

AUTUMN 2017  
Volume 13, Issue 1

Jan Rodil examines existence

Yuezhen Li considers Catalonia

Breck Radulovic ponders pussies

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# THE MIDWAY REVIEW

*A Journal of Essays*



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*The Midway Review* publishes informed, accessible essays featuring literary, cultural, and political commentary and criticism. It is a forum for serious reflection and civil discourse across a variety of intellectual perspectives. We are currently accepting submissions to be considered for our Winter 2018 issue. For submission guidelines, please consult [midwayreview.uchicago.edu](http://midwayreview.uchicago.edu).

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*The Midway Review* is printed by In-Print Graphics of Oak Forest, IL. Publication is made possible by the Student Government Finance Committee and the College of the University of Chicago.

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THE  
MIDWAY REVIEW

*Volume 13, Issue 1 — Autumn 2017*

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## Letter from the Editors

Dear Reader,

*The Midway Review* was founded the year MySpace and YouTube began to take off, Saddam Hussein was sentenced to death by the Iraqi Special Tribunal, and the United States housing bubble broke. To say that we're still reckoning with the reverberations from these historic events and the aftershocks they've generated across the globe would be an understatement. Like our forebears, the editorial staff at *The Midway Review* believe in the power of critical inquiry, and by extension, the power of a damned good essay to help its readers navigate the growing complexities of a world and an age that refuses to stop for anyone. This is why we continue publishing, regardless of what the press has to say about the impending death of print magazines and/or the capacities of millennials to produce worthwhile, high-caliber thought.

In our Autumn 2017 issue, our authors deal with forms of identification from the domestic to the supra-national, reflecting on how identity relates to time, culture, and the nation. Jan Rodil writes on how queerness and disease affect his perception of temporality, Yuezhen Li looks at what the Catalan independence referendum means for the future of nationalism in Europe, and Breck Radulovic examines the significance of the pervasive cultural link between cats and lesbians.

We hope you enjoy what they have to say—in the meantime, stay warm, stay restless. We'll be back in the winter with more thought-provoking essays.

—The Editors

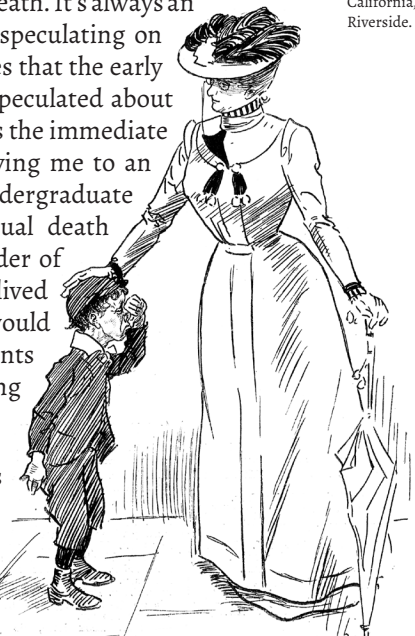
## A Queer State of Existence: No Future, No Time

Jan Rodil

I am probably going to die in the next few years, aren't I?"

The one question that I always often pop with an air of irony and stilted seriousness is the question of death. It's always an internal spectacle when it happens, speculating on dying before as the normative dictates that the early 20s is the beginning of adult life. I speculated about my death through conjectures such as the immediate older generation of my family outliving me to an eventual death not long after my undergraduate degree. I always framed my eventual death as one that resists the normative order of death. My entire lifespan would be lived entirely within my Aunt's lifetime. I would likely die even before my grandparents passed, and the chances of me living through a graduate degree are slim.

Questions of health always percolated as friends reassured me that I had a bright future. I then realized, putting bodily functions



My da, he's... old!

Jan Rodil is a fourth-year English major at the University of California, Riverside.

aside, there was something queer about thinking of the inevitability of death in such an absolute way. As a queer, gay Filipino man living in Riverside, California with career prospects stereotypically dim and a family that is in continual denial that their oldest son may not be able to support them; one can say that my entire existence is predisposed to a continual resistance to normative time. In an age where the future is in doubt, where Trumpian discourses are at root presupposing both a future of despair and hope, it's no surprise that it's nothing but the dogma of the script of normative time. But I live in queer time, a seeming errata of temporality that hegemonic language cannot articulate. As a gay man, I knew that my existence would not be subscribed to a script, but the extent of queer time that I lived in would not be realized until I became comfortable in discussing the notions of an early death.

Birth.

Childhood.

Adolescence.

Adulthood.

Death.

Clichéd, but these are the concepts that are ingrained as the script of human time. Lee Edelman identifies this, in the context of the child as the figure of the future, as “the absolute value of reproductive futurism”.<sup>1</sup> I cannot reproduce, nor do I hold any interest in rearing children. Additionally, the chances of my being in a relationship in politically strained times are slim. The politics of respectability are

1. Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), p.3.



One day our Charlie will grow up to  
condescend to women of his own!

abound in discourses over what it means to be queer. There are fears in which queer is becoming a monolithic form of convergence, one in which queer is no longer diverse. A traverse through the other side of the political binary finds that the deep-seated rage against queerness is ever present. Thus, I turn to what Edelman terms as the death drive to begin to articulate the particular kind of queerness that I exist in.

Of course, I do not mean to suppose that queerness leads to an early death (if queerness is death, then arguably so can immortality). However, the state of being queer can almost feel like death in an era of constant resistance and surveillance, in which the fear of a queer existence lodges the constant question of survival. Within the constancy of survival and surveillance is the impulse of the death drive, in which I, as a queer subject, am on borrowed time and must survive insofar as the surveillance state wills it. Edelman defines this death drive as “the inarticulable surplus that dismantles the subject from within”.<sup>2</sup> What I dismantle then is heteronormative time, the very subject which reproduces a false futurism that begets false reassurance. The impulse is internal, taken from statements of surveillance that remind us to ‘set ourselves straight’ lest we risk punishment for existing. Thus, the death drive is a step further than mere rebellion against the subject. It is the fundamental resistance of the normative insofar as we work within the framework of the heteronormative subject. The trappings of Edelman’s definition of the death drive is that the queer agent works from within the heteronormative fortress. Could the queer agent be working outside of the confines of heteronormativity’s impulse to impose order? Absolutely, but even working from the outside, it is a double bind of constant re-negotiations of refusing normative futurism. It’s tempting to fall into the trap of believing in the framework, but to negotiate what is queer is to reject the dogma of such a script.

2. Edelman, *No Future*, p.9.

Children are a tempting hope. As I thought of Edelman’s polemic work on queer theory as I percolated where I stand on the eventual fate of my life, I began to understand for a brief moment the temptation to rear children. With the biological and financial implications in mind, children are a legacy born out of human flesh. We are survived by our children in the often called forth idiomatic

## A QUEER STATE OF EXISTENCE

phrase that our essences live in the flesh and blood that we create. The concept of adoption makes percolating on the blood ties of children more difficult, but the intention is the same. In children, we see our futures continued, and the possibility of a future and a potential immortality of memory. Yet, this immortality through child-rearing is an illusion. This is no more encapsulated when Edelman writes:

*That future is nothing but kid stuff, reborn each day to screen out the grave that gapes from within the lifeless letter, luring us into, ensnaring us in, reality's gossamer web. Those queered by the social order that projects its death drive onto them are no doubt positioned as well to recognize the irreducibility of that fantasy and the cost of construing it as contingent to the logic of social organization as such.<sup>3</sup>*

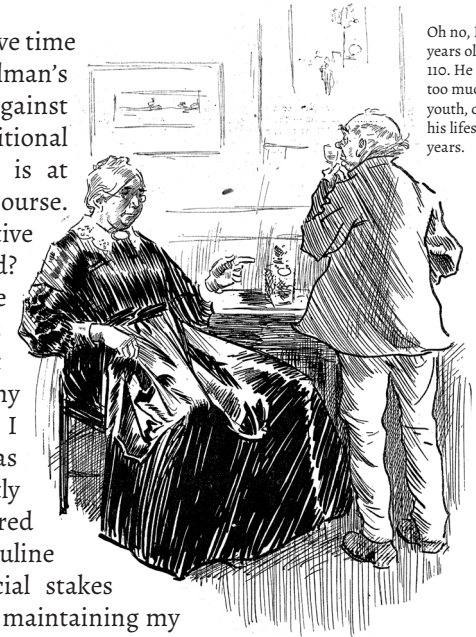
3. Edelman, *No Future*, p.30.

There is an eeriness to Edelman's configuration of hopelessness, especially of a future consigned to innocence. Yet, that is precisely what the heteronormative functions as, it is indeed the performance of innocence in which it looks towards the future with the child as its articulated image of its sign. Even in my family life in a largely Filipino household, kid stuff is the script that is followed faithfully. Grandfather always reassured me that not only would I get a girlfriend, my eventual goal was to indeed, perform the kid stuff, and turn my Father into a new Grandfather and so on and so forth. It is a crude way to articulate such a crude cycle, but for a script so ingrained in performance, it is indeed a fantasy that is irreducible. The heteronormative is complex precisely because it seeks a future that knows it is temporary. The kid stuff lasts for only as long as the child lives and is able to rear their children. For so long as reproductive futurism is performed, there is no death drive to speak of. This hope of the lack of a death drive is the fundamental drive that not only my family has, but any family seeking to continue a legacy. One can also think historically as well, tracing reproductive futurism's impulses through the structure of the royal family and how they conduct the process of dictating a heir to the creation of family businesses and their respective importance of the child of the shop owner to maintain the business. A future exists in heteronormativity, but it is dictated for you before you were even born.

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What happens when normative time is disrupted by a queer man? Edelman's theoretical praxis is resistance against the child, but I posit an additional dimension in which the child is at the center of this queer discourse. What happens when normative time is disrupted by the child? And if that child happens to be queer, gay, and Filipino? I, as the child, seem to represent the futurisms that dictate my family's survival in the world. I become the man of the house as my grandfather would constantly dictate for me. What appeared to be a construction of masculine dominance turned into financial stakes and the unsaid responsibility of maintaining my family's welfare when my grandparents are to face the inevitable fate of death. Before I could articulate my queerness, I was groomed to be heteronormative from the very beginning. In my particular case, I was raised to be a good Catholic boy who knew what his gender role was. I was to be strong, I was to make good money for my family and that my actions are to remain honorable to prevent embarrassment. The greatest irony in this process was in my articulation of my queerness in the realization that I was gay. I realized that even in heteronormativity, I had 'no future' in which to speak of. That future belonged to my grandparents, my stewards. What stake I had in building my future was lost before I was born. Before I knew it, the next 20 years of my life seemed to be planned at age 10.

In a place like California, especially in the trenches of the Inland Empire, the articulation of a queer identity is both engendering a threat and yet at the same time also welcoming. In immigrant communities, the pressure to preserve a future is paramount to continued survival. My articulation of queerness to my family,



Oh no, I'm 112 years old and he's 110. He smoked too much in his youth, cut back his lifespan by two years.

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who have more fiscal concerns in their eyes and are also more than willing to toe the line of the normative, would prove to be a null value. As I played a pretend game for my family to prove my straightness, it did not feel genuine. It was not real. Thus, a shift to a queer state of existence was gradual. It was in that painful transition process was where I realized that I could not give my family the future that they so desired. I could not bear children, I would not marry a woman, and nor would I live out their irreducible fantasies of being a patriarch that would carry forth their legacy. In their eyes, I had no future to which they could stake survival in. However, this is a double bind. As I mentioned earlier, I saw no future in heteronormativity, as the future that was laid out for me prior to my articulation and realization of queerness was no future either. What good would a future hold for me if all it was controlled by intricately by a family in which the survival of their legacy was at stake?

I survive through resistance, active and passive. I survive despite my family's hatred and distrust toward queer folk through learning to re-negotiate with their desires, over and over. This negotiation came with the mutual realization in which the futures that we hold are not intimately tied to each other. At the moment I hit queer time, in which I saw that as the moment where I would begin to realize that my grandfather's constant motion towards the heteronormative was folly in my eyes. The script that I was bound to had been broken. I was free to write my own, queer script, and the options were both limitless and limited. I could fall in love with a gay man and forget about my old existence, but that brushes up against the reality of the death drive. The drive of limitless optimism is broached by that time-old realization, death. However, death itself



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also has a script, being the last stage in the human timeline. Death's heteronormative dogma is tied to the notions of a permanent end of a legacy of the individuated person. To put it in other terms, the heteronormative dogma of death is the omniscient threat of death that drives the impulse towards reproductive futurism. Of course, I exist in resistance to that dogma and partake in the death drive. Yet I do not see that death drive as the hopelessness of being queer. I find a queer optimism in the drive, a strange liberation in constantly asking myself the possibility of an early death.

Under the auspices of queer time, the moment of death does not matter. Whatever timeline that I lived no longer applied to where I stand. I realized queerness on the still end of adolescence, but I had the option to either follow dogma or to write my own script at the beginning of my college career. In jest, I followed the script by having the privilege to go to my local University of California campus. However, unfortunate habits took the best of me as I lived out my college career. It's not queerness that will kill me, it is a can of Spam every week served warmly by my controlling but well-meaning Lola. It is sedentary nights in a Scottish-themed but unkempt apartment whose rates are a steal in the local area. It is the inability to maintain a consistency in diet, eating only once in some days but gorging out in others when I'm overtaken by college-caused sorrow. That's not even getting into a lifestyle largely caused by living in a sedentary Filipino household. If romance wasn't in my available toolset to seek acceptance from my family, it would be through food.

I am a diabetic man and no amount of sticking to the script would be able to save me from my eventual fate. My eventual worldview is largely fatalistic and can be dangerous to its applications on queer theory, but the possibility of an early death is indeed real. If food does not kill me, then politics will. If politics does not kill me, then anxiety will. If anxiety does not, then living will kill me. Thus, the only possibility in which I could articulate my existence was through a queer state. My death may well be premature, but there is something queer, something peculiar, about being the subject of the time-old statement: he had so much to live for.

## Is a Post-Nationalist Europe Still Possible after Catalonia?

Yuezhen Li

Yuezhen Li is a second-year in the College majoring in Philosophy and Mathematics.

On October 1st, 2017, the region of Catalonia held a referendum for its independence from Spain. Through this defiant referendum against the Spanish national government, millions of Catalans decided they wanted an independent Catalan Republic. The Spanish government headed by Mr. Mariano Rajoy avenged by nullifying Catalonia's status as an autonomous community, and claimed direct rule over it. Yet, on the 27th of the same month, the region's Parliament finally declared an independent Catalan state.

It is hard to know whether or not the Catalans will succeed in their independence movement. However, the momentum exhibited in the entire Catalan secession drive – by both Catalan independence-seekers and opposing Spaniards – is clearly vehement. The yes-saying Catalans did produce an impressive display of civil disobedience, whilst the national police tried their best to stop the Referendum from taking place at all on the voting day (in evening thereof, Mr. Rajoy announced that “no vote had been conducted”, only to be contradicted by the later vote counts). The hail of rubber bullets shot by the police could not stop voters from smashing their way to ballot boxes. Catalan authorities claim that on the voting day alone, more than eight hundred people were injured in their clash against police. With a turnout rate of 43%, a 93% final “yes” rate to the independence call is telling. On the other side of the story, the Spanish Prime Minister, supported by countless Spaniards who have faith in the unity of a Spanish nation, is still trying his way to undermine the legitimacy of this move.

Theorists and pundits still struggle to understand the event. Some have confirmed the national government's dismissal of the Catalan claims to independence as illegitimate on grounds that the vote violates the extent of self-determination allowed for an autonomous community as prescribed in the Spanish Constitution of 1978. Some with a realist-like bent speculate that the Catalan government may use the independence drive as a bargaining chip with the national government. Others approach the Catalan's desire for independence as an attempt to preserve Catalonia's own sizable, vibrant economy from the stagnancy that plagues a struggling Spanish economy. These are all legit theories that support either the Catalan state or the Spanish government. However, we cannot fully appreciate the full picture of this chaotic independence drive by looking at what is happening in Catalonia alone. Instead, we must look at an underlying and much deeper conflict that is present globally – one between the post-national vision of unity and the recurring waves of nationalist awareness.

This theme is especially worthy of further exploration given the recent series of global events – from Brexit and Trump's election to global Islamophobic sentiment. For several decades, the word “nationalism” has been seen as not only distasteful, but also as obsolete as a Walkman. Thinkers solidify that claim by declaring that the Western world has entered a post-national world, where the nation is dismissed as a mute category. Following this logic, liberal politicians have attempted several great transnational projects, and no doubt, the vision for European Integration is one of them. That very project rests upon the assumption that the discrepancies between European nations are small enough to be negligible, and thus a Europe without nationalist division is possible; following closely from that proposition is the radical call for the common market, supra-national governance and homogeneous culture around Europe. That would be a great picture of Europe's future, if only it could be achieved. Hence, Europe in the post-war seems largely one-dimensional: one that is pushing itself to the vision.

## II

Europe in the post-war era is characterized by the unchecked

progression of integration and super-nationalism (from the Roman Treaty that establishes the European Economic Community, through the Maastricht Treaty that establishes the European Union, to the creation and wide adoption of the common currency- the Euro), and the constant retreat of nationalism. That trend has stopped in the recent years, signaled by a series of global events. Britain's decision to quit the European Union (EU) that signals the victory of Eurosceptic, the challenge posed by far-right Marine Le Pen in the French presidential race, and the strong show of anti-refugee Alternative for Germany (AfD) in Germany in the parliamentary election all point to the same fact: the nationalist sentiment, long regarded as obsolete in Europe's political discourse, is back. Aside from the recent addition of anti-Muslim elements, this wave of nationalism takes on its tradition of Euroscepticism, that is, a fundamental distrust and opposition to the EU as a political entity and to European integration as an ideal. The independence movement in Catalonia does not simply add to that list; it shows an even more fundamental challenge to the creed's post-nationalism. By that I do not mean the level of anger and agitation each side

of this conflict has, though that is a visible aspect if we look up photos of rallies in Barcelona. What I do mean is that, not only that the man-made vision of a European federation is fiercely challenged, those multi-national states that have been there for long (e.g., Spain, which include the Basque and Catalan nations; the United Kingdom, comprised of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland) are also at stake. Regional secessionism in multi-

national western European states has not been active for decades, since Northern Ireland independence fights became quiet. Recent events in Catalonia motivate us to rethink the stability of multi-national states, on which many have cast doubt. The much more radical and demanding idea of post-nationalism and the formulation of European integration based upon it are in serious trouble. After all, if we are no longer even sure whether a few nations can cohabitate if their national links are strong enough, how can we expect a good many of nations to form a community based on ideas alone?

### III

In order to further appreciate the vision for a post-national Europe, I invite the reader to consider one of its most celebrated formulation, made by German intellectual Jurgen Habermas. In his book, *The Postnational Constellation: Political Essays*, Mr. Habermas crafts an image of what he calls "a universalist vision of political life", that is, a kind of political structure that is neither bounded by territorial values or group identities. He recognizes that historically, people are either united because they are genetically linked to one another (familial identity in the narrower sense, or ethnic identity in a broader sense), or because they have been close both physically and personally. Resulting from that paradigm is a heavy reliance on group identity as the organizing principle of social and political lives. That is, each person is attached to one particular group with which he or she identifies, at the time becomes antagonistic to all other groups. With time going on, each group will develop distinct structures, customs, and discourses, and those differences will make it rather hard to have inter-group conversations. A foremost example of this kind of structure is the formation of nation-states, that is, the political states that exclusively join the member of a nation in the socio-cultural sense. In the perfect form, each nation-state has a distinct language that is not intelligible to people outside the nation, is highly intolerant of foreigners (because they are also members of other nations), and forbids global communication because it can undermine each nation's purity.

Habermas's liberal tendency makes him think of this as a horrible picture of the human condition. In a traditional political



What do you mean it's not made in Spain? It's sherry, for Pete's sake!

vision under nation-states, each person lives under fragmentation. That person is bonded to the customs and traditions she has been brought up in, without the likeliness to think or live beyond what has been set forth for her. Following a tradition that stresses politics' role in expanding human freedom, Habermas insists we think of an alternative political structure where each person is free to live up to his or her best physical and intellectual possibilities, without the hindrance of the *particular* condition that the said person lives in.

To make individual freedom achievable and a universal community possible, Habermas proposes the radical abolishment of particular grouping altogether. Instead of the status quo where human people identify with their nations and center their lives around them, he calls for all people to be united. To do that, each individual must take on shared, non-territorial values and be able to constantly communicate, so that a human community in its broadest sense (one that is inclusive of all human beings on earth) is possible. Countless thinkers have expressed an interest in creating a vision where "the world is one", where the differences between the people around the globe will be reduced, or even eliminated, and they will be united into one single group. That properly characterizes the principle of post-nationalism, featured in the political thoughts of Soviet leader Leon Trotsky, Nobel-winning economist Paul Krugman, as well as Canadian statesman Justin Trudeau. Habermas's brand of post-nationalism is unique because it seeks to promote a new political order based on a global agreement for rational ideas, termed "verfassungspatriotismus" (literally, constitutional patriotism). The basic explanation for that term is the belief that political attachment "ought to center on the norms, the values and, more indirectly, the procedures of a liberal democratic constitution" (Jan-Werner Müller). It can be understood as a middle ground between the radical proposal of the global human community and the traditional formulation of nation-states. Unlike some other pro-globalization thinkers, Habermas does not champion the comprehensive abandon of grouping of individuals as a way of organizing the political sphere so that human beings are unified as one, because that idea is naïve in the sense that it pretends national differences do not exist. He does recognize the importance of the affection one has for the group

to which one is attached (in the case of the nation-state, this is often termed "patriotism"). What Habermas does support, is a new kind of grouping and love thereof. He believes that the identity based on rational political belief will finally supersede the identity based on ethnicity, culture, and civil life.

Here, we must briefly digress unto explaining what Habermas means as "the identity based on rational political belief". As a thinker whose main academic training is in continental philosophy, Habermas's vision of politics is deeply rooted in his theory of human nature, for this has been the traditional approach of political philosophers, ever since Thomas Hobbes. Specifically, Habermas is committed to the idea that each individual of the human species possesses a rational faculty that allows reasoning, and that person is endowed with the ability to communicate what he or she gets out of that reasoning process. Therefore, Habermas argues, we can expect them to each work out a rational system of political formulation, and together come to an agreement on the basic institutions of politics – laws, rules of governances, values, and the state apparatus – together known as the human species' common *constitution*. Because each person comes into that agreement not under coercion or custom, but because of his or her personal consent, we can expect that person to love that system of rule of the constitution, a sentiment that Mr. Habermas denotes "constitutional patriotism". Following the State of Nature principles of such great thinkers as John Locke (whose thoughts largely inspired American founding fathers) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Habermas grounds the advantage of constitutional patriotism (again, in which people are willingly united after thinking for themselves) over national patriotism (in which people are united only as a default set forth by traditions and blood ties) because the former involves each individual's volition in their self-determination. That is, states are formed because of each subject's consent to the political principles by which those states were founded. The legitimacy of post-national state will be the equal recognition of a common political culture, in the place of traditional national culture, as the organizing principle of citizenship. Unlike Max Weber's classic definition of the state as a "monopoly on violence" that coerces the citizens to remain stable, Habermas implies that it is acceptable that people are entitled to the freedom of leaving those states if they no longer identify with

those principles; Habermas reasons that they will not, because the structure of human rationality dictates that we will land on the same political beliefs by rigorous contemplation alone, assuming no *selfish consideration* interferes with that reasoning process.

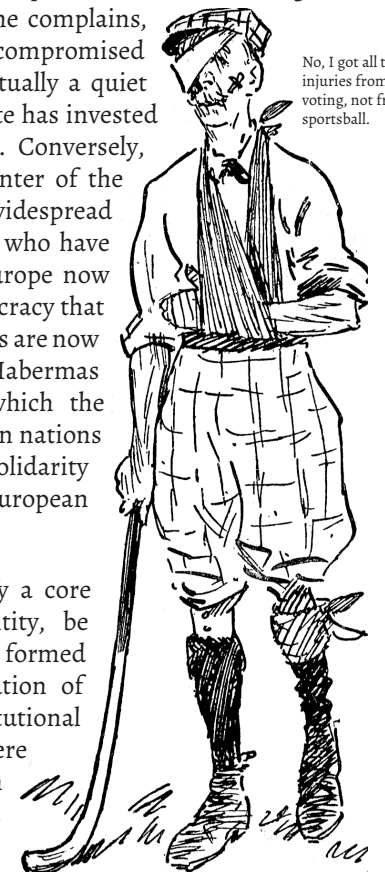
In the light of Habermas's theory of post-nationalist constitutional patriotism, it would be easy to understand the particular stance he takes as a globalist in relation to the vision of politics. More sophisticated and nuanced a thinker than some radicals, Habermas does not blind himself from admitting differences of blood or historical experience or creeds of faith do exist; however, he believes it is possible – as well as desirable – that we progress into a new phase of history, where political attachment is based on loyalty to a constitution. It can be implied that rather than traditional nation-states, Habermas prefer super-national federations as the basic mode of political states, in which consent to the same political beliefs provides the cohesion to the community. Hence, Habermas promotes a particular brand of globalism, that is, supra-national federation.

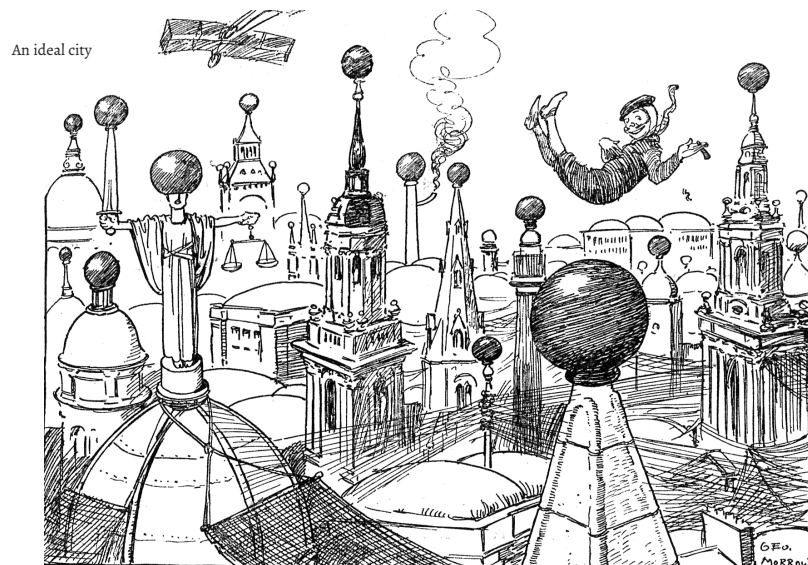
The best real-world example of the attempt to establishing a supra-national federation is the attempt to integrate Europe. Indeed, Mr. Habermas believes there exists a strong centripetal force as a recurring theme in Europe's history. Despite the multitude of nations inhabiting that Europe, he observes they all live up to the same "European ideal". It is no coincidence that Europe has the highest concentration of liberal-democratic regimes; that is explainable by the wide subscription the liberal-democratic ideals has on that continent. In that sense, Habermas thinks of his own theory a continuation of Europe's great tradition: no matter what language one speaks, what church one goes to, or what kind of life one leads, one identifies as a European, embodied by the constitutional code that is deeply rooted in one's minds. Conversely, Habermas believes that Europe is the best field where his constitutional patriotism theory can be applied to the real world. If a post-nationalism state can be realized anywhere, a Europe under integration must come first.

## IV

Even Habermas himself is not fully sure whether any super-national alliance will be a success, not to mention the much more ambitious project of European integration. He writes that, globalization alone does not make a political order good; much more is required so that a liberal democracy can survive a post-national world. In his essay "Zur Verfassung Europas" ("On Europe's Constitution"), he argues that the pressure posed by political and financial crises have allowed power to quietly shift from people to the hands of questionable legitimacy, such as the European Council, that are full of technocrats without concern for the real issues and the reverence for the constitutional rules by which European integration was formulated in the first place. Instead of making a true European democracy possible, he complains, the European community has been compromised by the frenzy of a few. This is effectually a quiet coup d'état against the trust each state has invested in the common European platform. Conversely, he believes the corruption at the center of the European platform is the cause of widespread Euroscepticism. It is because people who have trusted the idea of an integrated Europe now feel betrayed by the European bureaucracy that anti-European-integration sentiments are now popular. To tackle that problem, Habermas urges international citizenry, by which the constitutional integration of European nations is made possible, to take actions in solidarity and fight back the power from the European bureaucracy.

Habermas's account does identify a core problem of any super-national entity, be it a multi-national state that was formed on political grounds, or the federation of an integrated Europe with constitutional patriotism as its bond. Wherever there is a political union, there is a common decision-making mechanism. In a





dictatorship, it is the supreme leader; in a monarchy, it is the king or the queen; in a parliamentary democracy, it is the representative government. No matter to what degree a government represents the will of the people, as long as it is comprised of real human beings, it has its own interest. That is the source of the constant antagonism between the people and the government, as noted by many American libertarians. This is also the problem Mr. Habermas has with the European bureaucracy. However, there is an even more serious problem that he fails to recognize: when a political community is multi-national, the question of the disparity between nations comes into play. Even though the decision-makers are perfectly selfless, they are unlikely to make every group feel as though they have been treated fairly in all cases. This constitutes part of the motivation the Catalans rise in rebellion against the Spanish state.

This neglect in Habermas's account is not unexpected. As a believer of post-nationalism, Mr. Habermas is committed to the belief that nations are no longer one of the fundamental categories (if it is one of the categories at all) in today's political life; hence, he is reluctant to think in a nationalist's terms. In that discourse, the Catalans' anger is solely explainable by the Spanish government's

betrayal of democratic ideas (for the latter have attempted to undermine the region's autonomy) and its unfavorable economic policy given to that region. Similarly, Britain leaves Europe only because EU's bureaucratic working method is at odds with the UK's needs for economic advancement, and alt-right dogmas become viral only because people do not want a large population (with no regard to what that population consists of). Those are all of course valid theories, but they only count as part of the explanation. It is clear that in our age that nationalist thinking is still a common mode thought in politics. It is simply too radical an idea for political thinkers to assume we already live in a post-national world. Real-world political events, such as what happened in Catalonia in the past October, seem further confirming that we are not. In such a world, to deny the existence of nationalist thinking is only to promote hypocrisy and self-blinding from the truth, both unworthy of Mr. Habermas as a social scientist.

## V

Half a decade before Habermas even rose to prominence, the conservative German jurist Carl Schmitt has warned the world of the dangers of what he terms "political universalism". In his 1932 book *The Concept of the Political*, Schmitt argues that "the high points of politics [are where] the enemy is, in concrete clarity, recognized as the enemy". By that he means that the friend-enemy relation is fundamental to the political sphere, because it is by the concrete recognition of the other as enemy that one can establish one's own identity. Therefore, any attempt to deny one's adherence to a nation (*qua* identifying with a group of friends) in opposition to members of other nations (understood as "enemies", though not necessarily with hostility) risks losing all personal and communal identities. An identity-less person, according to Schmitt, cannot lead a public life, nor can the said person even assert his or her own status as a human being. In other words, any attempt to suppress national identities will result in massive and catastrophic *depoliticization* and *dehumanization*.

In Schmitt's account, post-nationalism in specific is a more dangerous type of anti-identity sentiments, because it claims

to speak in the name of “universal humanity”. Recall, from Mr. Habermas, the vision for constitutional patriotism rests upon the premise that all human beings can use their rational faculty to work out a global agreement for political arrangements and thereafter love the political order based on the agreement. Mr. Schmitt suggests that ideas like Habermas’s refers to “humanity as such, and [it] as a whole has no enemies”. If that were accepted, he continues “‘Humanity’ would become an asymmetrical counter-concept. If one discriminates within humanity and thereby denies the quality of being human to a disturber or destroyer, then the negatively valued person becomes an unperson, ... and must be destroyed”. That is to say, Schmitt is alerted of the danger of a radical tyranny inherent to all ideas of rule by universal humanity, including that of Habermas: if anyone is opposed to the post-national political arrangements, which, according to Habermas, is to be a human consensus, then that person violates the human consensus, can therefore disqualifies him or herself from even being human. In such a world, no diversity will be accepted and anyone with a dissent view will be regarded as the common enemy of all of the humankind. All that can be resulted would be massive killings and brainwashing aimed at eradicating all differences, just as what happened in France under Robespierre, or in Russia during the Soviet era.

## VI

After the independence drive in Catalonia, we are forced back to reflect on the post-national vision for a unified Europe. Post-nationalism, at least as Habermas understands it, requires ethnic identities be replaced by rational-ideological bonds as the cornerstone of state-formation. Whether that political theory is valid remains up to debate. Yet, we must admit that post-nationalism is not the reality. The idea that we now live in a world beyond national and ethnic divides is nothing more than a preposterous pretension; radical pushes toward European integration, without regard for national awareness, will surely prove to be unwise.

## Cat Call: How Lesbians Queer Society Through Interactions with Cats

Breck Radulovic

It’s a well-known fact that you can’t call yourself a lesbian unless you possess a cat—or, rather, for cats call no one mistress, a cat possesses you,<sup>1</sup> asserts an essay in the 1991 anthology *Cats (And Their Dykes)*. Patricia Roth Schwartz’s claim, along with numerous examples from pop culture, reify the text’s title. Saturday Night Live’s Kate McKinnon plays the stereotype for laughs in a recurring gag about the lesbian-run cat store Whiskers R We. McKinnon and various guest stars play randy, if dowdy, lesbians whose love for cats far surpasses their love for other humans. McKinnon’s character embodies many lesbian stereotypes, hailing the cat as “a friend with fur” and imploring her amorous co-star, played by Kristen Wiig, to “keep it in [her] jorts.”<sup>2</sup> Another piece of lesbian pop culture, Anna Pulley’s 2016 *The Lesbian Sex Haiku Book (With Cats!)* features cats not only as lesbians’ companions, but as lesbians themselves. Illustrator Kelsey Beyer renders lesbians as cats alongside Pulley’s haiku. *The Lesbian Sex Haiku Book* is less niche than it sounds, following in a decades-long tradition of queer cat literature, a genre whose hallmark is *Cats (And Their Dykes)*. These books, as do all queer endeavors, seek to challenge the normativity of heteropatriarchy.

Why is the stereotype so immediately recognizable and funny enough to warrant almost two million views on YouTube? Why are cats a fundamental part of queer expression and experience in *Cats (And Their Dykes)* and *The Lesbian Sex Haiku Book*? What about lesbians, particularly those styled as “dykes,” enforces their

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1. Patricia Roth Schwartz, *Cats (And Their Dykes)* p. 37

2. “Whiskers R We with Kristen Wiig” Kristen Wiig, Kate McKinnon

association with the domestic, but still independent, house cat and to what extent does this relationship challenge heteropatriarchy? In the context of this paper, a lesbian is identified as a woman or woman-aligned person who only experiences sexual and romantic attraction to other women or woman-aligned people. Queer can be understood more broadly, as an act or way of being that challenges heteropatriarchy. Heteropatriarchy, meanwhile, can be understood as the system of male, heterosexual, patriarchal supremacy that privileges the straight and male. The cat/lesbian connection represents the lesbian's rejection of her assigned social role as wife/sex object and mother. However, when embraced by lesbians, the cat/lesbian connection is also about rejecting women's traditional social role, and instead finding love outside the heterosexual, patriarchal family and outside platonic, non-sexual, non-romantic female relationships. Thus, for many lesbians, loving cats is an intrinsic part of queer, lesbian identity.

3. Pulley, p. 4

*The Lesbian Sex Haiku Book* was composed in haiku to "give our short-form brains something else to do when we aren't photographing dogs wearing leggings."<sup>3</sup> The cats were added at the suggestion of the author's then-girlfriend, Beyer, to humorously represent lesbian experience. The most superficial reading of Pulley's fascination with cats is that lesbians simply enjoy them as pets or companions, something she plays with in numerous haiku in the text. However, in each of three feline companionship haiku, cats replace a central part of the heteropatriarchal social order for the lesbian who owns them. In Pulley's second chapter, "How to Pick Up a Lesbian," the subsection "More Realistic Ways to 'Flag' as a Womyn-Loving Womoon" considers how lesbians identify themselves to prospective sexual partners. Pulley offers the following advice to her "womyn" readers: "Do not brush off/ the cat (or dog) hair you are most/ surely covered in."<sup>4</sup> The subsection title humorously rejects male definition by restyling the word "woman" without "man," and in the haiku, men are doubly replaced, first by the subject's cats and secondly by the subject's search for a female partner. It is hard to say which aspect is more threatening for the archetypal male derided by lesbian culture: the search for a lesbian partner, or the abdication of sex appeal entirely, represented by the unsexy jewelry of pet hair. A haiku later, in the chapter "How to Pick Up Your Ex-Girlfriend," the subject says,

4. Pulley, p. 20

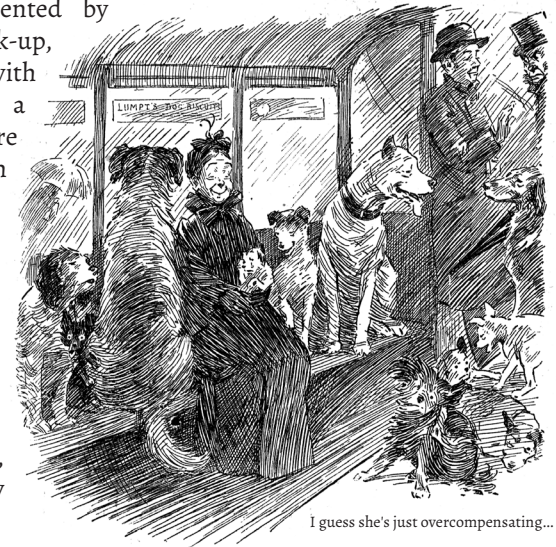
"Snuffles and Meow-Meow/ sure do miss you. Why don't you/ come say hi to them?"<sup>5</sup> In a heterosexual relationship gone sour, children represent the last living linkages of one partner to another.<sup>6</sup> However, in this poem, the children serving to reattract a lost love are furry and likely mute about their second "parent's" disappearance. In a twofold disruption of the nuclear family, Snuffles and Meow-Meow supplant the image of human children left behind by divorce.

5. Pulley, p. 29

6. In *Cats (And Their Dykes)*, Wendy Caster plays with this idea in "My Step-Cats and I." "It's a familiar scenario: a nuclear family breaks up, one parent gets custody of the kids, that parent eventually starts dating again, and then the kids and the parent's new friend have to learn to deal with one another... My lover Liz has two cats from a previous marriage. She and her ex-lover got them together, raised them together, loved them together. I knew they wouldn't accept me immediately." p. 111

7. Pulley, p. 126

"Sadness" represents the ultimate rejection of heteropatriarchal human society; that of society itself. From the chapter entitled "The Twelve Stages of Lesbian Break-Up Grief," the poem reads "Imagine which cat/ will probably eat you first/ when you die alone."<sup>7</sup> After losing her partner, the bereaved, dumped lesbian assumes she will never interact with society again. Instead, she intends to replace all human companionship with that of animals, while acknowledging that not only will those pets will not recognize her as a companion once she dies, but they will be the only ones to notice her death. This haiku, one of Pulley's darkest and most humorous, points to a risk of rejecting heterosexual society: that there might not be a society to replace the patriarchal one challenged by lesbianism. It is important to note that the fear of dying alone is not exclusive to lesbians, but rather applies to anyone who rejects the social prescription for romantic love. Fomented by a devastating break-up, Pulley's work toys with what it means to be a lesbian, but even more profoundly, with what it means for a human's primary social connection to be with a nonhuman animal. Pulley's book represents a dual queering of society: after getting engaged on the Isle of Lesbos, and subsequently



8. Pulley, pp. 1-4 broken up with, left in the companionship of cats,<sup>8</sup> Pulley's haiku not only challenge heterosexuality, but also the notion that human beings are meant to come in pairs.

Pulley's text extends beyond contemplation of companionship to include Beyer's zoomorphic depictions of lesbians themselves. In "The SHF (short-haired femme)" and "The LHB (long-haired butch)," Beyer depicts an earring-clad domestic shorthair and a dapper, tie-wearing Maine Coon to accompany Pulley's haiku musing on the stereotypes and interests of each category of lesbian.<sup>9</sup> The identities femme and butch represent a respective reclamation and complication of femininity outside of the context of attraction to men. Thus, by stylizing cats as femme and butch, Beyer attributes to cats the same sense of separatism from maleness that lesbians possess. Beyer also liberally reinterprets lesbian cultural iconography, from Melhissa Ethfuridge's *Your Litter Secret to the Indigo Purrls' Closer to Twine*.<sup>10</sup> Alison Bechdel's *The Essential Stripes to Watch Out For* and Tracy Chapman's *Give Me One Reason to Spay Here* are indeed puns, but also illuminate various aspects of the lesbian experience, albeit likely unintentionally.<sup>11</sup> The reinterpretation of Bechdel's title queries the essentialness of appearance to lesbian culture: are tabbies meaningfully different from calicos? Are lipstick lesbians altogether different from stone butches? Chapman's album cover, which features a Himalayan passionately strumming an acoustic guitar, raises questions of childlessness and reproductive control in both cats and lesbians.



The most explicit connection between cats and lesbians is made on the front and back covers, in which two cats (the front cover) and Pulley and Beyer (the back cover) lie touching in an unmade bed, smoking cigarettes. This juxtaposition makes the reader first ponder the ways in which one ascribes similar characteristics to both lesbians and cats. Chiefly, lesbians and cats are similarly seen as independent through their rejection of "typical" modes of social affection. Just as the cat demands attention on her own terms and is considered less people-oriented than the dog, so do lesbians reject the traditional female roles. Furthermore, by portraying herself and her girlfriend as cats, Pulley highlights the social otherness of the lesbian. By posing as felines, Pulley and Beyer not only buck gender and normative sexuality, but they even transcend the species boundary to become the ultimate other. Tangentially, the central comparison of the book raises the question of why are lesbians and cats similar enough to be transposed on one another rather than dogs, birds, or reptiles. Cats have historically been associated with deviant femininity through their association with witches and spinsters. Thus, lesbian identification with dogs could potentially challenge gendered notions even more than identification with cats. Reptiles, as bizarre or even repulsive, could represent opposition to traditional society as an object of identification. There are certainly lesbians who consider themselves "dog" or "reptile" people rather than "cat people." However, there is something peculiarly independent yet endearing about cats that results in an overwhelming connection in lesbian pop culture.

While Pulley's text flirts with bold assertions of queerness, distinguished from other modes of homosexuality for its purposeful tension with heteropatriarchy, *Cats (And Their Dykes)* embraces queerness in its very title, by repurposing the pejorative "dyke" over the neutral "lesbian." The use of parentheses in both titles serves to subjectify the being outside the parentheses and objectify the being inside. Pulley's book is primarily about lesbians, but *Cats (And Their Dykes)* aims to subvert an assumed human-to-animal hierarchy by subjectifying the cat and objectifying the human. The use of "lesbian" versus "dyke" also belies the degree to which each text seeks into interact with queerness and disruption of patriarchal

social order.

*Cats (And Their Dykes)* contains various queer musings, poems, anecdotes, and essays on the literal companionate relationship between cats and lesbians, with varying degrees of favorability. Some, like Abby Bogomolny's "Because I Turn on the Light Switch/ She Thinks I Make the Sun Come Out" and Jan Hardy's "Separatist Paradox" portray an orthodox understanding of the relationship pets have with people, one of affectionate dependence or of an essentially companionate care-taking connection. Hardy's title references lesbian separatism and so she claims, "The only male ego I can endure/ belongs to Leroy/ who found me at the Animal Rescue League/ decided I was worthy, / stood up and squeaked 'Me! Me!' through the screen."<sup>12</sup> Leroy is marked by his otherness through species difference; though he is male, he is only male enough for Hardy to question separatism in her title, not abandon it entirely. In this way, Leroy allows Hardy to queer society through separatism without forgoing companionship; although he does so in a fundamentally reliant way, as he begs for her to choose him. Living with a pet allows women to reclaim elements of caretaking in female identity without being subjected to patriarchal pressures of wifely or motherly duties. By feeding, grooming, and providing companionship to Leroy, Hardy engages in traditionally feminine behavior without catering to the needs of men or the patriarchy. Despite his position as care-receiver, Leroy still displays a cat's characteristic independence, for he does have a "male ego" that must be "endured." However, Leroy's gender must be substantially different from human male gender, because his "lesbian separatist" companion can endure it. It seems quite obvious that cats and other nonhuman animals do not experience gender in the same way that people do. Thus, interacting with cats, male and female, complicates social notions of sex and gender in a way that weakens their relevance.

Within *Cats (And Their Dykes)* are several touching stories of traditional cat ownership marked by love and loss, but the book's most intriguing message comes from several selections that call into question the "master"/pet relationship by considering it as a form of oppression analogous to that experienced by women and lesbians.

12. *Cats (And Their Dykes)*, p. 118

Amy Edgington's "Lessons in Love" rejects a paternalist hierarchy by framing her relationship to her cat in terms of undeniable love. She rebuts, "This had nothing to do with domestication—/ I did not want a pet; she was not looking/ for a hand-out or a master—/ but you cannot fall off the earth/ and you cannot fall out of love."<sup>13</sup> Her relationship to her cat mimics queer ones, not in a romantic sense, but in that it resists the domesticity of heterosexual love and argues that attempting to deny nonheterosexual love is futile.

13. *Cats (And Their Dykes)*, p. 36

Not all authors agree that loving cats is a queer act, however. In "Love or Dominance?" Eileen Anderson argues that pet ownership merely replicates the oppressive power dynamics of patriarchy. While lesbians, even those who self-describe as dykes, seek to challenge heteropatriarchy,

*interacting with cats in a framework of ownership, custodianship, and dominance, urges on us many patriarchal assumptions and behaviors that we would do much better to unlearn. The patriarchal framework and the behaviors we learn and internalize because of it [sic] actively prevent us from knowing what natural, consensual, cross-species relationships could be.*<sup>14</sup>

14. *Cats (And Their Dykes)*, p. 92

She argues that the oppressive conditions women experienced in historic relationships with men, lack of autonomy, constriction of movement, control over reproductive habits, are the same ones that pet owners subject pets to. Because "men's hierarchies are so easy to internalize," lesbians have "bought male lies, as I did for so long, that some creatures are more deserving, more *real* than others. An individual with such a discriminating attitude would more accurately be called a *pet* lover, not an animal lover."<sup>15</sup> In "A More Subtle Bondage," zana also outlays the similarities between the conditions of pets and women to challenge the otherness of cats. Speciesism allows us "to believe that animals are content under conditions we ourselves would find torturous," by making "ourselves believe they [animals] are very different from us."<sup>16</sup> Just as white men argued that women and people of color were intrinsically inferior and heterosexuals argued that queer people were unnatural, pet owners tell themselves that animals are too different from humans for ownership to be oppressive. The otherness of cats is in some

15. *Cats (And Their Dykes)*, p. 99

16. *Cats (And Their Dykes)*, p. 73

ways what draws lesbians to them as companions, but it also allows lesbians to engage in the patriarchal behavior they so desperately despise.

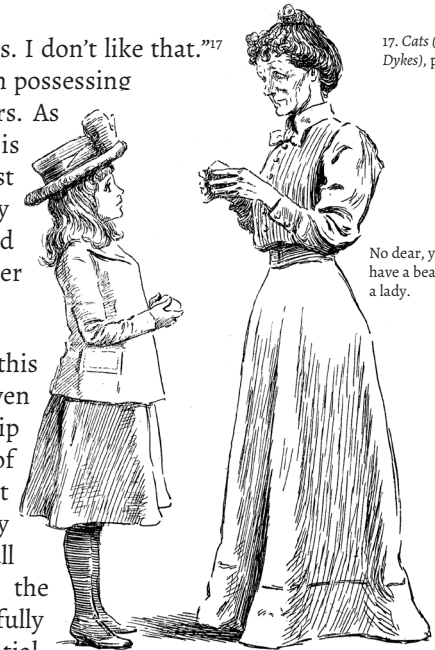
For Anderson, the parallels between cats and lesbians are so explicit that they must be considered intersectionally and their oppressions must be dismantled jointly. Her critique is haunting because it calls into question the genuineness of the love expressed by Edgington, Hardy, and all of the other authors in the book, as well as the reader's own affection for their pets as misguided and even hypocritical. It is also troubling because patriarchal oppressors often thought they, too, were doing what was best for those they oppressed. There is no way to argue against Anderson but to say that cats, as nonhuman animals, do not deserve the same rights as human beings, and there is no way to argue this point without resorting to language that was historically used to oppress women, people of color, and those who identify as queer. Anderson argues one can only ameliorate the oppressiveness of pet ownership, by respecting pets' bodily autonomy and by not "owning" any new animals, but that there is no way to participate in pet ownership without engaging in oppression. Notably, Anderson does not suggest what a pet-free, "free" animal world might look like. While she argues that pet ownership is against nature, she ignores the fact that humans have been interfering with "nature" for thousands of years by the selective breeding of domestic animals. Evolutionarily, domestic cats are no more "natural" than any other genetically modified organism. It is impossible to know how an animal that has always been domestic would behave if it were to become wild.

Other authors are troubled by the oppressive nature of pet ownership, but refrain from suggesting the abolition of the institution altogether. In Betsey Brown's "Catechesis," the title alone attributes religious learning to her experience with the companionship of cats. A near holy reverence for the existence of another being, confounded by the impossibility of truly relating to it, makes Brown's relationship with her cats metaphysical. She acknowledges the otherness and oppression of cats: "Although Soren and Pounce seem to enjoy sharing shelter, food, and companionship with Gail and me, I am aware that patriarchal society gives lesbians in our household

life-and-death power over the cats. I don't like that."<sup>17</sup> She, like Anderson, struggles with possessing rights that are not rightfully hers. As a lesbian and "womon," Brown is intimately familiar with the unjust corruption of personal agency inherent to heteropatriarchy, and searches for a way to valorize her cats' companionship.

It seems difficult to counter this criticism of pet ownership. Even if the human-animal relationship is not conceived of in terms of property or ownership socially, it is legally rendered as a property relationship. The human has full rights of life and control over the pet, even if these rights are not fully exercised. Brown offers a potential rebuttal. Although pet ownership is replicative of patriarchal relationships, "I continue to keep cats in my home because the alternative is worse. In today's united states, a free woman is at least theoretically permitted to exist, but a cat who is 'unowned' lives under a death sentence."<sup>18</sup> She counters Anderson's suggestion to end pet ownership simply: it is impossible. She does not argue that it is just to own another living being, only that there is no other way for things to be. Human beings have warped natural order, if such a thing can be said to exist, so that true "wildness" is no longer possible for any animal.

She further softens her position as "owner" by acknowledging that the human-cat relationship can be reciprocal in some ways. "Cats have done so much to help me that I want to do what I can to help them. If this means pretending to own a couple of wild animals, I'm willing to make a compromise."<sup>19</sup> She first attributes agency and a unique ability to cats, and places herself in a position of obligation to, not expectancy from, the cats. She owes companionship, food, and shelter to them, rather than cats owing the former to her.



17. *Cats (And Their Dykes)*, p. 44

No dear, you can't have a beard, you're a lady.

18. *Cats (And Their Dykes)*, p. 44

19. *Cats (And Their Dykes)*, p. 44

## CAT CALL

She does not believe that animal companionship is intrinsically oppressive or patriarchal, but she concedes that she must pretend to operate under that system. While she knows—or to be uncharitable, misconceives—that she is not replicating patriarchal power structures, she must pretend to do so in order to exist in society. She is in some ways her cats’ “beard,” allowing them to pass as model members of patriarchal society, while in reality, they challenge it. Perhaps queer pet ownership can be understood similarly to gay marriage. Through queer love, lesbians can rehabilitate formerly heterosexual, patriarchal institutions into loving ones.

Yet, there are lesbians who are allergic to cats or simply have no interest in their companionship. The sources considered also do little to imagine what the symbolization of cats does to the animal itself. It is a lot to ask of a kitten to stand for the queer destruction of heteropatriarchal society. These critiques do not cancel out the power of loving outside of one’s species for the queer cause. In a heteropatriarchal society, any meaningful, loving interaction outside of the heterosexual and domestic frame challenges this dominance. For lesbians that identify closely with queerness, as Pulley and the women of *Cats (And Their Dykes)* do, norm-challenging queer relationships form an important part of experience and actualization. By forming relationships with cats through affection, companionship, and direct association, lesbians dissolve the anthropocentrism at the heart of heteropatriarchy, and in doing so queer it profoundly. To love another species is, in some ways, the ultimate queer act because it challenges not only heteropatriarchy, but the norm of human supremacy itself.

T H I S  
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Alegreya, a typeface designed  
in 2010 by Juan Pablo del Peral, and  
printed on thrice-recycled, acid-free  
paper.



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