

FIFTEEN

LGBTQ . . . Z?

Kathy Rudy

In this essay, Kathy Rudy uses queer theory in general, and the thought of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in particular, to rethink our attitudes toward, and conceptions of, having sex with animals. Rudy's general argument is that our prohibition on having sex with animals depends on a more or less firm notion of what sex is. But, according to queer theory, we have no such firm notion because sex and sexuality are much more diffuse and pervasive than such firm notions have us believe (this is, of course, in line with queer theory's general questioning of all fixed concepts, conceptions, and definitions—see Kim Q. Hall's essay in this volume, "Thinking Queerly about Sex and Sexuality"). Thus, we have reason to question the prohibition on having sex with animals. More positively, Rudy also argues that our deep connections with animals (she uses her relationship with her dogs as an example) has the potential to change both parties to the relationship: the human being is no longer only human and the animal is no longer only animal. With such changes, Rudy seems to suggest, the big divide between human beings and animals might be somewhat bridged, with crucial implications for our beliefs about the wrongness and rightness of having sex with animals. Her conclusion seems to be not so much that sex with animals is sometimes not morally wrong but that it is no simple matter to divide our relationships with animals into "sexual" and "nonsexual," and that loving animals teaches us new ways to advocate for animals and to think of human exceptionalism.

Kathy Rudy is professor of women's studies at Duke University. She is the author of *Loving Animals: Toward a New Animal Advocacy* (Minnesota, 2011), along with earlier books and articles on ethics, sexuality, abortion, reproduction, natural birth and death, other animals, and on how these subjects trace each other in the frame of biopolitics. This essay was first published in *Hypatia*, vol. 27, no. 3 (2012), 601–15. It is reprinted here with the permission of Kathy Rudy and *Hypatia*.

I think many adults (and I am among them) are trying, in our work, to keep faith with vividly remembered promises made to ourselves in childhood: promises to make invisible possibilities and desires visible; to make the tacit things explicit; to smuggle queer representation in where it must be smuggled and, with the relative freedom of adulthood, to challenge queer eradicating impulses frontally.¹

I start my thinking with two conflicting and competing realities. The first is the pervasive social taboo against bestiality and zoophilia; the act of sex with animals is so prohibited in contemporary American culture that it is often difficult to speak of such things in public. This is interesting. Humans can kill animals, force them to breed with each other, eat them, surround them, train them, hunt them, nail them down, and cut them open for science, and, for the most part, the humans who perform those acts can be thought of as normal, functioning members of society. Yet having sex with animals remains an almost unspeakable anathema. Indeed, it was Peter Singer who first proposed in his 2001 essay "Heavy Petting" that, from the animals' point of view, having sex with them wasn't nearly as harmful as killing or torturing them.² Although he condemned all sex acts where animals were killed, he brought up the interesting point that in many cases, animals appear to initiate sex, to have erections, to seek out genital intimacy, and so on. Why, then, in this most intimate domain, is our use of animals most vociferously condemned?

The second reality that needs to be taken into consideration for this essay is the burgeoning pet culture in America of the last thirty or so years. Humans have never been closer to their pets, or spent more time or money on them.³ Part of me would like to see these new developments as seeds of transgression, or early markers of the demise of human exceptionalism. That is, in one sense the intense relationships some of us have with pets could itself be disruptive of the human-oriented world most of us inherited. Although I completely recognize that the vast majority of humans who participate in relationships with their pets don't recognize those relationships as transgressive, part of me would like to claim that for them anyway. It's not that the family dog is himself a paradigm-shifting entity, but the massive scale of pet culture could signal a shift that many of us humans have indeed fallen in love with someone besides ourselves.

But we don't think of pet culture that way at all. For the most part, pet animals are add-ons to postmodern, consumption-based, globalized life, not paradigm shifters. The easiest answer, and one that I will circle around and around in this essay, is that pets are not really threatening to twenty-first-century American life precisely because of the deeply ingrained taboos against bestiality. After all, we may love them, but we don't really love them, right? We don't ever view our love of animals as transgressive simply because the activities of bestiality and zoophilia seem so unthinkable. Loving animals is safe, for most of us, because it is

not "that." As Midas Dekkers aptly expresses it, "the high regard in which love for animals is held is matched only by the fierceness of the taboo on having sex with them."⁴

Enter queer theory. At the most cursory level, queer theory persuasively teaches us that sex itself is difficult to define; sexuality pervades many different levels of many different relationships; and sexual identity is famously unstable. Sex is an energy that can be tapped into but never nailed down. So in relation to bestiality, queer theory points out that the "that" that is performed between humans and animals by necessity must remain unnamed. Stated differently, the widespread social ban on bestiality rests on a solid notion of what sex is, and queer theory persuasively argues that we simply don't have such a thing. The interdict against bestiality can only be maintained if we think we always/already know what sex is. And, according to queer theory, we don't.

To tell this part of the story well, I need to reveal the event that prompted me—in the middle of writing a book about animals and ethics—to return to queer theory as a central organizing theme: that event was the death of Eve Sedgwick in the spring of 2009. Eve was a mentor to me when I was a grad student at Duke, and a wise senior colleague when I joined the faculty there. I found myself rereading some of her books after her death as a way to invite her to be more present in my life, as a way for me to remember her well. To my knowledge, although Eve mentions bestiality and zoophilia in passing, she never turns her wise and clever gaze completely on the subject. The rest of this essay, then, is something of a thought experiment connecting Eve's insights about queerness and sexuality with my own obsessions about animals. It has been exceedingly fun to write this for her.

Studying with Eve Sedgwick as a young scholar was like adding a new and different dimension to the feminist theory I brought with me to grad school. Before Eve, I rummaged through liberal, radical, and socialist theories of gender to make arguments about the importance and value of women in the world. Before Eve, gender was pretty much an unchecked constant in my intellectual landscape; it was the thing I worried over all the time in every context but never really saw because it loomed so large. In looking back on that time, I lived in a very two-dimensional world where the things that "made" gender (and feminism) went more or less unstudied.

Exploring feminist theory with Eve was like stepping into an IMAX 3D movie for the first time. I wasn't just watching the movie of gender anymore; I was in it and could see behind and beneath the structures that before had been utterly flat. Eve was a different kind of feminist; she cared about all the regular things the rest of us cared about, but she also cared about how gender itself was made. In watching the world through her eyes, I got to see a differently inflected reality; it wasn't the case, as I had previously thought, that gender came first and then sexual prefer-

ence flowed from there. Rather, all of our identities stemmed, in part, out of our desires. To be sure, lots of feminists before Sedgwick noted that gender was “socially constructed.” From de Beauvoir to Barrett and many others, we already knew that gender was made, but from those perspectives it mostly looked like society or culture or language or something outside us pressed down on us like cookie-cutters and made us into men and women. With Eve, the thing that made us gendered also came from inside of us. It came in the way we identified outside ourselves, it came in the way we desired an other and made ourselves into a person who could be in relation to that particular other; it came in the ways we loved. Our realities are made for us through the worlds and meanings available to us, but they are also made by the connections in the affective realm. Whom we loved mattered, not just as a point of feminist justice but also because that process of love contained the seeds of world-making.

I was a lesbian when I knew Eve at Duke back in the 1990s. I had “come out” in my early twenties, and it was an identity that almost fit for a long time. Well into my thirties I tried very hard to make that description of myself work for me. For ten years I “settled down” with one partner, focused on family life, “owned” only two dogs and one cat (with no fenced yard). I tried very hard to be reasonable about the animals; I would put them in kennels when we traveled and lock them in bedrooms when we entertained. But when I wasn’t with them I was miserable. It was like they carried a piece of my heart, and when they were not involved in some function or activity, a part of me wasn’t present, either. Eve knew of these predilections and always encouraged me to think about them in a positive frame. Claiming a solid “gay” identity never felt right to Eve, and she filled the world with feminist queer theory to explain why “being woman” or “being gay,” although certainly not wrong, wasn’t quite right, either. Nor was “being lesbian” quite right for me, mostly because my mind was always on the dogs. From as far back as I can remember, dogs have been the most vibrant, colorful, and important players in the landscape of my life. When I was a child, they were my very best friends. Soon after Eve left Duke, I found myself single, and in part due to her influence, I decided to pay serious attention to these intense feelings I had toward animals. Like the epigraph that opens this essay, I wanted to return to a childhood promise to make my relationships with them more visible and explicit.⁵

For me, paying attention to that childhood first love of animals was possible only as a result of Eve’s formulation of theory. In her world, gender and sexuality were terribly messy and unwieldy constructs, and she was absolutely delighted when they could be rendered even messier and more unwieldy. Had she lived, reaching outside the boundaries of the human would have been the next logical step in her feminism. Following Eve, I filled my new house with six rescues of various shapes and

sizes, and multitudes of fosters looking for new homes. People think I am crazy. But I have never ever been happier.

So here I sit with my six dogs, wondering, from the theory-world Eve bequeathed to me, what could it mean to love animals? What does it mean to make myself in relation to the love I have for these dogs? How do they help me construct my gender, my class, my race, the inward, internal topography of identities and desires that connect me to the world? How does living inside this 3D, big-screen movie with dogs all around me look to the rest of the world? How does it feel to the dogs themselves? And how does it look to me, inside it?

There is not an adequate name for the kind of life I lead, the way my desires organize themselves around animals. In the first half of the twentieth century, the heterosexual public either detested or felt sorry for women who were named by the then emerging category “lesbian.” They thought that the only women who would ever choose lesbianism were ugly, or unfeminine, or somehow lacking in the ability to capture a man. Now, on the other side of gay rights, feminism, and queer theory, such ideas seem silly or quaint, almost forgotten. But can people like me even hope for such liberation, when choosing animals as partners or companions doesn’t really even have an adequate name? At best, we fall under the radar of identity and are named (wrongly) as gay or straight, single or married, parents or childless. Our most important relationships, though, are never recognized. At worst, we are pitied. Like those early lesbians, people “feel sorry” for us because we can’t seem to sustain “real” relationships with “real” people.⁶ I came out as a lesbian nearly twenty-five years ago, and although that was hard on friends and family who were homophobic, the task of coming out as a lesbian was a piece of cake compared to coming out as—what?

I know I love my dogs with all my heart, but I can’t figure out if that love is sexually motivated. Queer theory has schooled me in ways that make the question of what counts as sex seem rather unintelligible. How do we cordon off sexual desire from all the other desires that move our lives? What does sex mean? Do I think I am having sex with my dogs when they kiss my face? How do we know beforehand what sex is? I get more affection from my dogs than I ever did from any girlfriend. We all always sleep together, sometimes under the same blankets when it’s cold. When I was gay, was I gay because of a narrowly defined genital act that I performed with a person who happened to be another woman? Those words don’t make any sense to me. I was gay then, I believe, because I chose to share my emotional, financial, and daily life with a person of the same gender. Now I choose to share that same life with six dogs.

Although I am not arguing that living with pets is necessarily a life-shifting paradigm, I am suggesting that the number of people who find community and communion with domesticated animals has both risen recently and become more visible. In a queer frame, this phenomenon is

extremely interesting, as it—loving animals—could constitute a new way of being with another species. Put differently, queer theory teaches us that it's not really a question of whether we have "sex" with animals; rather, it's about recognizing and honoring the affective bonds many of us share with other creatures. Those intense connections between humans and animals could be seen as revolutionary, in a queer frame. But, instead, pet love is sanitized and rendered harmless by the presence of the interdict against bestiality. The discourses of bestiality and zoophilia form the identity boundary that we cannot pass through if we want our love of animals to be seen as acceptable.

In American public culture today, conversations about bestiality and zoophilia exist in four different locations.⁷ I want to look briefly at those positions, and then move to analyze them through the lens of queer theory. Ultimately, of course, my argument is not *for* or *against* humans having sex with animals, but is a meditation on both the elusive nature of sex itself and the subjectivities of human versus nonhuman animals. The line policed by the fear of bestiality is about more than just what we can or can't do with our pets. As we shall see, it helps to form the very architecture of human exceptionalism.

The first two sites I speak about are (1) "bestiality" and (2) "zoophilia"; both exist mostly on the Internet, where sex with animals is portrayed more or less as a form of pornography. Acts are performed either by objectifying animals to the point where they are treated as props for certain sexual encounters (bestiality) or, conversely, by endowing animals with human characteristics, such as the desire to express love for their humans through sexual intimacy (zoophilia). The third site is closely associated with (3) "animal rights," where sex with animals is strongly condemned because animals are seen as needing protection from human manipulation in general, and sex with them can never be anything but a misuse of human power. Finally, sex with animals is discussed in (4) "mental health" literature, where the context is almost always therapeutic intervention; these therapy-based works reflect a dominant cultural notion that sex with animals needs to be "cured" because it's simply not normal. Attitudes and arguments from these four venues gives us unique vantage points to think about what sex is and what animals are.

On many bestiality websites (1), the dominant orientation toward animals really supports and adheres to the idea that animals are nothing more than forms of property. On these private, for-pay websites, animals are dressed up, stimulated, filmed from angles that don't show their faces or their expressions. They are, in short, props or tools to aid the human-centered sexual experience.⁸ In the logic of these practices, sex with these "things" is no more wrong than sex with other "things," such as dildos, blow-up dolls, and so on. In these settings, sex acts don't happen "between" humans and animals; rather, humans are simply using animals for their own pleasure and fantasy. For these bestialists, it doesn't matter

if the animal lives or dies as a result of this activity; the goal here is human pleasure. Examples of using animals as things include inserting rodents into a human rectum for pleasure, or beheading chickens and other birds at the point of orgasm to intensify the convulsions of the sphincter, or withholding food and fluids from dogs for long periods of time so they will lick and swallow various human secretions and excretions. From this point of view, such bestial practices aren't wrong because animals have no subjectivity, no self-interest. After all, we kill them to eat them or because we don't want them infesting our homes, why not use them for a little sexual pleasure first? Here, humans occupy a place in the world that is unrivaled.

A counterdiscourse emerges within the realm of pornography that portrays sex between humans and animals differently. Self-described zoophiles (2) argue that humans involved in loving relationships with animals are distinct from bestials; for zoophiles, animals are not "things," rather they are full and equal partners in sexual discovery. Zoophilia, they say, does not involve animal cruelty; it's not about hurting animals for human pleasure but about loving animals to pleasure both the human and the animal. In this frame, animals are not only not "things" but also capable of entering into something like a partnership with humans, for love and for sex. Indeed, in loving relationships, zoophilists suggest, animals can experience such a robust subjectivity that they not only give consent to sexual acts but also can initiate those acts, communicate desires for specific kinds of pleasure, and even opt out of sex if they so choose. In this perspective, animals aren't less-than-human pieces of property; they become something very close to human. From a zoophile's perspective, although nonhuman animals don't use spoken or written language, they can communicate their sexual desires in a myriad of ways. Here, nonhuman animals are elevated to the level of human subjectivity and granted the kinds of characteristics usually reserved only for humans.

On the other side of the debate, the taboo against sex with animals is secured and reinforced by two unlikely bedfellows. Possibly the strongest admonition against bestiality and/or zoophilia comes from the discourse of animal rights (3). For theorists committed to a platform that releases animals from "enslavement" by humans, humans and animals having sex is always and unconditionally wrong simply because animals cannot give consent. Much like children, prisoners, or slaves, they say, animals are subject to such coercion that they cannot participate in meaningful sexual encounters. It's not a question of pain or pleasure, but simply that by the very nature of their lack of agency, they cannot give consent to such acts. Partly it's a question of lacking a common language, but according to many animal rights theorists, even if we suddenly were able to communicate with nonhuman animals, sex between humans and animals would be wrong because animals are not authors of their own

worlds. Piers Beirne calls all sex between human and non-human animals "interspecies sexual assault" and argues "animals are beings without an effective voice."⁹ Essentially, most people in the animal rights movement think that because animals are powerless and voiceless, sex between humans and animals is always wrong.¹⁰

Finally, most material addressing both bestiality and zoophilia from psychological perspectives (4) reflects disgust at the idea of human/animal sex. In these essays and books, the desire to have sex with animals is seen as abnormal and in need of cure. The most liberal approaches try to explain how someone came to develop a predilection for bestiality, but I found no therapeutically based literature that advocated for acceptance of these practices. In each essay, there is the unquestioned perception that such behavior needs to be corrected. There seems to be a general sense of disgrace in wider American culture that fuels and reinforces the need for therapeutic resolution. This taboo on sex with animals is a powerful force that also functions, I suggest, to help us differentiate ourselves from animals very well. In the interdict against sex with animals, animals emerge as figures over which we define our superiority. In other words, maintaining the ontological boundary between humans and animals requires us to feel disgusted by breaches of that boundary, most especially around the issue of sex. Our psychological approaches operationalize this boundary by "curing" those who cross it.

I've mapped the four sites as a "pro and con" diagram above (two in favor of sex with animals, but from different positions, two opposed to sex with animals, but also from different positions). But in an interesting way, the pro and con sides of the argument also act as mirrors for each other's ontologies. That is, bestialists (1) and therapists (4) both see animals as "less than human"; whereas bestials use this less-than status as the reason to accept sex practices with animals ("who cares what happens to them, they are just things"), many therapists see sex with animals as degrading to the humans because animals are less than us ("we belittle humanity to engage in sex with unworthy creatures"). Similarly, zoophiles (2) see animals as equal or equivalent to humans, and therefore think sex with animals is fine as long as it's not abusive, painful, or degrading; animal rights activists (3) also see animals as equal or equivalent to humans, but because animals are so highly regarded, many activists believe that animals need protection from human domination (much the way children or mentally handicapped people need protection from those who would abuse them).

If Eve Sedgwick had written about sex with animals, I bet she wouldn't be interested in validating any of the four orientations. She would want to know how the four views compete with one another, and on what grounds they share in their common definitions about subjects and practices. She would want to know how we ended up in a world where these frameworks constructed our only options. She would want

to know how the categories themselves came into being, how they rub up against one another, how they overlook and obscure many aspects of life filled with animals. Eve would ask how we organized ourselves such that animals have to be either just like us or not like us at all, and thus have no value. She would want to know how it was possible that all animals can exist in one category. She would want to examine how our perceptions about the gender of animals both construct and reflect our perceptions about the gender of our selves. Are there other ways to think about animals other than "equal to us" or "less than us"? Are there ways to think about sex with animals other than in terms of right or wrong? What is it that can't be said? What other realities do these four positions obscure?

It's worth noting just how much slippage exists among positions that try to define themselves against one another. What looks different on the surface may be similar underneath (and vice versa). Eve addresses the way the subject positions of gay men and lesbians do or do not relate: "There can't be an a priori decision about how far it will make sense to conceptualize lesbian and gay male identities together. Or separately."¹¹ The same is true, for example, for the distinction between bestiality (1) and zoophilia (2). Although zoophiles try to distance themselves from bestials, the two occupy similar domains on the Internet, and I suspect many viewers care little about the affective relationships zoophiles advocate. They are lumped together in the therapeutic literature, and also by the condemnatory discourses of animal rights. A whole series of questions emerges to blur the distinction: How can we be certain about what kind of bond exists behind the sex? How does one know beforehand the difference between bestiality and zoophilia? Is a woman who becomes sexually aroused riding a horse a bestial or a zoophile? What if she gets aroused only on the back of one particular horse? Can emotional bonds exist, say, between a farmer and the livestock he is about to slaughter for meat? Although killing animals in the act of sex is more associated with bestiality, what if the sex and the killing are separated by periods of days or weeks or years? Can you love someone and still kill her?

Slippage and condensation occur on the other side of the divide as well. Although animal rights activists intend only to protect animals from human abuse, in their interdicts against human/animal sex, they also shore up the psychosocial position that human sex with animals is somehow abnormal. Both positions oppose sex with animals, and in doing so they perform a kind of violence on animals by lumping them all together into one seamless identity.

Here is Eve on the question of human identity categories: "People are different from each other. It is astonishing how few respectable conceptual tools we have for dealing with this self-evident fact. A tiny number of inconceivably coarse axes of categorization have been painstakingly inscribed in current critical and political thought: gender, race, class, na-

tionality, sexual orientation are pretty much the available distinctions."¹² With these words, Sedgwick opened up not only the study of sexuality but also the study of human identity to attend to complexity and messiness. I want now to extend this insight to nonhuman animals. If, as she argues, the available tools to categorize humans are paltry, the labels associated with animals are downright crude. Although the discourse of species recognizes certain biological differences between animals, most humans categorize animals only in the broadest strokes: as pets, livestock, or wild animals. These categorizations are slippery: a given species can occupy multiple categories (for example, feral cats, wild horses, and pet pigs all come to mind). Our method of categorizing animals is not only blunt but also famously unstable. Thus, mostly we refer to all of them as "animals."

The problem with both the animal rights and the psychotherapeutic positions is that they want to make universal rules for all animals, and in so doing sacrifice the richness of particularity. They advance an agenda that produces the human/animal duality as firmly and narrowly as the homo/hetero binary. They crowd all animals into one categorical way of thinking and tell us, even if subconsciously, that humans and animals occupy different ontological realms, that one is EITHER human OR animal—never neither, never both. It's precisely the same logic that forces us to conform to the homo/hetero binary.

What I am trying to introduce here is the possibility that as human and nonhuman, animals share an intensely bonded life together, we are all becoming something new, something part human, part animal, a part of one another. Both antisex positions rest on the idea that all humans are different from all other animals, and the wall between them can never be breached. Like the way we used to think of race and gender "identity," these positions contend that one's species rests on physical markers that are immutable, that belonging to the categories of "animal" or "human" is grounded in a biological essence untouched by culture. Positions that universalize all animals—even if allegedly to improve their lives—are unable to explore heterogeneity and fragmentation within each category.

Put differently, both animal rights (3) and psychosocial perspectives (4) do not believe that borders can be crossed. Queer theory, on the other hand, tells us that few of us have stable identities anymore, that borders are always crossed. We're all changing, shifting, splitting ourselves up this way and that. It labels these processes "hailing," "suturing," and "interpolation"; where once we saw ourselves affiliated in a certain way, a new interpretive community emerges to capture our passions and move us differently. I am asking the reader to entertain the possibility that the same kinds of shifts and disruptions happen with categories like "human," "rabbit," "ape," or "dog." As the result of our relationships, interpolations occur; my dogs and I have changed each other such that I am no longer human and they are no longer only canine. For these partic-

ular dogs and this particular person, something rather magical has happened to alter not only the way we perceive but also the way we live in the world.

In keeping with queer theory, I am asking the reader here to imagine the possibility that certain kinds of relationships can undo even the strongest and most trenchant categories. No one would deny that, as a result of their physical differences, my dogs experience the world differently than I do (for example, they hear better and smell better, but they can't read or write, and so on). But using only those experiences to invoke a unitary and stable world with unbridgeable boundaries for them (what we call species) completely discounts the other experiences they have had as a result of living with me, of us being a family together.¹³ They know what my words mean, even if they can't write or speak. I've learned to be much more attuned to smell and sound and other shifts of energy that are hard to put into words. These experiences matter because they change us all.

Detractors of pet keeping might call this kind of life sad. We are investing in these creatures, they think, because we cannot "find" a human person to love. But from my perspective, it looks completely different. These majestic, wonderful beings are not empty ciphers; they have needs and desires that they communicate to me in a myriad of ways, and in listening and responding to them, I am not only changed but also fulfilled. They help me carry my burdens and increase my joys. I know I am content when they rest soundly at my feet. It's not so much that I am not a lesbian, then—it's that the binary of gay and straight no longer has anything to do with me. My preference these days is canine.

Collectively, the four positions tell us that it's perfectly fine to love animals, to sleep with them, to cuddle with them, to enjoy their bodies in a myriad of ways, but if we have "sex" with them, we immediately locate ourselves in the dangerous territory of bestiality. As Dekkers notes:

If you drop the requirement that for sexual contact something has to be inserted somewhere and that something has to be fiddled with, and it is sufficient simply to cuddle, to derive a warm feeling from each other, to kiss perhaps at times, in brief to love, then bestiality is not a deviation but a general rule, not even something shameful but the done thing. After all, who does not wish to be called an animal lover?¹⁴

But without a coherent and agreed-upon definition of sex (which queer theory persuasively argues is impossible), the line between "animal lover" and zoophile is not only thin but also nonexistent. How do we know beforehand whether loving them constitutes "sex," and how can sex be so dangerous if it is so nebulous and undefined? In other words, the sense of danger associated with human/animal sex emerges as a result of a cultural anxiety about our own animality. That is, if we do "that" (leav-

ing “that” unnamed and unrepresented), we will lose something about what it means to be human, to be superior.

Indeed, Dekkers, along with Alphonso Lingus, argues that sex itself turns us humans into animals, that in orgasm, animality saturates every pore and gene and bone of our being. As Dekkers claims, “Every sexual encounter is a breaking of bounds, an intrusion into an alien realm, every sexual encounter retains a whiff of bestiality.”¹⁵ Both of these authors argue for the pervasiveness of bestiality by insisting that it underlies all acts of love; in making love even to a fellow human, we are always encountering an animal or animalized other. Although this is clearly an interesting idea, my claim is slightly different. I’m not so much arguing that through sex we all become animals, but more that in deep connection, we all—humans and animals alike—become something different. The very contours of stable identities shift under the revolutionary power of love.

My point, then, is not to make something called bestiality more visible but, by using animal love in various permutations, to disrupt the stability and superiority of human identity. Convincing love stories between humans and animals—such as J. R. Ackerley’s *My Dog Tulip* or Mark Doty’s *Dog Years*¹⁶—do just this; that is, they don’t tell us of an identity called bestiality but show us a world transformed by human/animal love. Such love destabilizes what we think we know about sex, what we think we know about gender, and what we think we know about being human. It can lead to what Margaret Grebowicz calls “an inscription of a wholly new imaginary of animality and the condition for the possibility of new imaginaries of gender.”¹⁷ It can also lead, I think, to a different imaginary of what it means to be human. As Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks articulates it, “The ethical questions that follow [bestiality] entail an intervention at the level of the fundamental fantasy of being human.”¹⁸

Animals are emerging in the academy as a newly legitimized subject matter, and it’s not a moment too soon. At no point in history have humans used animals like we’re using them in America today. Factory farms crank out three pounds of meat per person per day from twenty billion food animals who function literally as flesh machines; thousands of breeders offer inbred, often aggressive, damaged pets for sale on the Internet and in pet stores every day; millions upon millions of homeless pets are killed every year in shelters across America simply because they lack homes, and we humans don’t want to deal with them in our communities; the black market in exotic animals from chimps to tigers to wolves crosses through zoos, laboratories, and collectors of all sorts; and the numbers of animals maimed and killed for the testing of products and pharmaceuticals is almost double what it was twenty years ago. In terms of sheer numbers alone, the situation for animals in America today has never been more dire. Something Eve wrote reflects the urgency that I now feel toward these questions. She was writing, of course, about the

homo/hetero boundary, but I take the liberty here of inserting my own agenda (and I hope wherever she is, she won’t mind): “An understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern [human/animal definitions].”¹⁹

Thinking about bestiality/zoophilia and the human/animal boundary is a good way into a larger discussion of these urgent problems, but only if we subject bestiality/zoophilia to the scrutiny of feminist queer theory. That is, we need to ask a set of questions that problematizes the limited subject positions we allow animals to occupy, and opens the conversation about sex itself onto a wider territory: What do we mean by sex? What kinds of ideologies accompany a worldview that separates all human animals from every other living thing on earth? How can we bridge this gap sexually, metaphorically, and literally? How can we deploy a discourse of sexuality that grants animals agency and fulfillment? How can we make a more fulfilling world for ourselves and for other animals? What do sex, animals, and sex with animals contribute to this world-making? Perhaps a preliminary answer to some of these questions lies in a refiguring of my title: L, G, B, T, Z, and, overarching all of them, Q?

In Loving Memory of Eve Sedgwick

NOTES

1. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), 3.

2. Peter Singer, “Heavy Petting.” *Nerve*. February 14, 2009. <http://www.utilitarian.net/singer/by/2001----.htm> (accessed January 2, 2012).

3. Much has been written on the recent rise of pet culture in America; a full survey of that material is beyond the scope of this essay. See Donna Jeanne Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003); Katherine C. Grier, *Pets in America: A History* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); and Heidi Nast, “Critical Pet Studies?” *Antipode* 38:5 (2006), 894–906.

4. Midas Dekkers, *Dearest Pet: On Bestiality* (London: Verso, 1994), 149.

5. Of note here is a delightful chapter titled “Why the (Lesbian) Child Requires an Interval of Animal: The Family Dog as a Time Machine,” in Kathryn Stockton’s *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2009). She writes, for example, “The family dog is not just a pet. It is a metaphor for all that is loyal, familial, and family-photogenic” (90). Although I like the ways Stockton talks about the importance of animals in the life of a queer child, my goal in this essay is to make the family dog into something much more present than a metaphor.

6. See, for example, Heidi Nast, “Loving Whatever: Alienation, Neoliberalism, and Pet-love in the Twenty-first Century,” *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* 5:2 (2006), 300–327.

7. Throughout human history, of course, the vast majority of discussions around bestiality existed in the twinned realms of moral theology and juridical practices.

Interdicts against bestiality go as far back as the book of Leviticus, or farther, and are brought forward in court cases involving bestiality up through the Western seventeenth century. In most of these cases, events, and rules, bestiality is used as an attempt to regulate sexuality more generally, and all formed the foundation of the long-standing taboo we have inherited. In claiming that bestiality today resides in four locations, I do not mean to diminish the historical record at all. Rather, my point is that the taboo against bestiality is so widely accepted today that neither the church nor the courts need to involve themselves in policing it. Iterations of popular culture manage to accomplish this policing just fine on their own. For historical works on bestiality, see John Canup, *Out of the Wilderness: The Emergence of an American Identity in Colonial New England* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1990); Jonas Liliequist, "Presents against Nature: Crossing the Boundaries between Man and Animal in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Sweden," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1:3 (1991), 393–423; Richard Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution in Early America: Gender Relations in the American Experience* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); and Jens Rydstrom, *Sinners and Citizens: Bestiality and Homosexuality in Sweden, 1880–1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

8. For an excellent feminist analysis of bestiality pornography, see Margaret Grebowicz, "When Species Meat: Confronting Bestiality Pornography," *Humanalia: A Journal of Human/Animal Interface Studies* 1:2 (2010), 1–17.

9. Piers Beirne, "Rethinking Bestiality: Towards a Concept of Interspecies Sexual Assault," *Theoretical Criminology* 1:3 (1997), 317–40, at 323.

10. It's interesting to note that many formulations of animal rights secure their arguments based on the similarity of humans to nonhuman animals. As Tom Regan writes, "We understand their behavior because we understand ourselves and our behavior. . . . There is somebody there behind those canine eyes, somebody with wants and needs" (*Empty Cages: Facing the Challenge of Animal Rights* [Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004], 55). One might ask animal rights advocates why we couldn't also know their wants and needs in relation to sex.

11. Eve Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1990), 36.

12. Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 22.

13. Eve wrote extensively on this question of family, and as a result I am somewhat hesitant to insert it here, unproblematicized. The term sets up a hierarchy where heteronormative coupling resulting in human children is "natural," and every other social arrangement gains legitimacy only insofar as it can argue its likeness to "the family." Nevertheless, recuperation may be possible. As Eve writes, "It's been a ruling intuition for me to disengage the bonds of blood, of law, of habitation, of privacy, of companionship and succor, from the lockstep of their unanimity in the system called 'family'" (*Tendencies*, 6). I take her to mean that her familial affections were not ruled by blood ties or marital contracts, that they floated outside these domains in ways that were unpredictable and queer. It's only in this sense that I want to make family with my dogs.

14. Dekkers, *Dearest Pet*, 149.

15. Dekkers, *Dearest Pet*, 3. For a similar analysis, see Alphonso Lingus, "Bestiality," in *Animal Others: On Ethics, Ontology, and Animal Life*, edited by Peter H. Steeves (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1999), 37–54.

16. J. R. Ackerley, *My Dog Tulip* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1956); Mark Doty, *Dog Years: A Memoir* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007).

17. Grebowicz, "When Species Meat," 14. Of course, I do not mean to suggest that feminist theory in general, or even in its queer inflections, embraces or should embrace bestiality. Many feminists would disagree. See Carol Adams, "Bestiality: The Unmentioned Abuse," *The Animal's Agenda* 15:6 (1995), 30–31; Carol Adams and Josephine Donovan, eds., *The Feminist Care Tradition in Animal Ethics: A Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press), 2007; and Colleen Glenney Boggs, "American Bestiality: Sex, Animals, and the Construction of Subjectivity," *Cultural Critique* 76 (2010), 98–125.

18. Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks, "Being Human: Bestiality, Anthropology, and Law," *UMBR(a)* 1:1 (2003), 97–115, at 112.

19. Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 1.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Try to clearly state the main claim(s) that Rudy is arguing for in her essay, and the main reasons she provides in its support. What, exactly, does queer theory contribute to the claim and the argument? (In answering these questions, read the essay in this volume by Kim Q. Hall, "Thinking Queerly about Sex and Sexuality.")
2. Is it true that the ban on bestiality depends on a clear notion of what sex is? Why can't one argue, "We don't know what sex is, but we don't need to know what it is to know that some sexual activities are wrong, including sex with animals"? Would a comparison to other sexual acts considered wrong help Rudy's argument or undermine it? Moreover, why does Rudy frequently write that it is impossible to define sex "beforehand"? Why "beforehand"? Might there be confusion here between conceptual issues and causal ones? (See Study Question 9 for Kim Q. Hall's essay in this volume, "Thinking Queerly about Sex and Sexuality.")
3. Take seriously people's attitude of feeling sorry for those who have relationships only with animals. On what beliefs is such an attitude based? (Consider the uniqueness of human/human relationships, emotional bonds, reciprocity and recognition, empathy, etc.) Can this attitude—or one similar to it—be justified? Can it be justified despite everything that Rudy says to counteract it?
4. Can animals consent to sexual acts with human beings? (In answering this question, make sure to read the other essays in this volume on consent, especially the one by Alan Wertheimer.) If they can consent to other activities with human beings (can they?), why not to sex?
5. Rudy maps out two axes reflecting our attitudes toward sex with animals, one axis supporting sex with animals, the other prohibiting it. Each axis, however, contains opposite reasons for the support and for the prohibition (thereby leaving us with four "sites" of such attitudes). Explain the two axes fully and what role they play in Rudy's overall argument. And, in the spirit of what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick would have thought, are there ways to combine two or more of these four sites of the axes? Are there options additional to them?
6. Try to make sense of the following two sentences by Rudy: "It's not so much that I am not a lesbian, then [when she is in a relationship with her dogs]—it's that the binary of gay and straight no longer has anything to do with me. My preference these days is canine."

In connection with this, read the brief criticism of Rudy's claim given by Kim Q. Hall in her essay "Thinking Queerly about Sex and Sexuality" in this volume.

7. Rudy states, "The sense of danger associated with human/animal sex emerges as a result of a cultural anxiety about our own animality. That is, if we do 'that' (leaving 'that' unnamed and unrepresented), we will lose something about what it means to be human, to be superior." Is this true? Might there be better (or simply other) explanations for this taboo on sex with animals? (Consider: Many human groups have believed that they were superior to other human groups, even that they were more human than them [or just that the other group was not human, period], without ceasing to have sex with them. Indeed, having sex with them was often a way to assert their superiority.)
8. Rudy states that "my dogs and I have changed each other such that I am no longer human and they are no longer only canine." Indeed, her main claim is that "in deep connection, we all—humans and animals alike—become something different"; our "stable identities shift" because of the love connections. What does she mean by this claim? Is Rudy here making an ontological claim about what it means to be human and animal? If yes, would this take the teeth out of her daring (albeit never fully explicit) suggestion that sometimes human-animal sex might not be wrong? (Does she suggest this, even if implicitly?) If in such deep relationships the boundaries of being human and being animal changes, would the boldness of her suggestion diminish?
9. There seem to be two argumentative strategies in Rudy's essay. The first is to keep fixed the categories of being human and of being (a nonhuman) animal, and then argue that because, according to queer theory, we have no firm definition or concept of sex or of sexual identity, we cannot convincingly maintain the prohibition on sex between human beings and animals. The second strategy is to start with the idea that love or deep connection between human beings and animals has the potential to change both parties to the relationship (so she does not keep fixed the two just-mentioned categories), and then argue that we must think of our intimate relationships with animals more fluidly, not as either sexual or nonsexual. Can you find textual evidence for these two strategies in her essay? More important, are these two strategies compatible with each other or in tension with each other? If the former, how so? If the latter, why and which strategy is more convincing or successful?