BOOK REVIEW

Capture: American Pursuits and the Making of a New Animal Condition. Antoine Traisnel. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020. Pp. 296.

Antoine Traisnel's *Capture: American Pursuits and the Making of a New Animal Condition* is a meditation on the visual epistemology that has governed and given aesthetic form to the extractive conservation of wildlife in the United States since the mid-nineteenth century. Nimbly reinterpreting familiar exempla (Audubon, Cooper, Poe, Hawthorne, Muybridge) with seminal works of media theory and animal-oriented philosophy, each chapter uncovers the tectonic motion of a "biopolitics of vision" (15) underpinning the impulse to apprehend, classify, and replicate (images of) nonhuman animality. At first, the argument goes, animals fell under "the hunt regime"—an optic powered by the projection of national and naturalist sovereignty over prey/specimens that appeared, as if out of nowhere, on speculative grids of settler territorialization. Its successor, "the capture regime" (12–13), would aim to seize a substitutive likeness from the living just as they disappear into habitats desolated by mass extinction and entrapped in invasive systems of biocapitalist population control. Not the pursuit of animals but the captive reproducibility of the animal defines the rule of the latter.

As the capture regime superseded the hunt regime between the 1830s and the 1870s, it dislocated the figural and existential premises of animal representation, Traisnel contends. One result of this rupture—or "sublimation" (4)—was to expose the allegorical landscapes of American wilderness to the space-annihilating effect of economic and photographic mechanisms designed to transmute vital forces into indexical abstractions. Yet, in line with a conservationist ethos, it would also deposit the romance of nature's vanished sublimity in environments it consolidated as reserves of "a

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fragile wildness in need of protection" (34). Joining scholarship at the crossroads of animal studies, critical race studies, and settler colonial studies, *Capture* follows the intermedial relays between the two regimes to unforeseen conclusions, pulling up submerged congruences between the despoliation of animal lifeworlds and the bestialization of dispossessed peoples in America.

Allegories of acquisition lay the groundwork for the speculative containment of national territory narrated in the book's first part, "Last Vestiges of the Hunt." Just as the allegorizing gaze sought to subdue wild animals as figural receptacles for racial anxiety, so would methods of settler oversight preemptively void the sovereignty of Indigenous nations.

In the first chapter, "Still Lifes (Audubon)," the mode of possessive figuration deployed by John James Audubon's monumental watercolor, *Golden Eagle* (1833), is seen to betray a "contradiction between violence and conservation" endemic to Manifest Destiny (46). To retain the symbolic majesty of untamed nature, the ornithologist must fix the bird in a "pictorial rigor mortis" (40), requiring its actual confinement and death. At a time when protocols of scientific collection had not yet shed the rituals of predatory observation employed in hunting, the attempt to elude that contradiction led to a break in the subject-object copresence proper to sovereign knowledge. Audubon thus prefigures, for Traisnel, forms of vision that would mechanically divide the causality of the viewed object from its effect on any given viewing subject.

James Fenimore Cooper's historical romance *The Prairie* (1827) is the central axis of the turn from hunt to capture launched by the second chapter, "Land Speculations (Cooper)." At stake throughout is an account of how blurs in the ascendant regime of capture, typified by the "taxonomic myopia" (69) or selective empiricism behind theories of New World degeneracy, accommodated a settler-capitalist calculus of "possible loss" (64), with lethal repercussions for the "animals and animalized populations" displaced, assimilated, left to die, and forced to survive in the transfer (60). In this sense, the abridgment of visual mastery over these subjugated populations served to extend the drive to survey, enclose, secure, and expropriate land from territories prospectively cleared of prior inhabitants.

Moving from the hazardous peripheries of territorial dispossession to the rationalized milieus of urban surveillance and the aberrant timeframes of anatomy in motion, the book's second part, "New Genres of Capture," looks for the alternative dimensionalities animal/ized figures may express as they run against the causal grain of the capture regime's indexical realism. Less the projected enclosure of these figures than the aleatory dispersion of the signs they leave in their wake preoccupies the third chapter, "The Fugitive Animal (Poe)," a sustained "decryption" (97) of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841). Along the semiotic trails

the story's runaway Ourang-Outang cuts through the probabilistic network of the modern city, Traisnel at first picks up "an allegory of black animality" from allusions to slave law and the biometric procedures of criminal profiling, but ends up exhuming an "allegory of reading" lurking beneath those archives (105). Animal semiosis, he suggests, lodges a sublime emptiness in the foundations of humanist reason that then defiantly resurfaces via stray traces of unmotivated mobility.

Likewise, in the fourth chapter, "Fabulous Taxonomy (Hawthorne)," the instinct is to use a major American fiction—this time Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun* (1860)—to reveal the primacy of animalizing logics to biological racism. Nonetheless, for Traisnel the romance frames an "allegory of taxonomic knowledge" rather than the "parable on the perils of miscegenation" it would represent from a "strictly anthropocentric" perspective (128). Anatomy serves here neither as a totalizing system of timeless homologies (à la Cuvier) nor as a means to insert bodies into the progressive timelines of natural selection (à la Darwin). Instead, it stands for the metamorphic potential of a "strange intercalary time" (145) that draws extant morphologies toward undomesticated "transience" (152) and the "alternative economies of relation" (129) that intervals of evolutionary anachronism enable.

Near the end of the fifth chapter, "The Stock Image (Muybridge)," Traisnel resumes this line of argument to ask after the "ethological and biosemiotic ends" to which Jacob von Uexküll put the "chronophotographic method" developed in the 1870s by Eadward Muybridge (156). Against the capture regime's drive to break the seamlessness of live motion down into units of "fetishized energy" (182) disposed to biopolitically managed reproduction and commensuration within the empty time of commodity exchange, the experiments Uexküll devised would seek to recreate the perceptive and expressive patterns animals compose as they interact with their milieus (*Umwelten*). Animated by the promise that ethology may hold open whatever escape routes animal lifeworlds still carry, this chapter looks to biosemiosis to annotate the phenomenal entanglements these patterns express without in turn feeding them through the mechanistic causality of racial biocapitalism.

A number of questions remain. One set concerns the archive: To what extent is the capture regime "indissociable from the overtly majoritarian status of the white, male, and Euro-oriented canon" this study assembles (5)? Although fairly comprehensive in its critique of man, the readings that propel *Capture* leave us to wonder how masculinity (and modern sex/gender systems more broadly) may be configuring the objects under study—their dramas of scopic mastery, their strategies of colonial negligence, their scenarios of bestial criminality, their dreams of transitional embodiment, their experiments with inhuman sensation, and so on.

Or, conversely, we might ask whether "the ethics of life in capture" (193) must reach its limit in "the recognition of an unbridgeable distance between living beings" (195), and how this ethical model can avoid reproducing a sensorial hierarchy premised, as ecofeminist scholarship has long maintained, on the rational insulation of vision from the affective transfers that bind and move between species, bodies, and ecological surrounds.[1] Minoritarian archives more directly engaged in transcribing the responsiveness of those targeted by apparatuses of capture may be better suited to specifying how exploited populations have sustained ways of living that block, elude, and remain incommensurable with the regime change this study narrates.

Along these lines it is also worth questioning how the biopolitical critique motivating that narrative can move past the analogy between animals and animalized figures toward an account of the infrastructural collusion between the routinized slaughter of wildlife and the ongoing subjugation of racialized peoples. Looking beyond the ideological fit between racist and anthropocentric orders of knowledge, there are moments in *Capture* when the historical conditions of that conjuncture assume a chilling salience—see, for instance, the analysis of how the systematic overhunting of (the) buffalo combined the extermination of native species, the criminalization of "indigenous lifestyles" (83), and the attrition of Native sovereignty in a mutually reinforcing nexus of ecocidal/genocidal domination. Not just the overarching logic of capture but the on-the-ground logistics of the extractive processes it mediates are at issue here.[2] Later chapters hint at but tend not to fully elaborate similar relays when they link the securitization of protected habitats (zoos, cities) to the criminalization of Black fugitivity, or ask how the automation of industrial slaughterhouses fed into technologies of anthropometric control.

1. A version of this argument may be found in Susan Fraiman, "Pussy Panic versus Liking Animals: Tracking Gender in Animal Studies," *Critical Inquiry* 39, no. 1 (Autumn 2012): 96. See too Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010); Eva Hayward and Jamie Weinstein, "Tranimalities in the Age of Trans* Life," *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (May 2015): 195–208; and Kadji Amin, "Trans* Plasticity and the Ontology of Race and Species," *Social Text* 38, no. 2 (June 2020): 49–71.

2. On this point see Lauren Berlant, "The Commons: Infrastructures for Troubling Times*," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 34, no. 3 (June 2016): 393–419; Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); Rafico Ruiz, *Slow Disturbance: Infrastructural Mediation on the Settler Colonial Resource Frontier* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021); and Kevin Coleman and Daniel James, eds., *Capitalism and the Camera: Essays on Photography and Extraction* (New York: Verso, 2021). Also see Billy Ray Belcourt (Driftpile Cree Nation), "Animal Bodies, Colonial Subjects: (Re)Locating Animality in Decolonial Thought," *Societies* 5, no. 1 (March 2015): 1–11.

Our query, then, is this: If the reproducibility of images has come to undergird the reality of life in the age of capture, as Traisnel asserts, then what sorts of counterarchival practices are needed to retrieve a sense of how we might refuse, infiltrate, or dissolve the architectures of renewable extraction that continue to entrap and degrade interspecies lifeworlds? Where may the alternate realities held out by such practices begin to endanger the biopolitical enclosures in which they are reproduced?

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