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Book Review: The companion species manifesto: dogs, people, and significant otherness

Heidi J. Nast

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Asian women are located, including a narrow set of temporal and spatial geographies. It is an essential read, and offers a challenge for all geographers engaged with these literatures. The text is a stark reminder of the continuing acceptability of an Orientalist lens through which ethnographies and academic literatures are received, produced and reproduced. *South Asian women in the diaspora* is a collection written by South Asian women within the academy who theorize from a position of being producers and subjects of research within the institutions of knowledge production. This collection offers a critical review of the nature of the racial politics within the academy, and an insight into the sociology of knowledge production from the perspective of the South Asian academic. Here, the heterogeneity of South Asian women's academic interventions are explored, and thus challenge the usually reductive frame of subjective knowledges.

The first key theme within the text is the *objectification, essentialism* and limitation of intellectual agency afforded to South Asian women, reflecting the dynamics of race and the reductive dynamism within academic process. The second theme is the means through which stereotypes of South Asian women's embodied identities are purveyed in familiar iconographic forms. Nayanika Mookerjee examines the aestheticization of the raped woman as being incorporated within masculinist constructions of Bangladeshi nationalism, communicated through icons of nature and landscape. Bakirathi Mani also reviews the form of the South Asian body, within work on South Asian fashions in the West, as being one located in a cultural and homogenizing intellectual cul-de-sac. The third theme of the book is concerned with grounded approaches to South Asian spatial, identity, and participatory politics. In this section Rani Kwale records South Asian lesbian activism, which challenges the heterosexual matrix which structures spatial politics within society. Samina Zahir extends this concern with participatory practices in the context of community arts; here she examines the continued burden of representation played out within the political landscapes of community arts projects. This burden is expressed effectively by the editors in their development and promotion of a productive dialogue with social theory and practice within and outside the academy. Here, the gaze of those Othered is returned, and a variety of new lenses of academic enquiry are borne through new research trajectories and epistemological challenges.

Lancaster University

DIVYA TOLIA-KELLY

The companion species manifesto: dogs, people, and significant otherness. By Donna Haraway. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press. 2003. 100pp. \$10.00 paper. ISBN: 0 97175 758 5.

In this well-written, well-researched and thought-provoking essay, Haraway argues that a human's cross-species 'companion' relationship with a dog can tell and teach something profound about the importance of recognizing the facticity of difference and, hence, how to engage with 'significant otherness': 'Contrary to lots of dangerous and unethical projection in the Western world that makes domestic canines into furry

children, dogs are not about oneself . . . that is the beauty of dogs. They are not a projection, nor the realization of an intention, nor the telos of anything. They are dogs. . .’ (p. 11). For Haraway, cross-species companionship involves recognizing the complexity of all beings, each born into an orbit of different experiences, cultural/species values, abilities, materialities and history. It involves considering both humans and dogs as ‘subjects’, and entails processually taking ‘intersubjective’ notice of one another in ways that lead to trust-filled, meaningful rapport. Such appreciation of, and working attentively with, cross-species differences is something she avers is more easily apprehensible in human relationships with dogs and, especially, dogs bred for particular functional (i.e. work rather than leisure) purposes.

Drawing upon Thomas Aquinas, Aristotle, doggieland listservs, doggie magazines and secondary sources on dog histories and meta-histories, Haraway drives her points home partly through telling us about how she has engaged ‘intersubjectively’ with her two dogs – Roland (an Aussie-mix) and Cayenne Pepper (her pure-bred Aussie) – in agility training. Here, a trainer uses bodily and voice cues to help her pooch run an agility course that typically takes less than a minute to complete, the sport drawing upon these dogs’ histories and abilities as working dogs on ranches and the like. The tight relationship, Haraway tells us, ideally requires dog and trainer to develop a zen-like union, each one deeply trustful and respectful of the other, though not without clearly enforced rules of hierarchy. The success of this intersubjectivity requires, in her borrowed phraseology, ‘ontological choreography’. Using her own and other dog stories, Haraway shows how significant differences can be charted, cultivated and engaged, engagement involving a deep appreciation of a particular dog’s history, a history at times (as in the case of the Aussie) implicated in colonial violences, appropriations and inequality.

Two strengths stand out. Haraway is deeply aware of how ‘dogs’ are complex nodes through which all kinds of biopowers, biosociality, biohistories (and, I would add, ‘bio-geographies’) pass. She also brings her quotidian self to scrutiny through including snippets of her own intensely personal letters and essays dealing with dogs. She also admits at one point that she had always desired to give birth to a member of a species other than human (p. 96).

I was left, however, with a number of wagging racialized and class-inflected questions. What does it mean that middle-class white women dominate agility sports, which Haraway carefully points out? Is it possible to have a respectful ‘intersubjective’ relationship with your canine and still use the dog to track slaves and ‘enemies’ in war? Or would such things be mitigated by learning about and appreciating ‘intersubjectively’ the larger history of violence that often came to emplace dogs in our lives and cultures (e.g. Spanish-derived Merino sheep sent to Australia on colonized land and later shipped to the US whereupon US-derived dogs were developed to corral them). How does Haraway’s message speak to the potential for, and ethos of, cross-species ‘companionship’ in impoverished places (especially in non-Western contexts) where animals (e.g. oxen, the cart-horse, the hunting dog) commonly overwork alongside humans. For what cultures and sectors of society is her message intended?

I am also left with three major questions: First, who is to communicate this radical way of engaging doggie–human relationship, one that does not conflate all dogs with dogs used as ‘pets’ (‘...many pets and pet people deserve respect’ although ‘being a pet seems to me to be a demanding job for a dog, requiring self-control and canine emotional and cognitive skills matching those of good working dogs’ p. 38). My question is salient given that the vast majority of the burgeoning doggie-loving masses support non-radical, mushrooming ‘pet’ industries antithetical, I suppose, to Haraway’s project: witness the proliferation of doggie bakeries, doggie parks, doggie bedding, couture and perfumeries, doggie magazines, doggie insurance plans and the like. Those who buy into these industries do not treat their dogs simply as ‘furry little children’ (e.g. pp. 11, 38, 95). These are actors caught up in post-industrial commodity domains of desire and consumption enmeshed in highly mobile, post-industrial ‘family’ formations in which children are often optional and dogs provide all kinds of alternative functional convenience and affection (you can put them in kennels or the SPCA). Given that Haraway’s meta-knowledge about significant otherness does not travel easily alongside commodity chains, it appears that we would need meta-training schools to teach humans how ethically to engage and think about (only working?) dogs as nodes of much larger historical and material processes (‘Dog people need to learn how to inherit difficult histories in order to shape more vital multi-species futures’, p. 63).

Secondly, if the majority of dog-owners are deeply enmeshed in commodity circuits divorced from the embodied practices Haraway describes, why does she find working dogs to be particularly compelling vehicles for teaching humans about intersubjectivity, trust, and respect – a group of dogs largely inaccessible and unknown to 95 per cent of those living on the planet? Is it only because she happens to own dogs and to engage them in agility training? Is she arguing that dogs hold potential for being the ultimate(?) ‘companion species’ because they are common? Because they’ve been around in history for a long time? Because they are physically engaging, active creatures? Because, unlike birds or turtles, they are proxemic? Thirdly, if we (who the ‘we’ is, is unclear) learn her radical way of knowing dogs, will the world be saved? (‘[In agility training] – both dog and handler have to be able to take the initiative and to respond obediently to the other. The task, is to become coherent enough in an incoherent world to engage in a joint dance of being that breeds respect and response in the flesh, in the run, on the course. *And then to remember how to live like that at every scale, with all the partners*’ (p. 62)). The conservative in me wants to ask how counterhegemonic or recuperative this text is when the level of investment in pet-dogs, especially in post-industrial contexts of privilege soars while the gap between the wealthy and impoverished widens; and the expensive art of agility training remains a largely feminized, ‘white’ and elite one.

De Paul University

HEIDI J. NAST

Encyclopedia of world environmental history. Edited by Shepard Krech III, J.R. McNeill and Carolyn Merchant. New York: Routledge. 2004. 3 vol; 1429 pp. \$495.00 cloth. ISBN: 0 41593 732 9.