

Birds Beyond Words: Fantastic Animals and Other Flights of Imagination

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Abstract: In ‘Nature in the Active Voice’, Val Plumwood called for a ‘thorough rethink’ of the logic of domination that has authorized both colonialism and the exploitation of animals (113). But this mandate creates a conundrum: that logic elevates mind over matter and cognition over emotion. If Audre Lorde was right that ‘the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house’ (110), then we are unlikely to succeed in undermining that logic by *rethinking* it. We need practices that will expose the tedious nonsensicality of human supremacy while simultaneously awakening our capacities for empathy, imagination, and full-bodied ecological reasoning. Plumwood noted the power of poetry, but nonverbal methods of cognition and communication such as music, dance, and visual art may be even more vital to the struggle to think truly differently. Underground currents of art and activism including Dada, Tropicália, Afrofuturism, and surrealisms from around the world may offer both instructive and cautionary lessons. Kiwi and other category-defying animals, whose minds are very different from our own but whose ideas may be legible through their ways of being in the world, may be especially important instructors in the praxis of eco-logic.

Keywords: ableism, activism, art, birds, centrism, cognition, ecofeminism, human supremacy, language, logic, music, speciesism, surrealism

One morning at the small chicken sanctuary that would grow up to be VINE Sanctuary, I wobbled into the yards at sunrise and then stopped in my tracks. Rubbing my eyes, I considered the possibility that I was having my first close encounter with extra-terrestrial life. The cartoon creature before me had a tubby body, no neck, and a comically long beak. None of the parts seemed to match the others. It was as if she or he had been drawn by surrealists playing the exquisite corpse game.

Then the being levitated, making an eerie whirring sound before disappearing over the fence and into the marshy woods. Not entirely trusting my own eyes, yet still quite ready to believe I had glimpsed something other-worldly, I returned to my morning chores, filling food and water bowls and then opening coop doors, ducking to avoid being hit on the head by egg factory survivors swooping from their perches to explore the new day.

Consulting a field guide after finishing my rounds, I learned that I had seen neither ET nor a kiwi but a common American woodcock. Like kiwi, whom scholars have called the ‘most aberrant’ of the always anomalous flightless birds (Reid and Williams 301), woodcocks confound our categories. Woodcocks are the shorebirds of the forest, combining the long, thin beak of a sandpiper or oystercatcher with the mottled black-and-brown plumage of other shy denizens of the woods. That mysterious noise I heard wasn’t a vocalization but rather the sound of air whistling through the whirring feathers of a bird lifting off vertically, like a helicopter, as male woodcocks often do on their *singing grounds* during mating season (Dwyer et al.).

Now, this might not seem like much of a story: I once saw a bird who happened to look a bit like a kiwi, and that bird turned out to have some fascinating features. But listen: at that moment, something about the combination of my surprise at seeing such a strange creature and my sleepy, quasi-dreamlike state led me to be entirely open to the possibility that things might be otherwise than I had believed, that things I couldn’t imagine might yet be true.

That disorientation, that *dépaysement*, that readiness to rethink *everything* that you thought you knew, that’s the state we will need to induce – and be willing to enter ourselves! – in order to participate in the ‘thorough rethink’ of rationalism that Val Plumwood (‘Nature in the Active Voice’ 113) believed we need. Because of the entanglement of language and logic, I

think we will need to go beyond words to do so, drawing upon all of our other ways of reasoning and expressing ourselves, many of which may be rusty from disuse. Noticing, admiring, encountering, and learning from nonhuman animals may help us awaken those capacities within ourselves while at the same time giving us practice in the vital work of de-centring and deconstructing ‘the human’.

The Plumwood Problem

Val Plumwood was a philosopher – a professional thinker – who challenged the centrality of rationality to human identity and also enumerated several of the ways in which rationalism leads to harmful social and environmental outcomes. In so doing, Plumwood identified five characteristics of thinking that underlie Eurocentrism, androcentrism, *and* anthropocentrism: radical exclusion; homogenization and associated stereotyping; denial or backgrounding; incorporation; and instrumentalism (Plumwood, *Environmental Culture* 92-122). If we can unsettle those ways of thinking, Plumwood believed, we can undermine the shared structure of several forms of oppression.

She knew this would be difficult, saying that ‘the big question is: Can we think differently? Can what has been stripped out of our conception of the material world be put back?’ (‘Nature in the Active Voice’ 124). I will discuss some artists and activists who have tried to do this over the past hundred years, often motivated by analyses striking similar to those of Plumwood. My hope is that doing so will motivate us to go beyond words ordered rationally, because I doubt very much that we will be able to *think* our way out of rationality.

Which brings me to what I call the *mind-ass problem*. Every day, on my way to graduate school, I used to walk past a psychedelic mural of the Funkadelic album entitled ‘Free Your Mind... and Your Ass Will Follow’, which includes a song of the same title. That would remind me of a different Funkadelic song, ‘One Nation Under a Groove’, which suggests that we ‘dance our way out of our constrictions’, thereby freeing our minds by way of our asses. And so, I would continue on to classes in clinical psychology, wondering which tactic might work best.

As usual, when confronted by either/or binaries, I concluded it was both. I still believe that. And so, in order to free our minds in the ways that Plumwood wanted, we may need to free ourselves *from* our minds. In other words, in order to do a truly thorough rethink, we will need to rethink thinking.

Rethinking Thinking

The rational reasoning that, for many people, forms the very basis of both humanity and individual identity, is but a subset of a subset. Rational reasoning is but a small subset of conscious thought, which itself is but a small subset of cognition.

Let's dispense first with the Aristotelian and Linnaean notion that reasoning defines the human species. While most humans *can* sometimes engage in the kinds of conscious calculations known as rationality, this is but one of many cognitive capabilities common to members of our species and is not universal. Furthermore, members of many other species also are capable of reasoning. To define the human by means of a particular capability that is neither confined to humans nor possessed by all humans is both speciesist and ableist.

The descriptor of humans attributed to Aristotle, *zōon logon ekhon*, is typically translated to mean *the living being having logic* but is also sometimes understood to mean *the living being having language* (Doxtader 453). If language rather than reason is the claim for human exceptionality, the same problems remain: the claim is both false and injurious, harming all who communicate by different yet equally complex expressive methods (Jones 72-78).

These are well-established points that I and others have elaborated elsewhere. My interest here is on the harm done to those who *do* both use and define themselves by reason and/or language. Just as conscious reasoning is but one kind of cognition, communicating by means of sound symbols strung in logical sequences is but one of many means of communication of which we may be capable. Over-reliance on either may stunt our ability to collectively solve problems – including the climate emergency that threatens us all.

Here are some of the consequences of the elevation of rationality and its associated means of communication to the status of hallmarks of humanness:

Over-estimation of our rational capabilities. Humans often fail to follow the rules of logic, even when we believe we are doing so. (See *Heuristics and Biases* by Gilovich and colleagues for numerous examples of the kinds of logical errors toward which human cognition tends to trend.) When we falsely believe our own intuitions to be the results of pure reason, we may take useless or counterproductive actions. When we falsely believe *others* to be capable of pure reason, we may rely upon syllogisms when more heartfelt forms of persuasion might be more useful.

Over-estimation of the role of rational thought in making choices. Humans often choose based on non-conscious beliefs or inclinations and then generate ex post facto rationalizations for those choices. ‘We are multiplicities, pursuing disparate goals that are obscured from consciousness’ (Levy 119). When we mistakenly believe our own rationalizations, we lie to ourselves. Imagining other people to be rational actors leads to follies such as economic theories that presume that ‘economic agents are omniscient about their own preference orders, their budget constraints and the attainable set of outcomes’ (Rosenberg 361).

Over-estimation of the role of conscious thought in determining behaviour. People vary considerably in the degree to which their behaviours reflect their conscious choices. While the mismatch known as *cognitive dissonance* – a perceived divergence in beliefs vs. behaviour – does tend to trouble people, rationalization and other cognitive stratagems tend to be less effortful than changing behaviour and are therefore frequently the favoured response to such discomfort. While some people can and do change their behaviour after being alerted to discrepancies between their stated values and actual behaviour, others do not. Thus, even when rational argumentation leads to changed opinions, this may not lead to changed behaviour. When we rely exclusively on argumentation to change minds, assuming this will change behaviour, we may miss more material opportunities to motivate change.

Existential confusion about who we are. The misidentification of the human as supremely rational not only denigrates the capabilities of other animals but also confuses us about ourselves. This confusion often goes much deeper than the errors described above. Many people are in the habit of considering the subset of cognitive processes of which they are aware to be their very selves, thereby inadvertently relegating the rest of themselves to the category of other. Given that these self-declared selves are not only partial but also prone to confabulation, this represents a substantial error that can lead directly to delusion. Let that sink in for a moment, no matter how insistently the you that is reading this claims to be your one true self.

Subordination of other aspects of the organism. In addition to falsely claiming the mantle of *self* for only themselves, our conscious selves tend to treat our larger-than-conscious selves in much the same way that humans treat the larger-than-human world.¹ They imagine themselves to be independent and in charge when in fact they are dependent and woefully ignorant. They see themselves as the heroes of their self-told tales, treating muscles and sensations as mere tools or backgrounds. Because they are minds that cannot apprehend the material processes from which they arise, they value mind over matter.

Undervaluation of other capabilities. As they aggrandize themselves, our conscious selves valorise their own cognitive and expressive capabilities, denigrating or ignoring other ways of thinking and communicating.

Atrophy of other capabilities. Because our conscious selves do, in fact, exercise *some* control over the behaviour of the organism, their disdain for other ways of thinking and communicating can lead to neglect of those potential methods of problem-solving. Lack of practice can lead to atrophy.

Can we think differently? Yes, but we will need to forge new neural pathways while strengthening others that have been dormant. I mean that literally – to think differently we will need to *think* differently. We won't be able to argue ourselves into it. Other methods will be necessary. Luckily, artists are already offering alternative avenues and have been doing so for centuries – often in response to the same problems Plumwood wrote about. So, let's take a quick spin through art history for instruction and inspiration.

Pacific Surrealisms

'Logic is a complication. Logic is always false. It draws the superficial threads of concepts and words towards illusory conclusions and centres.' No, that wasn't Plumwood writing in the early 21st century, that was Tristan Tzara in the 1918 howl of outrage known as the *DADA Manifesto*.

World War I dislocated the bodies and minds of the Europeans who were its perpetrators and primary victims. Tanks, airplanes, and machine guns mechanized warfare as never before: 40 million people killed or wounded in four short years. Surviving soldiers shadowed the streets of European cities, their makeshift masks mimicking eyes and noses melted by poison gas, crude wooden arms and legs replacing those blown off by bombs.

Out of the carnage came Dada, a movement of artists, writers, and musicians dedicated to unmasking European civilization. Dadaists staged disturbing cabaret shows, recited poems of senseless syllables, composed disorienting collages of words and images, caricatured militaristic nationalism, and painted vividly surreal depictions of everyday life in a world made mad by madness.

Although primarily remembered as a progenitor of surrealism, Dada was not an aesthetic movement. 'Dada is a protest with the fists of its whole being engaged in destructive action', said Tzara, the Romanian poet who composed the Dada Manifesto, and he meant it. Many Dadaists staged protest events and contributed words and images to the dissident publications of their day. All aimed to disrupt complacency in the face of atrocity.

In retrospect, Dada's provocations may seem tame or quaint, but they were deadly serious. They'd been undone by war and – unlike most people today – they *knew* it. They knew that returning to normal could only lead to more of the same. They were desperate to interrupt the rationalized non-sense that led directly to mechanized killing.

They failed. Europe lurched inexorably into another world war marked by mechanized killing. Concentration camps. Atomic bombs.

'Like everything in life, Dada is useless', said Tristan Tzara in his 'Lecture on Dada' in 1922. In general, presumptions of futility tend to become self-fulfilling prophecies. My guess is that Dada's uncanny replication of nightmarish nonsensicality expressed the helpless anguish of wartime all too well, leaving people even less likely to imagine a way out. As Robin D.G. Kelley has noted, truly revolutionary artistic practices 'compel us to relive horrors and, most importantly, enable us to imagine a new society' (9).

And yet. Somehow, their howls echoed around the world, merging, harmonizing, and standing in atonal counterpoint with those of other artists whose works would have more material political impact, such as Caribbean Surrealists and Brazilian Cannibalists.

As Elisa Veini writes:

More interesting than to ask who was influencing whom and where the whole avant-gardist lot originated, I think, is to view the Brazilian Cannibalist modernism and the European Surrealist and Dadaist avant-gardes as twin movements or parallel streams that were each developing in their own particular context, while ideas – and artists – traveled back and forth between Europe and Latin America. (232)

Poet and novelist Jayne Cortez refers to surrealism as a tool (Kelley 187), and nowhere has that tool been deployed more effectively than in the Caribbean. In the introduction to his collection of surrealist writings from the Caribbean, Michael Richardson refers to surrealism in the region as 'a generalized revolt against the very foundations of Western civilization' (3). That meant rethinking thinking. 'Aristotle's logic? A practice of things and corpses', wrote surrealist René Ménénil from Martinique in 1945, 'Thought is bio-logical or not at all' ('Evidence' 150). In

1943, feminist and anti-colonial writer and activist Suzanne Césaire wrote that ‘The most urgent task was to liberate the mind from the shackles of absurd logic and so-called reason’ (‘Surrealism and Us’ 124).

This project included a reorientation to the larger-than-human world. ‘You have encircled the globe’, wrote Aimé Césaire in 1944, ‘You have yet to embrace it. Warmly’ (119). Suzanne Césaire wrote that we ‘can only guess at the uncomplicated loves of the fishes’ (‘The Great Camouflage’ 157). In 1945, René Ménéil said something that I have heard so many modern-day ecofeminists and animal advocates say: ‘If only we could awaken, if only we would awaken suddenly, as the sleeper does, to what is all around us’ (‘Humour’ 162).

This was a *political* project with real, material aims. In a 1933 article on the ‘Antifascist Significance of Surrealism,’ Pierre Yoyotte argued that leftists have ‘failed to understand... the political importance of collective emotions’ (42). The potential political impact of surrealism was demonstrated in Haiti in 1945, when a lecture by a visiting surrealist ignited a series of events that ultimately led to the fall of the government (Richardson 20).

At around the same time in the United States, a musician by the name of Herman Blount moved to Chicago (a hotbed of surrealism) and began recording music that, like the interventions of the Caribbean surrealists, was intended to enable new kinds of collective emotions. Better known as Sun Ra, this innovative composer and bandleader would perform and record until his death in 1993.

Comparing his own works to more standard compositions, Sun Ra said:

It was always about human emotions that everybody could feel, but it was just a repeat thing. It wasn’t bringing people any new emotions, you see, although they got a wide range of emotions that they never used, a lot of feelings they never felt. (Szwed Chapter 3)

A vegetarian who said ‘I am a little afraid of normal people. Their greatest desire in life seems to be to maim and destroy either themselves or others’ (Szwed Chapter 2), Sun Ra consistently and repeatedly said ‘I’m not a human’ (Szwed Chapter 1).

Sun Ra's project of reshaping humanity by using nonverbal means to enable new ways of thinking and feeling was entirely consistent with what Plumwood prescribed and exemplifies what I am arguing we need urgently to do today. And it works! While I cannot confirm or deny new feelings, I can report that I am indeed able to think differently when certain Sun Ra recordings are cued up on repeat. (For those who would like to test this for themselves, I have included a playlist among the recommended resources that follow this text.) I imagine that his performances, which were happenings including dance, lights, and chants, were even more powerful. Certainly, 'Sun Ra and his Arkestra inspired other Afrofuturists' (Kelley 31) whose own work in numerous artistic realms continues to provoke people to imagine otherwise.²

Inspired in part by Dada and surrealism, as well as by innovative jazz musicians such as John Coltrane (who himself was influenced by Sun Ra), members of the Situationist International of the 1960s devised *détournement*, in which artifacts of the dominant culture are detoured to make them expose their own lies. Like artist George Grosz, who pasted Dada phrases on Berlin shop windows, making himself an enemy of the Nazi state, Situationists scrawled slogans in surprising places, hoping to catch passersby unawares. But, unlike the defeatist catchphrases favoured by Dadaists, Situationist slogans voiced the unspoken desires that underly despair: 'Under the paving stones – the beach!'³

In his book *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, Situationist Raoul Vaneigem described the 'situations' he and his comrades sought to create in terms that echoed both Sun Ra and earlier Caribbean surrealists. Like jazz, Vaneigem said, situations were improvisations in which new ways of thinking and feeling might arise (195).

'Our ideas,' the Situationists believed, 'are on everybody's mind' (Wark 156). Maybe they were right. Certainly, their sentiments helped to inspire the Parisian worker-student uprising of May 1968, which had both immediate and long-lasting impact in France.

At the same time in Brazil, artists and musicians associated with the *Tropicalismo* or *Tropicália* movement were practicing a different kind of *détournement*. According to musician Caetano Veloso, 'We took what was kitsch – what was considered bad taste – and we placed it in a more sophisticated repertoire' (Velasco and Dunn 121). In response, the military dictatorship imprisoned, tortured, or exiled them, or locked them up in psychiatric institutions.

What was so subversive about Caetano Veloso, backed by the rock band *Os Mutantes* (The Mutants) singing ‘É Proibido Proibir’ (It is Forbidden to Forbid) while swishing his hips? Did the authorities know that was a Situationist slogan? Did Veloso’s long hair and girlish movements threaten the masculinity upon which family and nation depended? Or was there something more?

At first, the Tropicálists were opposed by the left as well as the right because they looked like US hippies and played electric guitars (Dunn). But Tropicália was not another example of US pop culture eating the world. Quite the contrary! The founders of Tropicália self-consciously enacted *Antropófago* (cannibalism) as outlined by Brazilian poet Oswald de Andrade in 1928. Inspired both by stories of triumphant native Americans eating invading Europeans and by the Dada journal *Cannibale*, Andrade promoted *Antropófago* as a process by which dispossessed people become stronger by taking in the products of more powerful cultures and making them their own (de Andrade).

Tropicálists went a step further, incorporating not only the products of the powerful but also those of other oppressed peoples and then blending all of that with indigenous Brazilian artistic, literary, and musical forms. They did so with an energy that made people feel free, winning over those who had booed them for their electric guitars. Their hybrid glee mocked the rigid cultural nationalism of the dictatorship even when their lyrics were about Carmen Miranda. This was a revolution people could dance to. It had to be shut down. Brazil’s military dictatorship weathered hurricane Tropicália but was ultimately unable to hold its ground against the sea change signalled by that tropical storm. Tropicálist Gilberto Gil became Brazil’s Minister of Culture in 2003.

Introducing the Plumwood 5+2

And so, I introduce to you the Plumwood 5+2, which sounds like an old-school hip-hop combo but is just my spin on five of Plumwood’s precepts plus two of my own. In her book subtitled *The Ecological Crisis of Reason*, Plumwood both critiqued centrist logics and showed the many ways in which they lead to injurious, and therefore irrational, outcomes. She also offered

potential antidotes, which we all can use today in whatever forms our work might take.

However, these might not be enough. Hence, my two addenda.

The five elements of centrist thinking that Plumwood elaborated in *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* are: radical exclusion, homogenization and associated stereotyping, denial or backgrounding, incorporation, and instrumentalism (92-122).

Plumwood also had ideas about how these might be undermined. Let's now imagine how we could draw upon the spirit and praxes of the movements just discussed for that task. I also think that we need to undermine the hegemony of rationality itself and that we won't be able to do any of this unless we expand our own other-than-rational capacities, so I will offer some ideas about those two aims as well.

1. **Radical Exclusion** results from drawing a bright line between humans and other animals (and between culture and nature). To counter radical exclusion, Plumwood called for 'emphasizing human continuity' (111) with the other-than-human world in order to 'challenge or disrupt human conceptions of identity' (112). This might be done in any number of ways in verbal, visual, or performance arts, as well as in creative activist tactics. Pause for a moment to imagine it.

2. **Homogenization and Stereotyping** occur when humans lump the multitudinous and diverse elements of the larger-than-human world together as 'the environment' or reduce all animals to automatons motivated only by instinctive imperatives, such as the drive to reproduce falsely ascribed to all animals by heteronormative biologists. Noting that 'terms like "nature" lump seals and elephants along with mountains and clouds', Plumwood suggested emphasizing 'nature's amazing diversity' to counteract homogenization and stereotyping (112). Again, this might be done in any number of ways in verbal, visual, or performance arts as well as in creative activist tactics. Pause for a moment to think about some marvellously unique feature of one of your favourite animals. Now, imagine at least three ways that an artist, scholar, or activist might mention or highlight this so as to provoke the same feelings you feel when you think of it.

3. **Denial and Backgrounding** occur when people perceive the larger-than-human world as mere background to the endeavours of humans, simultaneously denying our dependence on plants and other animals for oxygen, calories, and other essential elements of our very existence. In order to counter the denial and backgrounding, Plumwood felt it would be necessary to ‘puncture the Illusion of Disembeddedness’ (112). This is surprisingly easy to do, merely by encouraging an audience to take a deep breath while reminding them that they are imbibing the exhalations of algae and trees. That tends to create a pleasant feeling of being held by the larger-than-human world, but I can imagine other interventions that might provoke a more distressing recognition of human frailties.

4. **Incorporation.** In order to challenge incorporation, a key element of which is the definition of the Other by way of reference to the allegedly both normal and superior One, Plumwood felt it would be necessary to ‘displace the deeply rooted traditional view of non-human difference as lack’ (112). Again, there are so many ways that reminders of the utility and delight of difference might be incorporated into verbal, visual, or performance arts, as well as creative activist tactics.

5. **Instrumentalism.** In order to counter instrumentalism, in which elements of the larger-than-human world are reduced to mere resources or tools for human use, Plumwood called for more attention to ‘nature’s own creativity and agency’ (113). ‘Forget the passive machine model’, she said, ‘and tell us more about the self-inventive and self-elaborative capacity of nature, about the intentionality of the non-human world’ (‘Nature’ 124). Such stories might be easily woven into scholarly, artistic, and activist endeavours of all kinds. How might you highlight animal agency in your own work? Imagine it!

Please note that all of these elements of centrist thinking are active not only in anthropocentrism but also in ethnocentrism, androcentrism, and similarly oppressive logics. Thus, similar antidotes might be used to help undermine racism, sexism, ableism, and other forms of bias among humans.

6. Rationality Itself. Even Plumwood, who critiqued rationalism, sometimes seemed to believe that thinking would be our primary tool for undoing the hegemony of rationality. I suggest that we had better augment her prescriptions with tactics drawn from the history of counter-logical activist/artistic movements discussed above. Recall that ‘surreal’ means *more* real. As Plumwood noted, ‘our human-centredness weaves a dangerous set of illusions about the human condition right into the logic of our basic conceptual structures’ (‘Nature’ 114). What better way to help humans set aside such illusions than a turn toward the more real? For ideas about how to engineer such a shift, see the recommended practices and resources that follow this text.

7. Ourselves. It’s not just that conscious, rational thought is inherently limited in what it can conceive. It’s also that our capacities for imagination and our ability to reason in other ways must be presumed to be stunted. It’s one thing to say, ‘Yes, we should think differently!’ It’s another to become able to do so.

You may find that some of the exercises used by surrealists, such as automatic writing or drawing, loosen your associations sufficiently to allow new ideas and emotions to emerge. You may find that listening to Sun Ra does, as he had hoped, produce in you altogether new emotions. Because some poets take words apart and put them back together again differently, reading (or writing!) experimental poetry might, counterintuitively, help to loosen the stranglehold of words on your cognition. Drawing rather than describing your thoughts also can be useful in bringing new insights to light (Kantrowitz 2-15). See the recommended practices and resources that follow this text for more ideas.

Many of these practices can and should be collective rather than individual. I’m imagining an animal liberation movement and associated animal studies associations where, instead of demonstrating their capacity for self-sacrifice by enduring decades-long dreary meetings, activists – *and* scholars! – analyse problems by drawing and devise strategies by dancing.

Bringing ourselves into heartfelt and awestruck relationships with fantastic animals might also help to spark our imaginations while dampening our hubris.

Fantastic Animals

As Plumwood said, animals and other elements of the larger-than-human world are ‘presences to be encountered on their own terms’ (*Environmental Culture* 112). This can be difficult to do when the presumption of human supremacy patterns your perceptions. At the same time, those humdrum human misconceptions mean that most people are walking around ready to be wowed.

Of course, flamboyantly non-categorical animals like kiwi or emus can prompt people to rethink what they thought they knew (Jones ‘Derangement and Resistance’). Similarly, animals with unique capabilities such as sonar, echolocation, or underwater engineering can prompt awe. Octopi and other shapeshifters can leave people agape, as can any other animals whose ways of being in the world feel alien to humans.

But we need not turn to breathtaking examples to alert people to the wonders they encounter every day. Fantastic animals aren’t always elsewhere: they live in our neighbourhoods. Pigeons can detect the magnetic field of the Earth (Hopkin). Bees teach their offspring to waltz (Grandoni). Snails are molluscs of the earth, devouring detritus and leaving behind frass rich in nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium as they aerate the soil they help to create. What if the ‘land acknowledgements’ currently used by some scholars and activists to recognize the first humans to inhabit the lands from which they speak were broadened to acknowledge the land itself, along with all of its co-creators? In what other ways might we routinely remind humans of their dependence upon and relationships with an astonishing array of other beings?

In the co-creation of habitats and communities, other animals and their floral friends are always ‘thinking’ ecologically, in the sense that their perceptions and cognitions are attuned to the world beyond their bodies. Attuning ourselves to their multitudinous methods of solving problems might help us to become better able to think eco-logically, in the sense of using all of ourselves to perceive and respond to systems, whether they be ecosystems or our own interconnected systems of injustice.

Beneath the Paving Stones — The Beach!

The self-constituting creativity of ecosystems surrounds everyone, if only we would notice. Every modicum of earth contains multitudes, all interacting in ways that make our own lives possible (Nardi 47-236). Perhaps the persistent underground river of in some way surrealist art and activism might offer some avenues for making this underground more visible. The Situationists did, after all, inspire Parisians by reminding them of the pleasures smothered by concrete constructions (Marcus).

Some animal advocates are already working along these lines. I think of Lynn Mowson's powerful evocation of the voice of a cow ('Bloodlines') and the fabulous Duck Lake intervention of Yvette Watt and her colleagues, who blared Tchaikovsky from a boombox while flamboyantly dancing on a floating platform on a lake at sunrise on the first day of duck hunting season in Tasmania, simultaneously saving the lives of ducks that day and drawing media attention to their opposition to the hunt (Gallasch). I recall the activists in the United States who did something similar, using paddleboats rigged out to look like giant bathtub rubber duckies (Chorush). More recently, I've seen news of business-suited men suckling from life-sized fiberglass cows and hoped that city-dwellers happening upon such activist-art installations experience the same sort of mind-opening surprise I felt when I saw the woodcock.

Just thinking of such interventions makes me feel more alive. My memories of similar actions in which I have participated are especially vivid. Even when the action was the equivalent of an aside or one-off amidst an allegedly more substantial campaign, the impact was palpable.

People want to feel more alive. That wish for vividness might be our way in. If there is a defining feature of our species, it may be the behavioural plasticity that allowed us to colonize so many different habitats, devising so many different ways of eating, clothing, and housing ourselves as well as so many different kinds of artistry in the process of forging so many diverse cultures. If so, it is at least possible that people, collectively, can become otherwise than the currently dominant modes of being-in-the-world. And, if the Caribbean surrealists were right that those modes are deadening, people would want a way out, if only they knew that other ways of being were possible.

‘Our ideas are on everyone’s minds.’ That situationist slogan might apply to us, too. Just as they aimed to activate already-existing dissatisfaction with capitalism and tap into longing for less alienated relationships with other people, those of us who advocate for animals can call to already-existing wishes for fuller and better relationships with the larger-than-human world. It’s lonely at the top! We can help humans step off of their self-constructed pedestals, thereby becoming better able to enter into more equitable and satisfying relationships with each other and other animals.

When speaking of VINE Sanctuary to civic organizations in our small North American town, I try to remember to mention the wonders of local flora and fauna along with the happenings among sanctuary residents. For example, I often mention that turkeys co-created these forests in cooperation with beavers long before our species of great ape evolved on another continent. I wish I could convey to you the evident awe and delight with which audiences of everyday people greet such news. I’ll sometimes mention some small thing I noticed that day, such as how vivid the lichens on the trees have become due to recent rains, in the hope that my own evident delight will spark attendees to be more attentive to such wonders themselves.

These are just a couple of examples of how easily anybody can incorporate Val Plumwood’s suggestions into their ongoing academic, artistic, or activist work. As she wrote, ‘There are many ways we can challenge anthropocentric culture, and all of them are urgent’ (Environmental Culture 4). I hope that anyone who is inspired by these words to do so by means of surrealism or other sideways strategies will do me the favour of sending me news of how it goes.

Notes

¹ See my contribution to the forthcoming *Routledge Handbook to Gender and Animals*, edited by Chlöe Taylor for extended thoughts on this quasi-colonial internal configuration.

² See, for example, Ko, 'Creating New Conceptual Architecture: On Afrofuturism, Animality, and Unlearning/Rewriting Ourselves'.

³ This Situationist slogan, first scrawled on walls in Paris in 1968, continues to be deployed by anarchists and other artists around the world.

Recommended Practices for Thinking Differently

for Individuals

Here are some tips for putting the intention to think differently into practice.

- Offer your eyes, ears, and other sensory organs a variety of stimuli. Listen to a wide variety of genres of music. Dance along if it moves you. Music without words (or in languages you don't know) may be particularly useful in overcoming over-reliance on words. Go to museums and other places where your eyes can see things they haven't seen before.
- If you are lucky enough to live in or visit a place where dance performances happen, go to as many as you can. Try to let the movements speak to your body without translating them into words.
- If you are a writer, read George Orwell's 'Politics and the English Language,' which is widely available online. Learn how words and phrases, applied too quickly, can inhibit clear thinking. Use his tips for avoiding this outcome. Most importantly, follow the precept to try to get what you want to say clear in your mind *before* trying to find the words to say it. Similarly, find the arc of the story you want to tell before outlining the sections of an essay or book.
- Think with a pencil (or crayon or pen). Sketch, map, chart, or otherwise draw the problems you are trying to solve.
- If you are physically capable of doing so, write by hand rather than typing on a computer whenever possible. This will allow gesture, which is often guided by emotion or unarticulated thoughts, to be part of the process.
- Learn to draw, and in so doing you will learn to see both shapes and details you might otherwise have missed.
- Whatever the main purpose of a text, action, or artwork might be, try to do one or more of the things Plumwood recommended along the way.

- Walk or roll wordlessly in the woods as often as possible.
- Move your body in as many different ways as possible.
- Use blocks of other objects to allow your hands to think three-dimensionally.
- Spend time with other animals in ways that do not involve controlling or categorizing them.
- Get to know all of your neighbours of all species. Regularly wonder what they are doing, thinking, or noticing.

for Groups

- Be mindful of the tendency of groups to defer to their most verbally adept members and take active steps to avoid that outcome.
- Create opportunities for participation in multiple mediums.
- Sketch, map, or draw together when strategizing.
- Dance or play-act a problem you are trying to solve. Try it both with and without words.
- For fun, and to uncover insights the group might already possess without knowing it, use variations on the Exquisite Corpse game to collectively author or construct texts or assemblages.
- Collaborate with other groups in ways that offer possibilities for cross-pollination.

Recommended Resources

Texts

Inspiration

These volumes contain surrealist, situationist, and otherwise otherwise writings. Read them not only for education and inspiration but also to allow them to work their magic on your own brain.

All That Is Evident Is Suspect: Readings from the Oulipo, 1963-2018 edited by Ian Monk and Daniel Levin Becker (McSweeney's, 2018) collects surreal-ish writings of the *Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle* (workshop for potential literature), often disclosing the praxes by which they were created. You may also wish to investigate the *Oubapo* (workshop for potential cartooning), *Oupeinpo* (workshop for potential painting), and *Oucarpo* (workshop for potential cartography).

Black, Brown, & Beige: Surrealist Writings from Africa and the Diaspora edited by Franklin Rosemont and Robin D. G. Kelley (University of Texas Press, 2009) collects poetry and prose by writers of African descent across decades and continents.

Dada Almanac edited by Richard Huelsenbeck (Atlas Press, 1994) offers the most complete collection of Dadaist writings.

Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century by Griel Marcus (Harvard University Press, 1989) is a narrative rather than an anthology but is so richly illustrated with images and extended quotations that it serves a similar purpose as it maps what the author perceives as an underground stream linking several of the movements I've discussed here with other subversive happenings, such as punk rock.

Refusal of the Shadow: Surrealism and the Caribbean edited by Michael Richardson (Verso, 1996) offers a rich array of writing from the region where surrealism was most politically impactful.

Situationist International Anthology edited by Ken Knabb (Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981) collects situationist writings from across the globe.

How-To

Work through the exercises in one or more of these volumes to enliven yourself (and possibly change the structure of your own brain) while learning to incorporate non-verbal methods in your writing and thinking processes.

Drawing Thought: How Drawing Helps Us Observe, Discover, and Invent by Andrea Kantrowitz (MIT Press, 2022) is a neuroscience-informed guidebook offering scores of exercises designed to unlock thoughts, feelings, and insights.

Oulipo Compendium edited by Harry Matthews and Alastair Brotchie (Atlas Press, 1998) collects stratagems used by members of the Oulipo to generate sometimes surprising texts by imposing constraints on the writing process.

Syllabus by Lynda Barry (Drawn & Quarterly, 2015) offers a plenitude of practices and exercises that collectively sharpen perceptions while loosening associations.

What It Is by Lynda Barry (Drawn & Quarterly, 2008) demonstrates how to enliven writing by using drawing to unlock gesture, memory, and emotion.

Recordings

Bloodlines by Lynn Mowson is a brain-changing experience in itself and also offers numerous examples of how arts can be incorporated into activism. Watch it here:

<https://youtu.be/Xe4uiMQkHc4>

The *Sun Ra Parrot-Approved Playlist* created by me in collaboration with the parrots known as Harvey and Wiley collects tracks that both I and the birds find stimulating. Use the track list below, or go to <https://music.apple.com/us/playlist/sun-ra-parrot-approved-playlist/pl.u-r2RYquDPz75> (Apple Music) or

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/6GgUKO6L9JkPvop6tP9QgJ?si=24bdb97c7def4a07> (Spotify) to listen online.

Sun Ra. 'Adventure in Space'. *Singles: The Definitive 45s Collection, Vol. 1: 1952-1961*.

Sun Ra and His Arkestra. 'Ancient Aiethopia.' *Jazz in Silhouette*.

Sun Ra, 'Bassism'. *The Futuristic Sounds of Sun Ra*.

Sun Ra & His Astro-Infinity Arkestra. 'Body and Soul.' *Holiday for Soul Dance*.

Sun Ra and His Arkestra. 'El Is a Sound of Joy'. *Super-Sonic Jazz*.

Sun Ra. 'Fate in a Pleasant Mood.' *Fate in a Pleasant Mood*.

Sun Ra. 'Interplanetary Music No. 1.' *Interstellar Low Ways*.

Sun Ra and His Arkestra. 'I'll Get By.' *Some Blues but Not the Kind That's Blue*.

Sun Ra. 'Lights on a Satellite.' *Fate in a Pleasant Mood*.

Sun Ra. 'Lullaby for Realville.' *Jazz by Sun Ra*.

Sun Ra and His Arkestra. 'Motherhood.' *Transitions 3*.

Sun Ra and His Arkestra. 'My Brother the Wind.' *To Those of Earth... And Other Worlds*.

Sun Ra. 'Over the Rainbow.' *Somewhere Over the Rainbow (Beyond Saturn)*.

Sun Ra. 'Planet Earth.' *Sun Ra Exotica*.

Sun Ra Arkestra. 'Queer Notions.' *Swirling*.

Sun Ra. 'Spontaneous Simplicity.' *Sun Ra Exotica*.

Sun Ra. 'Springtime Again.' *Sleeping Beauty*.

Sun Ra and His Arkestra. 'Where Is Tomorrow?' *Transitions 3*.

Sun Ra. 'Where Pathways Meet.' *Lanquidity*

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Acknowledgments

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