linked world (Van Horn et al., 2021; Haraway, 2016). Indeed, the manifestation of kinship in caring for the piglets required acknowledging this connection, and consequently my capacity to *relate* with *others*. I was discovering the *other* when engaging with the piglets by discovering my bodily ability of intra-acting e/motionally with them.

Corporeal, E/Motional, and Sensorial Bodies

The body is the condition for existence; as a corporeal entity, the body is more than simply physical matter. For Acampora (2006), in discussing our being, and in relation with *others* begins at simply being a body, he writes, “Where we begin, quite on the contrary, is already caught up in the experience of being a live body thoroughly involved in a plethora of ecological and social interrelationships with other living bodies and people” (p. 5). My relation with the piglet begins with my being a body, and the ways in which my body is tuned for relationship. Like Acampora (2006), in his book *The Spell of the Sensuous*, David Abram (1996) invites us to consider the importance of the body by playing with the absence of body:

Without this body, without this tongue or these ears, you could neither speak nor hear another’s voice. Nor could you have anything to speak about, or even to reflect on, or to think, since without any contact, any encounter, without any glimmer of sensory experience, there could be nothing to question or to know. The living body is thus the very possibility of contact, not just with others but with oneself—the very possibility of reflection, of thought, of knowledge (p. 37).

Acampora (2006) and Abram’s (1996) description gives us a Merleau-Pontyeian notion of the body as a mode of tactile being within the world. There is contact not just with oneself, but other beings within the world. Like this idea presented by Abram (1996), in the article, *Responding Bodies and Partial Affinities in Human-Animal Worlds*, Despret (2013) affirms the importance of body as fundamental to reciprocity. In my case, the piglets responding to me, I responding to them, a back-and-forth nurturance, embodied dialogue of sorts. Despret (2013) writes, “Having a

'body' discloses and renders perceptible the very existence of [this] reciprocity: moreover, it is the actual condition of its existence" (p. 53). The body is the condition of reciprocity, and reciprocity with other beings is a condition of body. What these articulations of the body teach us is that connection with "others" is constitutive of what we call embodiment. Interspecies kinship is a connection felt through and between bodies. So, returning to the body is the first step in renegotiating relationships with the more-than-human world. This return is not simply to a prepossessed body but to a corporeality that is inherently open, tangled, and fulfilled in receiving nourishment from others. Abram (2010) illuminates this bodily awareness in his description of the body as active and tuned for reciprocity with others: "[body] not a closed or static object, but an open, unfinished entity utterly entwined with the soils, waters, and winds that move through it—a wild creature whose life is contingent up" (p. 110). My body entwined with those of the piglets, and the wider more-than-human world.

The corporeal self does not exist as closed upon itself as what was once previously thought in a Cartesian way; instead, the body is enmeshed with the more-than-human world in both complex and dynamic ways. Acampora (2006) affirms an alike conception of body; "It is fact that we have or, rather, are animate bodies—bodies that are experienced and come to be known through interaction with other animate bodies" (p. 5). My body as entangled with the piglets, came to be known through intra-acting, and our ability to inter-affect and inter-animate one another. A bodily response was evoked in experiencing the struggle encountered by the piglets that ultimately led to a bodily kinetic compassion and empathy for *others*.

Tending to this notion of corporeality, and intra-action between bodies, I now turn to the work of 20th century phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty who identified the experiencing self with the corporeal body. He wrote: "I am not in front of my body, I am in my body, or rather I am my body" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 151). The "living body" or "body-subject" becomes the very foundation for knowing the world. All encounters of the world are experiential and felt through the body (Merleau-Ponty, 1945). In addition to the living body, the act of perception is considered foundational to encountering the world. Perception is distinct from intellect and is the background in which all acts are grounded in. Engaging with piglets becomes an embodied intra-action, affective response, opposed to a historically intellectual exercise. My ability to perceive the actions of the piglets and vice versa their ability to perceive mine results in a feedback loop of interaction between us. The meaning that is constituted as a result of these perceptual encounters is central to Merleau-Ponty's philosophy.

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty (2014) introduced the term "intercorporeality" also known as the "intercorporeal self" and "carnal intersubjectivity." Intercorporeality describes the reciprocity between one's carnal body and that of another. In other words, there is an embodied relationship or intersubjectivity between self and world that is possible through perceiving and reciprocating the actions of another. This is how the piglets, and I were influenced, moved, and animated by one another, co-creating, and constituting meaning within the world. Merleau-Ponty (1964) describes intercorporeality, and perception in the following passage:

Perceiving the other, my body and his are coupled, resulting in a sort of action which pairs them. This conduct which I am able only to see, I live somehow from a distance. I

make it mine; I recover it or comprehend it. Reciprocally I know that the gestures I make myself can be the objects of another's intention. It is the transfer of my intentions to the other's body and of his intentions to my own, my alienation of the other and his alienation of me, that makes possible the perception of others (p. 118).

The perceived and perceiver are distinct but engaged in reciprocal dialogue. The perceived is not considered inanimate or an object, but a living body that is able to intra-act with other living bodies. Intercorporeality expresses how my body and those of the piglets relate to each other as capable of animating one another. Responding to the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, Abram (1996) articulates intersubjectivity and intercorporeality in the following manner: "The mutual inscription of others in my experience, and (as I must assume) of myself in their experiences, effects the interweaving of our individual phenomenal fields into a single, ever-shifting fabric, a single phenomenal world or 'reality'" (p. 32). While I was perceiving the piglets, they were also perceiving me in, likely, a quite different way. Nevertheless, in this perceptual exchange our living bodies produced a particular reality that as Abram (1996) stated is "ever-shifting" (p. 32).

Taking Merleau-Ponty's "intercorporeality" one step further is the idea of "trans-corporeality" (Alaimo, 2010). If intercorporeality suggests a connection between bodies, then trans-corporeality affirms human, and the more-than-human as inextricably intertwined. I am ultimately inseparable from the more-than-human which includes the piglets. In the book, *Bodily Nature*, Stacy Alaimo (2010) defines trans-corporeality as "Imagining human corporeality as trans-corporeality in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world, underlines the extent to which the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from 'the environment'" (p. 2). Human corporeality reconceptualized as trans-corporeality has human beingness inseparable from the more-than-human world (Alaimo, 2010). Taking up trans-corporeality is a further attempt to break down dichotomies between human/nature (Alaimo, 2010) or in my case, human/pig.

Tuning to the senses is critical in this discussion of intercorporeality. The senses have been considered a mediator, or the glue that binds self to the more-than-human world (Abram in a podcast with Sharon Blackie, 2019). Abram (1996) shares that "Humans are tuned for relationship. The eyes, the skin, the tongue, ears, and nostrils—all are gates where our body receives the nourishment of otherness" (p. 9). For example, when I engage with animate others, like watching the piglets walk single file behind me, listening to their squeals of joy as they gobble up potato peels, or feeling the nudge of their cold snout on my skin, our senses are "synapsed" (Abram in a podcast with Sharon Blackie, 2019) with one another. Abram (2010) thus invites us to consider not just *being* a sensorial body that exists in the world, but rather *becoming human animal*. And to become human animal is to discover how the animal senses relate and reciprocate within the animate world (Abram, 2010).

Owning up to being animal, a creature of earth. Tuning our animal senses to the sensible terrain; blending our skin with the rain-rippled surface of rivers, mingling our ears with the thunder and the thrumming of frogs, and our eyes with the molten sky. Feeling the polyrhythmic pulse of this place—this huge windswept body of water and stone. This vexed being in whose flesh we're entangled." (Abram, 1996, p. 3)

Although all senses are critical to becoming human animal for Abram (1996), tactility was most significant in my memory of caring for the piglets. The feeling of touching the piglets elicited a felt affirmation of connection. A feeling that radiated from the contact of my fingers upwards through my being, eliciting an affective felt kinship. A kinship that exists between and within the tangible flesh. Abram (2010) made an important distinction when he emphasized that it is not just “I” am touching the more-than-human, in my case, the piglets, but they are also touching back. Kearney (2015) remarks on “touch” in reference to carnal hermeneutics; “Touch...is forever mediating and messaging between inside and outside, self, and other, human and more-than-human. Tangible flesh is constantly a medium of transition and transmission. It is always on” (p. 103). In this sense, touch is the medium involving me and the piglets. Merleau-Ponty provides context to touch within intra-action:

Now why would this generality, which constitutes the unity of my body, not open it to other bodies? The handshake too is reversible; I can feel myself touched as well and at the same time as touching, and surely there does not exist some huge animal whose organs our bodies would be, as, for each of our bodies, our hands, our eyes are the organs. Why would not the synergy exist among different organisms, if it is possible within each? Their landscapes interweave, their actions and their passions fit together exactly: this is possible as soon as we no longer make belongingness to one same “consciousness” the primordial definition of sensibility, and as soon as we rather understand it as the return of the visible upon itself, a carnal adherence of the sentient to the sensed and of the sensed to the sentient. (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 142)

Recognizing the potential of touch to animate one another, how we reciprocate, relate to human and *others* through our bodies reveals the very manner of cultivating kinship, and an inter-animated world.

Human Exceptionalism

In this next section, I will describe and critique the tensions of human exceptionalism that were revealed in caring for the piglets and consequently their affects and telling effects.

September was approaching which meant that I would soon be heading back to the city for school. I was faced with the question of what to do with the piglets knowing that I sadly could not keep them. Thankfully, my childhood friend adopted Lila to live on her hobby farm, and so I was just left to find homes for Louie and Lacey. If I were to give them back to the farmer, she was going to trade them at the auction barn—an unknown and troublesome fate. With September looming I reluctantly decided to look online to find the piglets a home. It did not take long to receive interest, and the following day a couple pulled up in a dodge caravan, collected the piglets, and that was it. The couple had a hobby farm, and it sounded like a good fit. Having nurtured the piglets from their first days on Earth to four months old, saying goodbye was unimaginably difficult. However, soon after the piglets left for their new home, I was approached by someone in the community who told me that their new family had lied about their intentions. They did not have a farm, and the pigs were bought as indoor pets for their children. According to an online ad that I found, the new owners’ dogs attacked one of the piglets, therefore they

could not keep them anymore for fear of a repeated incident. They sold them to someone else online. I was further informed that the new owners were involved in extensive criminal activity, people that I would not want to mess with. After some online investigation on my part, and coming across accessible public information, I knew the location of the pigs and made the hour trek to the neighbouring city to retrieve the pigs.

I was fearful of the unknown, and the potential of what could unfold given the history of the people who now had the pigs. But the fact that my kin, the piglets, were in trouble, was enough to suppress the fear. I knocked on the door of the house, and exactly who I had expected to answer the door was now in front of me. I explained who I was, and I politely asked to see the piglets; I could hear their squeal to the right of me. The individual brought me to the bedroom where two people were sitting with them on a bed. The piglets burst into a symphony of squeals when they saw me. One of them had visible wounds on its head from the dog attack. The new owners said he had purchased them thinking they were “designer miniature pigs,” and that they were planning to raise them in a semi-detached inner-city home. What happened next is a bit of a blur. Recollecting on this memory I feel tense throughout my body, and a heaviness in my chest. What I said in that moment would determine the fate of the piglets, however, in my heart I knew that I would do whatever it took to get them out of that situation. I pleaded my case, and I didn’t give the new owners a chance of interjecting when I handed them a fifty-dollar bill and made a swift escape out the door with the piglets in hand. The drive home with the piglets was surreal. I was emotional, previously for having to give them up, but also for what I perceived as their felt terror and stress in the events of the last week. In the days that followed, I was threatened online that the previous owners were going to come after me—that I started conflict with people with whom I didn’t want to mess. The piglets were safe, and that is all that mattered.

I was cutting it close to the start of the semester, and my dad, who did not want the piglets living at our home to begin with, was not thrilled when I showed up with them for a second time. My mother and aunt offered their support to try and find a home for them. It was my aunt that asked a nurse at the local hospital who had a hobby farm with her partner if they would be interested in providing a home for the piglets. Not long after they came over to meet the piglets, and I knew it was a perfect fit. And after visiting their farm, I was further certain that it was the right place for them to spend the rest of their lives. This experience was almost ten years ago. To this day, I continue to visit the pigs at their new home, and I am always greeted with squeals and nudges on my leg. The piglets were my revelation of kinship, and of my existence as one species among many, in a vitally interanimated world.

Eurocentric ways of thinking, saying, and doing are characteristically exceptionalist like the exploitation, and instrumental use of animals. Playing in the tensions within situations provides opportunity to unravel our assumptions towards animals. For the remainder of this paper, I am going to highlight tensions of human exceptionalism in my narrative, dwell in these tensions, provide some literature context, and indicate how we may take the example of the piglets to discern a way to realize our corporeal yearnings and ways of intra-acting with animals.

Human exceptionalism is the belief that humans are the superior species. In describing human exceptionalism, Wood (2020) writes,

Exceptionalism is not in fashion these days on any front. And human exceptionalism is no exception [...] [It] can blind us, both to the significance of nonhuman ways of being as well as to how some species may achieve by other means the very same competencies, we mistakenly take to be unique to us (p. xv).

Seventeenth century thinkers like René Descartes (1954) no doubt have had lasting impact on conceptions of the body, animality, and the relation between ourselves and the world. Cartesian dualisms of body/mind, subject/object, and rationalism/empiricism have been of significant influence. Abram (1996) furthers this claim in stating that “Descartes’s radical separation of the immaterial human mind from the wholly mechanical world of nature did much to fill this need [for human exceptionalism], providing a splendid rationalization for the vivisection experiments that soon began to proliferate, as well as for the steady plundering and despoilment of nonhuman nature in the New World and the other European colonies” (p. 54). The Cartesian mindset of human/nature and human/animal has led to a culture of domination where humans are thought of as the superior beings that have permission to utilize all inferior “others.” Evidence of this is in relationships, and the treatment of particular animals, especially in Western society.

Humans have different kinds of relationships with animals which are socially constructed, and culturally influenced. Some animals are considered for consumption, while others are strictly companions, many we admire their beauty from afar, and some we engage recreationally with through sport. What is distinctive about this relationship with piglets is that it poses a challenge to the traditional instrumental treatment of pigs, that is for human consumption, medical use, and as a by-product for cosmetics, clothing, and leather. This relationship with the piglets invigorates the possibility for companionship with an animal that is considered otherwise. Although some people do enjoy the companionship of pigs, the majority of pigs raised in Canada are for the purpose of satisfying human needs. As such, pigs are typically viewed for their instrumental potential, and in doing so, are perceived as less-than human, unintelligible, lacking agency, and not as individual beings in their own right. The narrative of the piglets draws attention to the effects of the human/animal dualism, and influence of exceptionalism in how humans know, and interact with pig in Western contexts. And it encourages that perhaps if we were to know and get a feel for pig that there might be an inclination to rethink their characteristically instrumental value as instead companions, and our fellow kin.

Instrumentalism views particular animals, or the more-than-human world as objectivized and depersonalized “others” that exist for the consumption or use of by a “subject” (Bai, 2003). In the context of this paper, the “subject” is human, and the “object” is animal, or more specifically, the piglets. This relationship between object and subject, Bai (2003) notes, “is marked by domination, subjugation, and expropriation. The subject is that which exercises its will and design upon the object which is merely the recipient. Put in value language terms, the subject has an intrinsic value, but the object has only an extrinsic, hence instrumental, value. The subject exists for itself, but the object exists only for the subject” (p. 2). The piglets were perceived to have instrumental value to the farmer because they provided entertainment to the visiting guests, and later materialized as desirable “miniature pigs.” When there was a break in guests visiting,

and the work of caring would be too onerous, the farmer no longer saw instrumental value in the piglets. Furthermore, when the people found out the piglets were not “miniature pigs” their interest diminished. The piglets were viewed as expendable objects — their only purpose being to provide entertainment, and human satisfaction. This instrumental relationship is exemplary of and can be extended to other human and animal associations like horse racing, entertainment, or animal agriculture of which are all instances where animals are seen for their instrumental potential, or as objects to be used.

Caring for the piglets nurtured a new understanding of pig. This entailed unlearning the instrumental narrative of pigs and other domesticated animals perpetuated in agriculture, and Western society. The piglets provoked a new kind of knowing pig as not valued for instrumental means, rather as animate individuals with their own personalities, and stories. It is when beings are seen as alive, and sentient that we think twice about violating their integrity (Bai, 2003). It was through seeing their liveliness that led to a disassociation of understanding that was shaped by the culture I live in for a knowing that was of felt means and apprehended through direct bodily intra-action with the piglets. Donna Haraway (2013) states “that respect, curiosity, and knowledge spring from animal-human associations, and work powerfully against ideas about human exceptionalism” (abstract). My witnessing of the piglets’ intelligence, sensitivity, and emotionality toward life made me observant to the portrayal of pigs in Western society. Feeling sensorially through our intra-actions, and what I perceive as excitement in time spent at the lakefront or hay field indicated by their sporadic movement, and change in pitch, the wagging of their tail after a meal, or when another being came into their focus affirmed their effects that impacted my mindset. Attending to this distinctive relationship with the piglets illustrates possibilities for interspecies relationships that are beyond traditional instrumentalism and go some way toward challenging siloed culturally influenced understandings of animals.

Pig was once considered a meal on holidays, a staple at breakfast, and known by their desensitized labels of pork, bacon, or ham. However, getting a feel for the liveliness of the piglets lead me to adopt a vegan lifestyle. That was further encouraged by the subsequent inability to decipher between the commonly regarded companion animals — dogs, and cats, that I shared my home with. And in ways too, the similarities between myself as human, and them as pigs were apparent. Consuming animal products shifted from habitual, to feeling as though I was eating my kin which Wood (2020) attributes to cannibalism or better yet, “kinnibalism.” Wood (2020) writes, “Cannibalism rightly understood.... chooses its victims from our most defenseless relatives, who have no voice, no constituency, and little protection. Did we perhaps so powerfully police the human/nonhuman line with culinary taboos only to disguise our true bestiality? Our willingness to breed and eat our cousins, and companions, our kin” (p. 110). Eating animals is to make them instruments, and is suggestive of dominance, and power that are central to the human-animal dualism (Adams, 1991, 2018). If we are to challenge human exceptionalism, and hierarchical relationships, Haraway (2015) urges “action to unravel the ties of both genealogy and kin, and kin and species” (para, 9). Building on this unraveling of genealogy and multi-species kinship (Haraway, 2015) these direct interspecies experiences can invoke a feeling of eating other animals as instances of “kinnablism” (Wood, 2020) as I experienced with the piglets.

There seems to be ambiguity in relationships with different kinds of animals, a hierarchy of companionship where certain animals are regarded as providing more camaraderie than others. Or even more kin. Some animals are appropriate to consume and not others. From a societal standpoint, it might be considered daring, or even unconventional to have relationships with certain animals. Given that pigs are mostly instrumentalized for consumption, they are often regarded as less of a companion than other animals. This distinct relationship with the piglets is exemplary of a kind of knowing pig that is unlike their socially considered purpose. We know animals in these particular societal contexts, and for certain means, but do we really know them at all? The foundation of these socially-constructed relationships are hierarchies, dualisms, anthropocentrism, and human exceptionalism. These constructs maintain species separation between humans and other animals. And contribute to a particular frame of knowing, and ways of relating to other animals. The western societal uses, and portrayal of pig, including the common species-specific characterizations of dirty, beastly, and unruly, that even translate to insults in the English language (e.g., calling someone a “pig”), pop-culture and the media all contribute to how we know, relate to, and interact with pig. The seemingly unusual relationship with the piglets poses questions around normative expectations of what or who constitutes worthy companion or fellow kin, and the treatment of domestic animals. It is when we step outside these socially constructed contexts and into a bodily felt knowing through direct contact, as I did with the piglets, that we can get a feel for who these beings really are.

I came to understand the piglets as unique individual beings during my direct contact with them. In these moments, the piglets were not abstractions, nor objects. During our time together, distinctions between my self-identity as human and my perception of them as other-than-human seemed to blend and soften. Boundaries separating our bodies were negligible as we touched each other. An understanding of self as inextricably linked cultivated across bodies. The piglets were not “other,” and it felt that nor was I; rather we were kin to one another. I was affected by the piglets, and I sensed they were affected by their contact with me. Physical differences, intellect, and language, what once may have seemed like barriers to relationships dissipated. Intra-acting with the piglets evoked stepping outside a human exceptionalist frame of knowing that was shaped by societal narratives and contributed to a prior understanding of pig that was then parlayed into a felt knowing of sensorial and corporeal means. The effect of this relationship is an inability to decipher between common companion animals, and piglets, accompanied by questions surrounding the disproportions of treatment of these beings. I was left wondering “why is pig companionship unusual?” Does their traditional instrumental treatment by modern Western humans mitigate against a more convivial relationship with them as companions?

Conclusion

Bluntly stated by Wood (2020): “Animals are in trouble today, as never before” (p. 137). Anthropogenic climate change, habitat loss, and the pollution of land and waters are killing species and putting all in threat. Motivated by my experience with the piglets, I believe that viscerally felt interspecies intra-actions cultivate relationality, kinship, and understanding of an interanimated world. Kinship with scaley, furry, short haired, and four-legged kinds can extend ecological perspicacity.

In this paper I shared my experience caring for the piglets; one account of how experience with animals impacts an understanding of self, and interspecies relationships. The capacity for connection with other animals will waver from person-to-person, and is influenced by place, culture, and ways of knowing. The remainder of the paper included theoretical and conceptual framings that provided context to the lived experience. What can be gleaned from this paper is that connecting with other animals compels a re-enchantment of our own animality as corporeal beings. To see ourselves not as distinct others, but in many ways alike, receptive, and respectful of the differences among beings, and not considered as barriers for connection. This paper has shown that relationships with other animals are not dependent on intellectual capacities, or language, rather there are ways to interact and relate that are of corporeal, and sensorial means. What was further demonstrated in this paper is that a measure of kinship is evoked through intra-action with other beings. And it is through intra-action that we can come to realize our belonging to a web of life, with many other different, and alike beings. This paper observes meaningful lasting impressions and ripple effects of other animal connections that transcend space and time. A feeling of kinship with the piglets that rippled outward to the wider more-than-human world. Attention was focused to how we can better attend to and enact relationships with other animals and find a measure of kinship in doing so.

This paper further demonstrated how direct contact, and viscerally felt intra-action with other animals invokes a knowing that confronts the assumptions, barriers, and challenges of anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism. A kind of embodied knowing that is cultivated through sensorial, e/motional, and relational intra-action. A critique of human exceptionalism was provided through the author's experience of attending to and caring for the piglets. Questions and challenges concerning the species hierarchy, instrumental treatment, and the general socially-constructed perspective on the purpose of particular animals were brought to the forefront. Scholarship has shown that pigs have greater intelligence than dogs and are considered to have the intellect of a human toddler. Pigs have been labeled the fifth most intelligent animal in the world. Despite the known intelligence of pigs, there is a disparity in how they are regarded and treated in Western society, and in comparison, to other domesticated animals. This paper raises the question of why that is the case. What has been shown is that getting to know other animals through direct contact provokes questioning of species assumptions, and thus is powerful in challenging human exceptionalism.

The experience of caring for the piglets is yet another tangible example of interspecies relationships. This paper echoes existing scholarship concerning animality, corporeality, kinship, and ways of knowing animals. This paper further opens up the conversation about how we relate and interact with animals in whatever ways that looks like for someone. And the potential of these experiences to conjure a new sense of self and being in relation to *others*. Despite kinship scholarship not outwardly advocating for abstaining in consuming animals, it is the overlap of "kinnibalism" and "cannibalism" (Wood, 2020) that was realized in the personal, and up-close experience of the piglets. A realization that made a difference in deciding to eat ham, pork, or bacon. Experiences like those with the piglets are impressionable; these interspecies interactions touch us emotionally, and the impact extends beyond the initial contact. It is greater attention to the care for domestic critters that this paper is advocating for that is new amidst all of the abstractions of human exceptionalism. This paper brings the consideration of human and animal

relations to the forefront, up-close and personal, and in direct contact as exemplary of a practice of care for how to live well with others of many kinds.

I opened this paper by describing interspecies kinship, and how a lived understanding was manifested through my intra-action with the piglets. Thereafter, I described the role of the body in interspecies intra-actions, the ability to e/motionally and sensorially relate to other animals. Challenges of human exceptionalism were described, and connections were made to broader issues. Throughout, I have maintained that cultivating interspecies relationships is best achieved through intra-actions with nonspecific others and understanding how we as corporeal beings relate e/motionally with one another. Encounters like those I have described with the piglets reveal the tactile-affective dynamics of relationships between species. Instead of the more-than-human animal being considered a distinct “other,” and less than human, interspecies encounters of even the most everyday kind can realize our deepest corporeal yearnings.

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