

You'll all recognize this[slide]: it's the picture that launched a thousand articles about global warming. It ran in *The Sunday Telegraph* [slide], *The New York Times*, *The Boston Globe*, *the International Herald Tribune*, *The Times of London*, and many other papers. It was said to have been taken by Canadian environmentalists and to show a pair of polar bears stranded on Arctic ice that was shrinking due to global warming. It made polar bears the poster animals of global warming, a status they have retained even after the photograph's evidentiary status was thoroughly discredited: it turned out that the photograph wasn't taken by environmentalists, but by a student of marine biology, who did not release the image herself, and who never imagined or intended to convey that she was recording evidence of global warming. Moreover, the photo was snapped in August, at the height of the Alaskan summer, when melting ice is normal. The ice floes pictured were not very far from land, and polar bears are good swimmers. Predictably, right wing anti-environmentalists and global-warming deniers like Rush Limbaugh were quick to use the episode to their own advantage, saying this [quote] "fraud," was "a great little microcosm for the entire global warming escapade."

But the iconicity that the image conferred on the animals did not dissipate. Rather it intensified. Al Gore incorporated the image into his global warming slide presentation, adding a comment that goes to the heart of the image's power and appeal; these "beautiful animals, [said Gore, are] . . . literally being forced off the planet. They're in trouble, [they've] got *nowhere else to go*."

Nowhere else to go. That forlorn phrase evokes a century or more of anguished negotiations with the concept of place, a history of what I have elsewhere called "geopathology," referring not only to the myriad problems of place that have defined the past century of dislocation, but also place as *problem*, as psychological impasse and ideological blind spot. The harsh political realities and the fantastic economic ambitions of the past century produced movements of populations on an unprecedented scale. While millions moved voluntarily, to better themselves, millions more were forced to move, and millions more were simply stranded in refugee camps around the globe, with nowhere else to go. Today, the alarming phenomena of climate change have focused attention on the degree to which these vast human dislocations were also, inevitably, ecological devastations, and that other species have paid an extraordinary price, although it takes a case like that of the polar bears to remind us that geopathology is, especially now, also a zoopathology, a disease of the ties binding humans to the other animals.

The two works I want to discuss today offer divergent perspectives on what we could call a zoögeopathology: the planetary health emergency that is challenging the anthropocentric geographies we have lived by for so long. The works intervene in cultural

constructions of environmental crisis in diametrically opposed ways, but both happen to use the same two figures—polar bears and children—in a way that questions and complicates a provocative formulation offered by French philosopher Jean Baudrillard. In a brilliant and under-referenced chapter on animals in *Simulations and Simulacra*, Baudrillard writes: [slide]: "Animals have no unconscious, because they have a territory. Men have only had an unconscious since they lost a territory." Though Baudrillard's proposed binary, unconscious versus territory, risks falling into the trap of human exceptionalism, which is pernicious even when it is disguised as critique (that is, even when the characteristics identified as setting humans apart from animals are undesirable, as they are here, with the unconscious defined as a repetitious mourning for the loss of a participatory plenitude that Baudrillard calls territory), yet it offers a way into thinking about zoögeopathology as a condition in which the binary of territory and unconscious breaks down and is replaced by an uncanny space of *shared animality*, a space calling for new languages, new behaviors, new mythologies.

The first work is Marina Zurkow's 4-channel video-animation installation entitled *The Poster Children*, in the original a 9 minute loop replaying endlessly, this is a single-channel 3 minute version. [start movie] The piece brings together two figures of the contemporary pop-cultural imagination: the endangered polar bears of global warming and the endangered children of post-Columbine America. Simply rendered figures representing the two groups inhabit the landscape, which consists of a watery expanse broken only by fragmenting ice floes and small islands of electronic waste. Posed disconsolately on their precarious stages, the animals and the children perform a listless and paradoxical drama of destructive survival: the animals ravenously tearing into bloodied flesh, the children compulsively firing guns. A more vivid or more poignant picturing of Al Gore's phrase—"nowhere left to go"—could hardly be imagined, and the fact that the predicament now applies not only to animals but to the most vulnerable members of our own species makes for an instant and uncanny recognition that this a crisis like no other.

These poster-animals and poster-children of possibly lost causes are pictured off-duty in this "anti-Eden," as the artist calls it, [quote] "allowed a break from their ideological duties as mercenary images-for-hire." Temporarily rescued from their jobs as environmental and cultural warning signs in the teeming mediasphere, the children and the animals display the characteristics of victims of trauma, their blank expressions and endlessly repeated actions pointing back to some experience that has interrupted normal growth, affect, and activities. To return to Baudrillard's formulation: the territory they inhabit is saturated with the destructive unconscious impulses of our culture.

The disturbing behavior of Zurkow's characters links them to the characters in the second work I want to discuss today, a piece entitled "Polar Bear God" by performance artist Deke Weaver, which also engages questions of animals, humans, and place. Weaver's account of zoögeopathology involves one member of each of the groups in Zurkow's piece: one specific child and one specific polar bear. This polar bear, too, like those imagined by Al Gore and those clinging to ice floes in Zurkow's piece, has "nowhere left to go." However, while Zurkow's piece literalizes the idea of extreme verges and enforced endgames--through the attenuated ice-shelves and the pointless repetition, Weaver's piece literalizes it by focusing on an actual animal. The bear in this piece is Gus, the most popular "attraction" in New York's Central Park Zoo. A large part of the piece consists of an imaginative reconstruction of what it might feel like to be trapped as Gus is, with literally nowhere else to go. [play DVD from 2:50 to 6:05]

Gus's behavior has a scientific name: those involuntary repetitive movements or sounds are called "stereotypies." Stereotypies characterize what some animal experts call "zoo psychosis;" they are symptoms of the trauma of being kidnapped, displaced, incarcerated, alienated, bored to death. Stereotypies are also, of course, characteristic behavior of people suffering from autism, and the second character in Weaver's piece is a victim of the frightening epidemic of that disease that is sweeping America. [6:10-7:58]. Gus swims back and forth, from rock wall to glass wall, hour after hour, day after day. Ellen's baby boy rocks back and forth, moaning to himself, hour after hour, day after day.

To link the two pathologies of zoo psychosis and autism is not to slight or trivialize the heartbreaking human experience of the victims of the disease. Nor is it to anthropomorphize or sentimentalize the animal's essentially unknowable suffering. Rather, it is to own up to the truth of our shared animality and our shared contingency in the anti-Edens we have been bringing into being. In giving both Gus and Ellen's baby boy the same voice, the same script, in imagining the wronged animal express itself with the moans of the afflicted child, the performer gathers their respective suffering into the attenuated space of his own bodily existence, and tests its capacity for embodied empathy.

The performative significance of Weaver's moaning characters emerges in contrast to a key feature of Zurkow's piece. As disturbing as these figures are in themselves, what makes them deeply disquieting is that they unfold in complete silence. The video installation has no sound track. We hear no shots as the children pull the triggers, no splash as the bullets hit the water, no grunting as the bears tear into the flesh, no buzzing as the flies swarm around the floating piles of electronic waste. The seamless sound-image system of traditional animation—in which the soundtrack turns visual information into meaning and affect—is so entrenched in our experience of this genre that when it is suspended, as it is in *The Poster Children*, the absence feels like an

ominous breakdown, a preamble to a more pervasive and irreversible collapse.

The absence of a sound-track is particularly unsettling in the context of a story of animals and children, two groups whose natural distance from norms of rationalism and discourse has made them favorite targets of an investigative and rationalist humanism seeking to justify and impose its account of reality above all others. Baudrillard's analysis of this ideology recognizes the central role it assigns to language. To install itself at the normative center of reality, says Baudrillard, modernity must render all its Others—including children and animals—discursive. [slide] It must make them give up the silence that so threatens us with its intimations of autonomy, of distance and mystery. Everyone and everything must be conscripted into the "empire of meaning:"

"The mad, once mute, today are heard by everyone; one has found the grid on which to collect their once absurd and indecipherable messages. Children speak, to the adult universe they are no longer those simultaneously strange and insignificant beings - children signify, they have become significant - not through some sort of "liberation" of their speech, but because adult reason has given itself the most subtle means to avert the threat of their silence. [. . .] One had buried them under silence, one buries them beneath speech."

The silence of the animals, however, seems to be able to survive all the many ways humanity has tried to render them discursive. This, he seems to say, is their continuing gift to us. His formulation of this idea is particularly challenging: [slide] "It is not the ecological problem of their survival that is important, but still and always that of their silence. In a world bent on doing nothing but making one speak, in a world assembled under the hegemony of signs and discourse, their silence weighs more and more heavily on our organization of meaning." From this perspective, the silence of *The Poster Children* reads not as deficit but as resistance, even as programmatic withdrawal from an "empire of meaning" that has so betrayed both humans and animals. By contrast, Deke Weaver's moaning wants to give voice to zoögeopathology without incurring the liabilities of language: while Zurkow's anti-Eden asks us to contemplate the possibility that our current predicament is an endgame, a last gasp before all bullets are spent and all places gone, Weaver makes voice and body the building blocks for a new creation. The last moments of the piece present a surprising theogony: the speaker's imagination gives birth to a rag-tag collection of super-specialized deities, sitting in a waiting room somewhere, awaiting we know not what. Like Zurkow's poster animals and children, like Weaver's own Gus and autistic child, these delimited gods may be at some last resort, with nowhere else to go. Nevertheless, the re-sacralization they represent is also an act of reclamation, a few shaky steps into a space of shared animality, shared contingency, and a new mythology with which to begin unperforming zoögeopathology.