Socializing Superiority: The Cultural Denaturalization of Children's Relations with Animals

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Abstract

Children's relations with other animals in minority (Western) cultures are shaped by a paradoxical socialization process: affective relations with some nonhuman animals (such as "pets") are inculcated alongside norms of exploitation (such as "meat"-eating). That illogicality is central to positive self-concepts of caring for other animals while being complicit in the perpetration of routinized acts of violence against them. Caring and killing share an assumption of human superiority founded on childhood denaturalization, such that nonhuman animals are respectively civilized or commodified through their human encounters. In this chapter, we discuss the development and application of a conceptual model which

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"maps" this childhood socialization process. The "map" is populated by research which explores how children are encouraged to compartmentalize nonhuman animals into "types" that legitimate their existing uses, so that those uses are culturally reproduced (Cole and Stewart, Our children and other animals: the cultural construction of human-animal relations in childhood. Ashgate, Farnham, 2014; Stewart and Cole, Food Cult Soc 12(4):457–476, 2009). Cultural reproduction in the mass media, especially Hollywood films, is highlighted in this chapter: the use of anthropomorphized nonhuman animal "characters" in children's films is enduringly popular (four of the top six films at the 2016 worldwide box office feature CGI animal "characters"). Such films invite children to develop affective relations with fictional anthropomorphic animals while diverting concern from real exploited nonhuman animals. Such an approach also reveals the precarity of the socialization process and is therefore suggestive of means for its disruption, especially through the deconstruction of human exceptionalism and the reintegration of children in particular, and humans in general, with other animals as natural beings.

Keywords
Documentary methods · Mass media · Movies · Socialization · Sociology · Speciesism · Visual methods

This chapter draws on and continues to develop our theoretical and analytical focus on the socialization of the human use of other animals specifically in the context of childhood in the contemporary West. These uses include food, clothing, sport, entertainment, scientific research, and many other areas of activity relevant to childhood socialization (see Cole & Stewart, 2014, 2016, 2017; Stewart & Cole, 2015). In this chapter we return our focus to mainstream animated movies aimed at children. Nevertheless, our previous research suggests that the patterns, styles, and processes of representation which legitimate and/or obscure the uses of nonhuman animals are ubiquitous in all cultural artifacts targeted at children.

Nonhuman animals are abundantly represented in children's stories in whatever medium those stories are articulated. Children are thereby tacitly constructed as closer to nature, through their willingness to suspend disbelief and inhabit imaginative worlds in which nonhuman animals are subjects on a par with humans. Recognizing other animals as subjects is routine in children's films, and these stories can have powerful, enduring effects on us. However, maturation is partly predicated on denaturalizing children as they grow older, by circumscribing intersubjective relations with nonhuman animal characters as infantile conceits that should be abandoned. Our analyses of these stories therefore consider how narrative traditions contribute to a socialization process whereby children learn to conceptually distance animals they have an emotional-ethical bond with, from animals they eat, wear, or otherwise use. Childhoodnature is therefore currently exploited by the culture industries, but then foreclosed by a socialization process that requires commitment to human exceptionalism.

Popular media artifacts, such as the movies discussed here, are produced in specific social, cultural, and historical contexts and can therefore provide insight into society at a particular place and time (Brennan, 2013). For scholars of Critical Animal Studies (CAS), a close reading of such sources helps us unravel dominant discourses around human-nonhuman animal relations, allowing identification and critical analysis of dominant discourses (see Cole and Morgan, 2011a, b; Morgan & Cole, 2011). That critical analysis is a necessary step toward forging counter-discourses that can disrupt the prevailing exploitation of other animals, linking research with activism in CAS and providing an important ethical motivation for our research. In the course of our discussion in this chapter, we highlight instances where children's movies potentially destabilize dominant discourses and how these might be developed.

In broad terms, those dominant discourses center on nonhuman animals being primarily defined according to their perceived utility to humans. These definitions instantiate human-nonhuman animal relations that are fundamentally skewed toward the favoring of human interests. They have elsewhere been analyzed to generate typologies (e.g., Benton, 1993; Cudworth, 2008; Hirschman & Sanders, 1997), membership of which circumscribes the probable fate of nonhuman animals when they enter into contact with humans. Examples include "wild animals," "pets," "vermin," or "food animals." However, these judgments of utility and category membership are contingent and socially constructed, as demonstrated by cultural and historical variability in the species and individual animals assigned to particular types. As we discuss below, that contingency is also demonstrated by the ways in which filmmakers can and do play with nonhuman animal typologies for comic or dramatic effect, albeit typically as a prelude to their reassertion. Animal typologies are therefore transmitted, we argue, through the diversion of polymorphous and nondiscriminatory affective forms of relation between children and other animals, into culturally defined routes: children first learn to love, but then to use, other animals in line with social norms.

In exploring the ways in which cultural artifacts communicate appropriate practices, or uses, relating to nonhuman animals, we have moved away from using typologies and categories, instead developing a framework that supports a more context-specific theoretical exploration of animal use and its representation (Cole & Stewart, 2014; Stewart & Cole, 2009, 2015). As an analytical approach, the framework we use is informed by our acknowledgment that such categories themselves are a product of practices and discourses rather than providing the starting point for critical analysis of representations. This framework is visualized as a relational typology or conceptual map (see Fig. 1). The map reproduced here is a simplified version of an earlier version (see Cole & Stewart, 2014) and shows how human-nonhuman animal relations are produced through human practices and discourses, in ways which tend to privilege humans at the expense of other animals. In other words, nonhuman animals themselves have little recourse to asserting an independent ontology that evades human use. This framework illustrates the contingency and riskiness of other animals' relationships with humans, by virtue of the differential

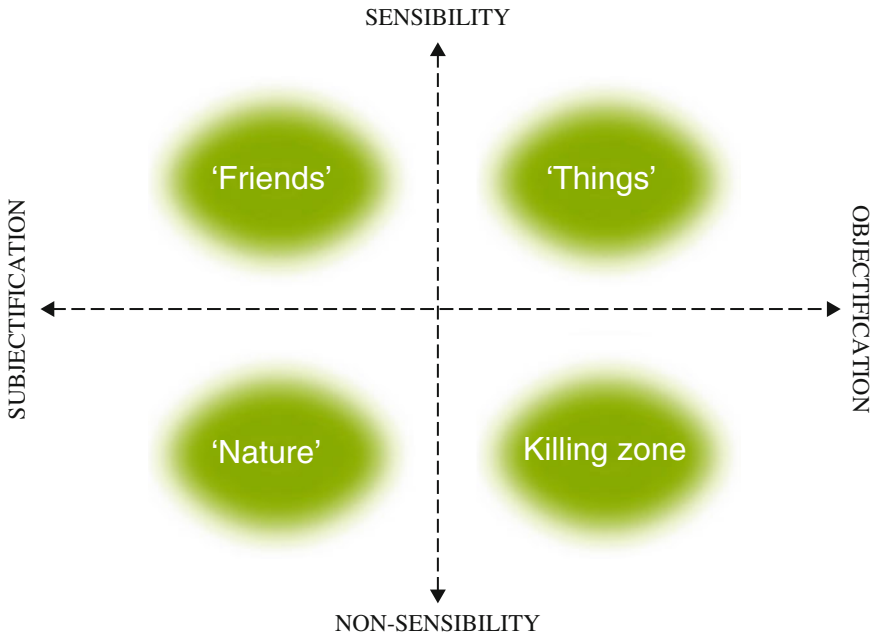

Fig. 1 A conceptual map of the social construction of "other" animals

levels of subjectivity and sensibility afforded them by human practices and discourses.

The framework helps us to identify how different practices and representations shift and interact in different contexts, through the ways in which nonhuman animals are positioned and repositioned. The horizontal axis of the framework represents the extent to which we construct other animals as exploitable objects or as autonomous subjects, or agents. The vertical axis relates to the extent to which different "types" of animals are both culturally and physically sensible (i.e., visible, audible, etc.). The central theme is that Western societies tend to encourage attention and affection for those who need it least – relatively protected animal companions, or cultural representations of animals granted greater levels of subjectivity and/or sensibility – and not on those who need it most: those who are exploited or exterminated in the southeast killing zone of the map.

Methodology

Cultural artifacts and media like films, magazines, TV programming, and games facilitate analysis of the social, cultural, and historical context of their production (Brennan, 2013). For scholars of CAS, these sources provide a useful resource for understanding dominant discourses and practices around human-nonhuman animal relations. In this light, the movies analyzed in this chapter were treated as discursive

documents to be "read," both in terms of the script-as-text and by interpreting the meaning of visual and audio representations on screen. We therefore employed a qualitative analytical approach. This involved analyzing our data with reference to the theoretical framework developed in our previous research and elaborated above (Cole & Stewart, 2014; Stewart & Cole, 2009, 2015). In practical terms, this involved repeated viewings of each movie, independently taking notes before comparing and dialogically refining our interpretations. Particular attention was paid to the ways in which nonhuman animals were situated across the geography of Fig. 1, how they were moved across it, and how they were differentiated from each other in terms of their ethical significance according to their relative positions. Discourse analysis explores how data both describes and performs – content conveys information, but how it is conveyed performs an additional layer of meaning. Thus, discourse analysis shows how versions of the world around us are discursively produced in the way in which information is presented (Silverman, 2015). This approach allows us to analyze exemplars of animal representations in children's culture, with a view to understanding the mass media's role in reproducing our conceptual map.

Conceptually Mapping Childhood Socialization

We have previously applied this conceptual framework in four empirical contexts: the family, education, mass media, and digital media (Cole & Stewart, 2014). Although the focus of this work has been in the UK, much of it is relevant to wider Western society and beyond, especially in light of the globalizing reach of many of the cultural representations of other animals that we have studied. Space prevents us from recapping the full scope of this research, but to place our movie analyses in context, we next briefly review our previous findings in relation to the mass media.

Mass Media

Mass media representations aimed at children are marked by a "cute" style of representation that can also be seen in many of the other areas we have studied, such as representations on clothing or food packaging. These representations are typically of cartoonized anthropomorphized versions of the nonhuman species they are meant to depict: infantilized animals with big eyes, rounded facial features, and expressions subtly distorted to mimic more human appearance. The cutification of nonhuman animals also includes representations of "real" ones in photographs, notably in a genre of UK magazines featuring animals aimed at pre-teenage girls (Cole & Stewart, 2014). The photographs almost exclusively depict infant animals gazing down the camera lens, implicitly giving and receiving adoration with the viewer.

Our previous analyses of films aimed at children that feature nonhuman characters (as very many films aimed at children do) show how these representations

reinforce dominant practices of human use of nonhumans. For example, *The Lion King* (Hahn et al., 1994 and see Stewart & Cole, 2009) clearly reinforces a discourse of a "natural order" where the chief protagonists (with whom the audience are invited to identify) are presented as rightfully and naturally having dominion over other species. Other films we have analyzed (see Stewart & Cole, 2009), for example, *Babe* (Miller, Miller, Mitchell, & Noonan, 1995), communicate a message that it is deviation from "nature" that invites subjectification. Babe's capacity to herd sheep as a unique "sheep-pig" is an example. That is, the appealing quirks of Babe et al. enable them to stand out from the usually massified interchangeable members of their species in the southern regions of Fig. 1. On that basis only are they representationally uplifted toward the northwestern "friends" region of the conceptual map. Our analysis of *Puss in Boots* (Ouaou, Aguilar & Miller, 2011 and see Cole & Stewart, 2012) explores the intersection of these species-related distinctions with discourses that marginalize humans according to gender, race, and class, illustrating how processes communicating subjectivity and sensibility are also mobilized to reinforce patriarchal, ethnocentric, and classist discourses.

Denaturalizing and Renaturalizing Human-Animal Relations in Hollywood Films

In the remainder of this chapter we continue this focus on the mass media and specifically four Hollywood children's films released in 2016 featuring nonhuman animal "characters": *Zootropolis* (Spencer, Howard, & Moore, 2016), *The Secret Life of Pets* (Meledandri, Healy, & Renaud, 2016), *Finding Dory* (Collins & Stanton, 2016), and *The Jungle Book* (Favreau, Taylor, & Favreau, 2016). The discussion of *Finding Dory* is combined with an analysis of its prequel, *Finding Nemo* (Walters & Stanton, 2003). This selection was guided by the commercial success of the 2016 films, all of which featured in the top six at the worldwide box office in their year of release (Box Office Mojo, 2017a). In order, *Finding Dory* took $1,028,570,889 for third position, *Zootropolis* took $1,023,784,195 in fourth, *The Jungle Book* took $966,550,600 in fifth, and *The Secret Life of Pets* took $875,457,937 in sixth place for a combined total of approaching 3.9 billion US dollars. *Finding Nemo* was similarly successful, taking $940,335,536 worldwide for second spot in the 2003 box office league table (Box Office Mojo, 2017b). This scale of commercial success clearly entails a wide viewership, augmented by DVD, Blu-ray and streaming releases of the films for domestic consumption.

Zootropolis

Synopsis

Zootropolis (Spencer et al., 2016, entitled *Zootopia* in some territories) is a CGI animation film depicting a multispecies nonhuman mammal community living harmoniously in an urban environment, albeit one that hosts species-appropriate

habitats such as "Little Rodentia" or "The Rainforest District." The plot centers on the young rabbit Judy Hopps as she pursues her ambition to move from a rural carrot farm with her parents to Zootropolis to become a police officer. The alternate title *Zootopia* alludes to the utopian resolution of interspecies conflict in the city, specifically the cessation of predation, which carnivorous animals have "evolved" past in the film. However, in the course of the film, Judy uncovers and foils a plot to instate a prey hegemony over Zootropolis by the assistant mayor Bellwether, a female sheep. The plot involves drugging members of former predator species, precipitating their atavistic return to "savagery" and thereby justifying their incarceration.

Analysis

The city of Zootropolis is a multispecies melting pot that echoes the human ethnic diversity of an idealized US metropolis, populated with immigrants with multiple trajectories but who all find a home within it. It also models the American dream, as Zootropolis is a place "where anyone can be anything." The species of different characters do not confine them to a single stereotyped destiny, exemplified in Judy Hopps' turning her back on the safe option of remaining a carrot farmer with her parents. This identity fluidity is arguably intended to be a point of identification and inspiration for the human audience and especially to ease the growing pains of children who may be experiencing bullying, discrimination, or the stigmatic application of outcast identities. Judy is shown as having been subject to bullying by the fox Gideon Grey in childhood, who physically and verbally intimidates her, including taunts about the pre-evolution predation of rabbits by foxes. Judy Hopps' determination and success therefore defies her species stereotyping as merely "cute" and ineffectual and models the capacity to transcend othering processes. For instance, on arrival at her police precinct, Judy is greeted by Benjamin Clawhauser, a cheetah who admiringly says, "I've gotta tell ya you are even cuter than I thought you'd be." Judy replies, "you probably didn't know but a bunny can call another bunny cute but when other animals do it, that's a little. . .." The sentence is left unfinished, but the audience is invited to transpose the implied "speciesism" to "racism" and/or "sexism" given Judy's species uniqueness as a rabbit police officer and her female gender. Judy is therefore fully aware of her species identity and the demeaning stereotypes that have been applied to it, but asserts her right to define herself nonetheless. Similarly, she later declares that, "I'm not just some token bunny," riffing on the tokenism deployed in an attempt to placate and defuse various social movements throughout the history of progressive politics. Clawhauser himself subverts an image of cheetahs as dynamic and athletic by being portrayed as a stereotypically obese doughnut-loving police officer, but one with a distinctively camp persona.

Judy is also an empowering figure for others in the film, notably the fox character Nick Wilde. Wilde's surname highlights his outlaw status as a petty criminal, but also his resignation to species stereotypes as inescapable destiny. As he says to Judy, "you can only be what you are [. . .] sly fox, dumb bunny." Nick's resignation is later revealed as a consequence of his having been the victim of anti-predator bullying

and subject to labeling with stereotypes of foxes as shifty and untrustworthy. After being enrolled as an initially reluctant co-investigator by Judy, Nick ends the film having realized his capacity for self-actualization and transcending the limitations of the "sly fox" stereotype. As Judy insists, "you are so much more," an assertion that pays off at the end of the film when Nick has become a police officer and is teased by Judy with a "sly bunny, dumb fox" one-liner. As such, Nick models a path to redemption through cooperating in the restoration of the social order of Zootropolis.

Zootropolis therefore models the denaturalizing of intra-human difference, and thereby an anti-essentialist message, but uses nonhuman animals as ciphers for doing so. This is a less threatening option in a film targeting a young audience than directly confronting racism, sexism, etc., but it also means that the implications it has for speciesism are not developed as they could, arguably should, be. For example, Judy's appearance remains circumscribed by "cute" style, such as her outsized forward-pointing blue eyes and a figure based on a woman as much as a rabbit, with a bipedal gait, prominent hips, and a bustline under her police tunic. There is an echo of the highly sexualized cartoon rendering of Jessica Rabbit from *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (Marshall, Watts, & Zemeckis, 1988) which in turn played on the *Playboy* bunny motif and sexualized "bunny girl" outfit. The feminizing of rabbits simultaneously cutifies the species as a whole and women by association in cultural representations. By contrast, the male rabbit characters of Roger Rabbit or Bugs Bunny are markedly non-sexualized. In other words, Judy is resisting a patriarchal-speciesist nexus that predates (pun intended) the film and which is divorced from the "nature" of real rabbits. But she does this within the film without contesting the sexualized feminization of rabbits, or in other words, without undermining the anthropomorphic appropriation of rabbits as human cultural symbols. To contest the distribution of rabbits across Fig. 1, *Zootropolis* would need to portray rabbits as contesting their misrepresentation as human cultural symbols and to assert their nonhuman animality, their "rabbitness."

Other animals remain circumscribed by stereotypes with little hint of their capacity for fluid identity transformations. At the extreme, the film abominates skunks when Nick is upbraided by Mr. Big, a comically diminutive arctic shrew portrayed as a Godfather-mafia character, for selling him a fake woollen rug made from "the fur of a skunk's butt." This is an exceptional instance of the film objectifying nonhuman animals and alluding to real-world violence against them, although it is possible to imagine that the filmmakers intended the rug to evoke the shearing of a skunk rather than the execution and skinning that is integral to the fur industry. This is not to deny the exploitative character of the sheep's wool industry, but to acknowledge its representation in children's culture as unproblematic, notably in the Oscar winning CGI animation film *Shaun the Sheep Movie* (Kewley, Lockhart, Burton, & Starzak, 2015) and also through the presence of sheep characters like Bellwether within *Zootropolis*. The film largely avoids representing food consumption by its characters and therefore suppresses the problem of explaining what (or who) obligate carnivores eat in Zootropolis, implying their transition to a largely plant-based diet. Nick himself describes blueberries as delicious near the end of the film. "Nonviolent" food consumption is alluded to by the presence of a juice bar in

the railway station, the selling of ice cream in a shop staffed by elephants, a brief appearance of a "Frozen Yakcurt" shop, the frequent appearance of doughnuts, a bakery operated by the adult Gideon Grey, and fresh vegetables sold by Judy's parents. Clawhauser's first appearance shows him eating a bowl of cereal called "Lucky Chomps," depicted in milk. The expropriation of milk and eggs in "dairy" or baked goods is absent from the narrative, so the film does not have to explain how, for instance, cows or hens are able to be "anything" when they are still being exploited. The Frozen Yakcurt shop suggests a yak-based dairy industry, but only a male yak – Yax – appears as a character in the film. Notably neither cows nor chickens are represented as characters in *Zootropolis*. The absence of hens is explicable in the mammals-only speciesist line drawn in Zootropolis. This is also hinted at in the fleeting appearance of a large building with a sign proclaiming "Fishtown Market" and a smaller one signed "Clarks Halibuts" in the Tundratown district, suggesting the consumption of fishes by its mammal inhabitants. The species logic of Zootropolis collapses altogether with the appearance next to Fishtown Market of a restaurant called "Blubber Chef," suggesting the killing and consumption of whales. Zootropolis therefore retains a southeastern killing zone from Fig. 1, which is almost as tricky to spot as it is in the nonfictional world.

The irony of the denaturing effects of anthropomorphism is exposed for comic effect by Yax, a yak proprietor of a naturist club that Judy visits in the course of her investigation. In relation to the presumed weirdness of naturism, Yax comments that, "you know what I say is weird? Clothes on animals!" As he speaks, an unclothed elephant and giraffe are shown engaged in a yoga routine. So, their "natural" nudity is undercut by their anthropomorphic performance of a human cultural practice. The fact that the inhabitants of Zootropolis have "evolved" entails that they have become uplifted toward an approximation of humanity. It is their very civilization which makes naturism worthy of comment and defense by Yax. The cultured and herbivorous yoga practitioners contrast with the "savagery" of the atavistic carnivores as the plot develops. The investigation leads Judy and Nick to an interview with Mr. Big, who asserts that, "we may be evolved, but deep down we are still animal," with "animal" being a signifier of irrationality and violence. Mr. Big's warning of atavism is fulfilled by the drugged otter Mr. Otterton, who is described by Mr. Manchas, a jaguar chauffeur attacked by Otterton, thus: "he was an animal, down on all fours, he was a savage." Manchas himself is soon revealed as having been drugged and is described by Judy as a "jaguar gone savage" when he falls to all-fours and attacks them. The equation between animality and irrationality is highlighted by Nick when he accusingly asked Judy whether "you think I might go nuts?"

In summary, *Zootropolis* offers a surface subversion of stereotyping and othering processes and a celebration of the capacity to transcend inequality and freely construct identity. There is a limited disturbance of speciesist constructions of nonhuman animals in Fig. 1, such as the meta-commentary on "cute" style and the inversion of "sly fox, dumb bunny." However, in the main the film depends on the reproduction of stereotypical constructions of nonhuman animal characters: it reduces them to ciphers to facilitate the exploration of the experiences of growing

up and the problems of maintaining orderly diverse human communities. Meanwhile, nonmammalian animals in particular (and some mammals in the case of whales and "dairy" cows) remain thoroughly objectified as "food" but are otherwise absent. The movie ironically subverts childhoodnature as Zootropolis is a purified urban space. While it plays on the ubiquity of nonhuman animal representations in children's culture, it anthropomorphically domesticates them, rather than capitalizing on their potential to encourage children to empathize with nonhuman (as well as human) others. Zootropolis is anything but a peaceable interspecies community, but instead is a metaphorical representation of a utopian human community purged of nonhuman others.

Finding Nemo/Finding Dory

Synopsis

Finding Nemo (Walters & Stanton, 2003) and its sequel *Finding Dory* (Collins & Stanton, 2016) are CGI animation films in which the titular fishes are captured and imperilled and whose whereabouts are sought by their nonhuman friends. In the original film, after capture by a diver, the clownfish Nemo is confined in a tank by a dentist as a gift for his uncaring daughter. Nemo is sought by his father Marlin and Dory, a blue tang, who he meets en route. In the sequel, Dory, aided by Nemo and Marlin, seeks out her long-lost parents at a Marine Life Institute.

Analysis

Although *Finding Nemo* is 14 years old at the time of writing, the appearance of a sequel in 2016 makes its analysis highly relevant. As well as featuring characters in common and a similar visual style and plot, the sequel stimulates renewed interest in its predecessor, as well as providing an opportunity to package and sell the two films together for home release. It is also possible to discern continuities and differences between the two films.

Both films share overt problematizations of human-nonhuman animal relationships, especially in terms of critiquing the captivity of aquatic creatures as unnatural and contrary to their interests and wishes. *Finding Nemo* includes a moral lesson in the form of Darla, the daughter of the dentist who keeps Nemo in a tank in his surgery, along with other aquatic creatures. Darla is described as a "fish killer," whose curiosity and fascination for fishes is not matched with sufficient empathy to avoid harming them. There is an implicit invitation for young viewers to disidentify with Darla and eschew maltreatment of fishes. Furthermore, Gill, one of the other captives in the tank, asserts that, "Fish aren't meant to be in a box," and a key plotline in the film involves the fishes plotting their escape from the tank. However, the admonishment to not mistreat fishes presupposes contact with them in situations of power where maltreatment is a possibility. That may well include the potential for both films to stimulate desire for the keeping of "exotic" fishes despite Gill's assertion, as well as the desire to spectate them in captive environments such as "aquaria." The latter is immodestly confirmed by a filmmaker in the *Finding Nemo*

home release additional features: "internationally it's in the lexicon of aquarium viewers now" (i.e., the clownfish species of which Nemo is a representative). In *Finding Dory*, there is an attempt to partially redeem this risk in the critical representation of a "touch pool" at an aquarium, a shallow enclosure designed for young children to be able to lean over and touch aquatic animals under water. The experience is portrayed as painful for the fishes, who struggle to avoid being touched by human hands. Furthermore, Claire Parkinson (in press) reports that the writers of *Finding Dory* adjusted the script to be more critical of captivity in the wake of the *Blackfish* (Cowperthwaite, Oteyza, & Cowperthwaite, 2013) documentary, by replacing a SeaWorld style attraction with a Marine Life center that operated under a "Rescue, Rehabilitation, and Release" slogan. The film adds a further layer of environmentalist critique absent from *Finding Nemo*, in that Dory is initially caught in a discarded plastic can holder. The defilement of "nature" is highlighted as another moral lesson for the viewer.

The signs of progress in *Finding Dory* may also be found in its downplaying of fishes as food for humans compared with *Finding Nemo* while retaining a theme of fishes as potential food for other animals that injects dramatic tension. The latter is of course justifiable, and even the simplistic claim that "we all know nature's a predatory world" by a filmmaker in the *Finding Nemo* home release additional features acknowledges the reality of the risk of predation in nature. However, predation in the films is represented as a threat to the survival of *subjectified* characters and therefore all the more horrific. Meanwhile, the representation of fishes as human food depends on their objectification, that is, their limited screen time and relative lack of characterization, which therefore does not attract an equivalent response of revulsion. The film's principle characters are not members of species typically consumed by their majority Western audience. While the latter are not personified in *Finding Nemo* and do not invite empathy to the same degree as the "exotic" Nemo et al., there is the potential to transfer empathy to their real counterparts in the oceans. For instance, near the end of *Finding Nemo*, the sight of an approaching fishing trawler is met with screams from fishes who swim away from the net in panic. A shoal is nevertheless caught, but then encouraged to swim downward in unison, which is an act of collective resistance that rips open the net and allows them to swim to freedom. Here, the intervention of a CGI representation facilitates the crossing of the meridian of Fig. 1 from the southeastern "killing zone" to the southwestern "nature" zone. The uplifting of fishes into the upper reaches of the northwestern region is however foreclosed by their massification and relative lack of subjectivity and initiative compared with the "exotic" film characters.

This scene, perhaps more than any other in either film, opens the possibility of genuine challenge to the normality and acceptability of the human consumption of sea-living animals. That is, while *Finding Dory* does not reproduce conventional human consumption practices of aquatic animals, neither does it do much to explicitly contest them. An exception is a passing concern expressed by Marlin that they might be en route to a restaurant and therefore implicitly be at risk of consumption. Meanwhile, the practice of "factory fishing" is portrayed in *Finding Nemo* as decidedly unnatural, destructive, and terrorizing. However, the overt

connection between this nightmarish construction and mundane consumption practices is not made. For example, earlier in the film a seaside restaurant is depicted in the background with a sign advertising, "Hot Dogs Snacks Fish n Chips Cold Drinks." Human consumption practices are also voiced by aquatic creatures when "where's the butter" is a clue given to Dory and Marlin by a shoal of fishes who organize themselves into the outline of a lobster in a guessing game. The use of "dairy products" and cooking underwater are of course nonsensical, but together with the sign, it undercuts the problematization of the objectification of aquatic animals and positions them in the southeast "killing zone" of Fig. 1 alongside land animals killed for "hot dogs" or exploited for "dairy." The critique of "factory fishing" is also allowed to stand as an exceptionally objectionable practice that still leaves room for welfarist constructions of "humane" fishing practices to survive unremarked and uncritiqued. The undercutting is completed in the home release additional features, in which a filmmaker group reminiscence about the film's production and reception includes the joking report that, "I'm still getting emails of sushi and Nemo." More telling still is the recollection that, "the number one question we were always asked is if we were going to have sushi at the wrap party [. . .] which we did." There is scant reason to assume that the filmmakers had emancipatory intentions in creating *Finding Nemo*.

Although *Finding Dory* does not include an equivalently direct critique of "fishing," it does mark the captivity of aquatic animals as morally questionable: "it's our [a rescue centre] goal that any animal we rescue will eventually be returned home, where they belong." This explicitly repositions such animals in the southwest zone of "nature" and not as captive entertainment in "aquaria," as 'pets', or as (human) food. The assertion of freedom is more poetically evoked by Bailey, a captive Beluga whale, who opines that, "there are no walls in the ocean," and is graphically represented in the tortured experience of the "touch pool" described above. As Parkinson argues (2018), the character of Bailey is also significant for deploying echolocation to outwit humans and in so doing tempering anthropomorphism with a "specie-specific trait" that emphasizes difference from humans, but not thereby inferiority.

In *Finding Nemo* and *Finding Dory*, the degree of cutification of nonhuman animals is central to their relative subjectification. As we discussed in relation to its use in mass media representations of nonhuman animals, cutification entails a distinctive style of childlike anthropomorphic representation. This includes oversized humanlike eyes, a range of quasi-human facial expressions, and the capacity to speak in human language. This is in spite of the claim made in the additional features on the home release of *Finding Nemo* that "he [the director] didn't want overly anthropomorphized fish." In a pivotal scene near the end of *Finding Dory*, road traffic is literally stopped by the adoption of cute poses in a "cuddle party" by a lineup of otters in the road. The otters in turn forgo the predation of the "cute" subjects Dory et al., one of them cuddling Dory herself in this scene. Contrastingly, nonhuman predators are represented as more or less monstrous. Early in *Finding Nemo*, the cute clownfish are menaced by a predator fish who roars, but does not

speak. Later on, a deep-sea angler fish also roars threateningly without speaking. Likewise, early in *Finding Dory*, a squid attacks and also lacks the subjectifying characteristic of a voice. Predation is thereby portrayed as uncivilized, animalistic, and barbarous, and therefore there is a disidentification between the audience and "natural" carnivory of living and "raw" prey.

The civilizing of carnivory is represented by the greater subjectification afforded to a predator self-help therapy group of three sharks, led by Bruce, a great white. The sharks are anthropomorphized, but more adult and thereby less cute than the films' heroes. Bruce voices his desire to reidentify as a cultured and civilized subject: "I am a nice shark, not a mindless eating machine. If I am to change this image, I must first change myself. Fish are friends, not food." The therapy session jokingly evokes the demonizing media construction of sharks exacerbated in popular culture by *Jaws* (Zanuck, Brown, & Spielberg, 1975) and its sequels. Bruce goes on to announce that "today's meeting is step five: bring a fish friend," but his instinctive carnivory is aroused by the scent of blood in the water when he excitedly declares, "I'm having fish tonight!" The scene also jokingly exposes the cutification process. The hammerhead shark's rejoinder to Bruce's assertion of fish as friends is "except stinking dolphins," to which the other shark adds, "Dolphins! Yeah they think they're so cute." The sharks' struggles to suppress their natural appetites are contrasted with the unrestrained predatory greed of a flock of gulls who menace Marlin and Dory. Massification, a common technique used to deindividualize and desubjectify nonhuman animals (such as the stampeding wildebeest in *The Lion King*), is here deployed to construct predation as mindless and animalistic. The gulls also lack human speech and are relatively uncutified. Their utterance is restricted to a growing cacophony of "mine!" as they approach potential prey, signaling their collectively expressed selfish greed. There is an interesting contrast here with the more usual tendency to massify herbivores and elevate the subjectivity of carnivores, as also to be found in *The Lion King*. The abomination of the gulls is compounded by Nigel, a subjectified stork who rescues Marlin and Dory, who accuses the gulls of being "rats with wings," discursively condemning them to the "killing zone" as "vermin."

This pair of films then obliquely invokes childhoodnature, especially through the problematization of abusive child-nonhuman animal relations in the figure of Darla in *Finding Nemo* and the "touch pool" in *Finding Dory*. That is, they critique the construction of fishes as spectacles or objects of amusement, by which children are estranged from nature. Ironically, they do so within movies that depend on the construction of certain charismatic aquatic animals as colorful spectacles and, as conceded by the filmmakers, contribute to the "lexicon of aquarium viewers."

The Secret Life of Pets

Synopsis

The Secret Life of Pets (Meledandri et al., 2016) is a CGI animation film in which anthropomorphized and cutified "pets" in a contemporary urban US setting (New York) are able to converse with each other in English, although humans

only hear them making nonhuman vocalizations (such as barking) rather than speaking any human language. The "pets" are depicted as enjoying a "secret life," while their human companions are absent during the working day, socializing and using domestic appliances, for instance, a poodle using a stereo to indulge a liking for heavy metal music. The narrative centers on Max the Jack Russell Terrier, who is upset by the arrival of Duke, a rescued mongrel, into the household he shares with his human owner Katie. The initial schism between the dogs is gradually healed through the course of the film. They are captured by an Animal Control patrol, incidentally rescued by a gang of abandoned "pets," before in turn escaping the gang who turn out to be bent on revenge against humans and traitorous willing "pets." Meanwhile, their friends (other "pets" in their neighborhood) search for them. The film climaxes with the abandoned "pet" gang and Max and his friends uniting to thwart the Animal Control officers and being returned to human "owners" and willing "pet" status.

Analysis

The Secret Life of Pets (Meledandri et al., 2016) has an overt moral message for viewers about the importance of treating "pets" with care and of not allowing them to be abandoned to the precarity of the pound. Loving relationships with animal companions are positively modeled, while abusive or neglectful relationships are portrayed as damaging. The former bookend the film: an early scene in a park shows dogs enjoying walking with their human companions, and the central protagonist, Max the Jack Russell terrier, describes his relationship with his human companion Katie as, "[. . .] love stronger than words." At the end of the film, a montage plays out in which humans return to their homes to be joyfully reunited with their animal companions. Abusive relationships are represented by a group of "flushed pets" who are alienated from humans as a result of their prior maltreatment and seek violent revenge. As the leader of the flushed pets, Snowball the rabbit, puts it; "our primary mission – the downfall of the human race." The "flushed pets" therefore exhibit a "wildness" in terms of rage and violence – they are depicted as driven by irrationality, to the point of an obsessive mental instability. For example, Snowball describes a "flushed" viper as, "fueled by a diet of anti-human rage," and it is notable that the raging viper does not speak. Despite their anthropomorphism then, the "flushed pets" are discursively positioned toward the southwest of Fig. 1, as threats to the owner-"pet" domestic order, similar to the construction of urban foxes discussed earlier. By contrast, the heroic "pets" who have not been abused in the film remain civilized by their association with humans and seek to avoid violent confrontation. In both respects, however, the character of nonhuman animals is shaped by their relations with humans, foreclosing the thinkability of their having independent lives as free-living beings: the "flushed pets" seek revenge rather than escape to a human-free utopia. All nonhuman animals are therefore enclosed within the terrain of Fig. 1. The dramatic narrative of *The Secret Life of Pets* inheres in the disturbance and restoration of the conceptual map in Fig. 1. The transgressive positioning of nonhuman animals in "the wrong place" (both the "flushed pets" and the civilized "pets" while separated from their human owners) introduces a tension that is

resolved by their conventional repositioning at the end of the film – the beneficent reuniting of both flushed and civilized "pets" with humans.

However, the drama re-models the real-world conceptual separation of legitimate nonhuman victims of human violence (especially "food animals") from legitimate nonhuman recipients of human "care" (especially "pets"). This is illustrated early in the film when Chloe the cat is shown eschewing the "cat food" left by her owner and instead eating a cold roasted chicken from the refrigerator, followed by a cake. The separation is reproduced by imputing a humanlike agency to Chloe – indulgence of hedonistic pleasure in eating and especially in eating nonhuman animals (with nothing to indicate a vegan householder, we can read the cake as including hen's eggs and cow's milk, butter or cream as well, in line with the conventional omnivory among the intended audience). There is a point of identification made between the human viewer and Chloe – "we" can recognize her appetite for consuming nonhuman animals in the same form that "we" do, rather than in the impoverished form of "cat food." This is compounded by the later fleeting appearance of remnants of chicken's wings, as well as a pizza, as a meal having been consumed by a sleeping human in an apartment that the "pets" run through. The twin scenes of Chloe and the sated sleeper communicate the pleasures of gluttony on nonhuman flesh, as long as that flesh is disconnected from the nonhuman animals it was taken from (living chickens do not appear in the film). The agency of real "pets" is therefore dragged northwestward toward the position occupied by humans, by means of the intervention of the anthropomorphic representation of Chloe. At the same time, chickens are thoroughly objectified, so that the representation of the bird compounds the objectification of real chickens – in this case the representations intervene to reproduce the cultural visibility of consumable dead animals while distracting attention from real exploited animals.

Later in the film, Max and Duke stumble upon a sausage factory while on their way to finding the home of Duke's previous owner:

> Duke: "sausage [. . .] you smell that? Sausage!"
> Max: "We're coming for you baby!"

Max's excited promise imputes agency to the objects of his desire, as if they could be satisfied and fulfilled by this response to their allure, and subtly reproduces the heteronormative mingling of gustatory with erotic pleasure. As Carol Adams (2004) has extensively documented, the association between the flesh of nonhuman animals and the bodies of women is frequently linked in Western cultural representations and especially when targeted at imagined male consumers. In this case, the diminutive "baby" uttered by Max connotes a sexually desirable young woman, despite the ironically phallic associations of sausages. The factory is called "Weiner Kingdom" (weiner also being common US slang for penis), and the factory sign is adorned with a logo of an anthropomorphized smiling sausage wearing nothing but a golden crown. The kingly status of weiners reinforces their gendering as masculine food, but nevertheless they are feminized as objects of consumption later in the scene, as described below. On entering the factory, Max and Duke are confronted with an

overview of the production process: "meat" (uniform neat cuts) hanging from conveyors is dropped into a mincer and then formed into sausages by another machine, on which the dogs begin to gorge themselves. The process by which nonhuman animals are fragmented into "meat" is absent, so that flesh is dissociated from killing and butchering, stifling sensibility of the southeast region of Fig. 1.

As they eat voraciously, the dogs begin to hallucinate the sausages coming to life: a clothed sausage appears and beckons the dogs with the words "Come on boys" into a fantasy sausage theme park populated with singing and dancing sausages, leading Duke to exclaim "holy schnitzel!" The sausages are singing "We go together," the closing song from the musical film *Grease* (Stigwood, Carr, & Kleiser, 1978). The invocation of *Grease* emphasizes the celebration of Americana in *Secret Life*, not least through the association of "meat"-eating (especially hot dogs) with US culinary, cultural, and heteronormative masculine identity. The same articulation is made in the R-rated CGI animation *Sausage Party* (Ellison et al., 2016), in which personified "fancy dog" sausages are packaged on a US Independence Day display (Cole & Stewart, 2018). In this case, the protagonist sausages themselves are icons of heteronormative masculinity who become aware of their fate as human food, but unaware of their previous existence as nonhuman animals. The fantasy *Secret Life* sausages do not attain even that limited consciousness: while one band of sausage singers perform on stage (dressed in hula skirts made from gherkins and thereby feminized), Max and Duke appear – Max bites off one of their heads, while Duke swallows the others whole, without the song being interrupted or any alarm being expressed by these or any other sausages – a decapitated sausage continues to dance. The camera then sweeps across a bridge populated by sausages feminized by wearing bikinis fashioned from yellow mustard – the sausages leap into the river as if evading the onrushing dogs – a unique expression of alarm in the scene, though their alarm might equally be read as meta-alarm at the intrusion of the camera itself. A dancing line of sausages then walk into Duke's mouth while he lays on his back, before the dogs are shown falling into a huge bowl of inanimate sausages, while animate sausages continue to sing and dance around the bowl. At this point the sausages repeat the refrain "we'll always be together" from the end of the song: the shared experience of gluttony cements Max and Duke's burgeoning friendship, but also the song asserts that the consumption of nonhuman animals will always be a part of their lives. While the lyrics might symbolize Max and Duke's relationship, it is the fantasy sausages who are singing it and who are implicitly included in the "we" being referred to in the lyrics.

The scene recalls medieval fantasies of the Land of Cockaigne, pseudo-utopian stories in which food (including "animal products") falls from the skies into the mouths of supine gluttons, relieved from the troubles of labor and deprivation. Such tropes may be interpreted as escapist relief from the reality of class inequality and exploitation while reproducing species inequality. In *The Secret Life of Pets*, a similar reading is available, and it may even have a critical undertone, as it makes visible the extent to which animal companions' appetites are subject to strict human control and their lack of freedom to feed themselves as and when they wish. However, Weiner Kingdom supplies unlimited satisfaction only on the basis of the

representationally suppressed killing of other nonhuman animals, as well as asserting that "pets" have food preferences that align with those of their owners – they are enrolled as unwitting co-producers of the discursive terrain of Fig. 1. If Weiner Kingdom is a version of the Land of Cockaigne, it is a fraud, one in which nonhuman subjugation continues unabated and unrecognized even while it welcomes valorized nonhumans into its utopian world. Furthermore, the dogs' hallucinatory departure from reality dramatizes their irrational inability to control their appetites, contrasting with rationality as the defining characteristic by which human exceptionalism is culturally asserted and which legitimates the human control of "pets."

It is difficult to assign the "meat" in Weiner Kingdom to any specific species due to its generic appearance in the factory scene, but it is notable that species commonly butchered to produce sausages such as cows are absent from the film. Predatory threat toward nonhuman animals is only represented *between* nonhuman species, not from humans, notably by a domesticated hawk named Tiberius toward Gidget, a female Pomeranian who is romantically attracted to Max. As a dog, Gidget avoids the risk of reminding the audience of the fates of species conventionally consumed by US audiences. When meeting Gidget, Tiberius struggles to suppress his "killer instinct":

> 'You're sweet too [. . .] but not too sweet. There's also a salty gamey thing going on [. . .] You're a very thoughtful food. Food? I didn't say that. I said friend.'

Tiberius succeeds in asserting self-control as he increasingly acknowledges Gidget as a fellow subject rather than an object/prey, according with the audience's pre-existing disposition to afford some measure of subjectivity to dogs. The threat to Gidget is defused and exploited for comic effect. However, a more critical reading is possible: Tiberius could be argued to model the enduring affective dividend from constructing nonhuman animals as "friends," usurping the transitory pleasures of constructing them as "food." This more critical reading opens up a path toward restoring childhoodnature, as against the use of nonhuman animal representations to reassert their radical difference and distance from the child viewer as "types" in Fig. 1. Such a reading is tenuous though, as *Secret Life* as a whole asserts the normality of encountering nonhuman others primarily as genetically manipulated, denatured, subordinate companions, in human-dominated urban space.

Despite the absence of representations of living cows or chickens, the film does include a pig character named Tattoo as one of the "flushed pets." Tattoo is so named because "I lived in a tattoo parlor, the trainees used to practice on me. Until they ran out of space." One of the tattoos alludes to the fate of the majority of "domesticated" pigs: "right rump" is tattooed onto Tattoo's backside, which may suggest his relegation to the killing zone given the exhaustion of his usefulness to the tattooists. Other than this, his unusual former life in a tattoo parlor repositions him *away* from the southeast of Fig. 1 and therefore away from associations with

sausages that might disturb his promotion to the northeastern region as a character. That is, Tattoo is not given a backstory of escape from a factory farm or slaughterhouse, which would force audience confrontation of the objectification of real-world pigs, much as *Babe* achieved. Tattoo is a vengeful "flushed pet" because of his misuse in an entertainment context, if we interpret the use of tattoos in contemporary urban contexts as primarily driven by the construction and performance of identity through consumption practices. He shares this position as an "entertainment" animal (albeit a particularly lowly one) with Snowball, who recalls being "a magician's rabbit" when asserting that all of the "flushed pets" have "suffered at the hands of man" in a speech to Max and Duke: "[. . .] humans say they love us. But then they turn around and throw us out like garbage." Snowball's anger is depicted as justified, albeit exaggerated, and thereby the message is reinforced to the audience to treat "pets" well and to eschew their reductive positioning as objects of "entertainment," but decidedly not to forgo "pet-keeping." There is an irony in the CGI characters being created precisely so as to entertain, and of course the entire film reasserts how "entertaining" "pets" are for their human companions, albeit in conditions of domesticity rather than as unwilling laborers for tattooists or magicians.

This is compounded by the portrayal of the violent "wildness" of the "flushed pets" and, by implication, of real-world animal liberationist activism. Snowball first appears engaged in direct action to rescue his colleague Ripper, a bulldog, from the Animal Control van in which Max and Duke are also imprisoned. After effecting the rescue of Ripper, Snowball excitedly outlines his ideology: "The liberation has begun! Liberated forever! Domesticated never!" He goes on: "We are flushed pets, thrown away by our owners, and now we are out for revenge. It's like a club, but with biting and scratching," and later, "long live the revolution, suckers!" Max implores Snowball to "take us with you," but Snowball resists: "I don't think so, pets. Yeah you got the stench of domestication all over you." Snowball later denounces Max and Duke as "leash lovers" when instructing the viper to capture them. The viper is squashed and killed in the melee as Max and Duke escape, upsetting and further enraging Snowball. It is noteworthy that the viper is constructed as monstrous, mute, and therefore killable in the film, unlike the voiced nonhuman characters. The campaign against "domestication" is therefore perpetrated by irrational, violent, embittered individuals who are ultimately pacifiable by being re-pettified and finding their place once more within Fig. 1.

In summary, *The Secret Life of Pets* reaffirms the status quo of human-nonhuman animal relations, tempered by gentle welfarist critiques of misuses of nonhuman animals for entertainment and admonishments to provide them with the love and care they deserve as "pets." The proper place for nonhuman animals in children's consciousness is as denatured subordinate companions, not as free-living beings, and definitely not as exploited, confined, and killed victims. As Max says to Duke of his erstwhile owner (an elderly man who they discover had passed away rather than abandoned Duke to the pound), "of course he liked you, he was your owner." Without their "owners," nonhuman animals are depicted as being at risk from regression to violence and irrationality. The duty

incumbent upon humans is to attend to their duties as civilizing carers, uplifting their companions into a sentimentalized domesticity. It is through this assertion of a civilizing duty that childhoodnature is subverted, as human ontology is constructed as removed from nature, exclusively occupying the northwestern terrain of Fig. 1.

The Jungle Book

Synopsis

The Jungle Book (Favreau et al., 2016) is a CGI remake of the famous 1967 Disney animation and adaptation of the 1894 story by Rudyard Kipling. The film traces the coming of age of Mowgli, an orphaned boy discovered abandoned by Bagheera, a panther. Bagheera leaves Mowgli in the care of a wolf pack, who raise him as one of their own. The pack and the other animals are menaced by the tiger Shere Khan, and it falls to Mowgli to lead a resistance against and finally overthrow him. Unlike the 1967 version, the 2016 film ends with Mowgli rejecting a return to a human village after vanquishing Khan and choosing to stay with the other animals instead, overtly asserting childhoodnature in a way that none of the other films analyzed above do.

Analysis

The realistic aesthetic of *The Jungle Book* makes it visually distinct from the more cartoon style of the other four films, albeit a realism undercut by anthropomorphism such as the use of human language by some nonhuman characters and fantasy elements, such as the gigantic size of the orangutan antagonist King Louie. The film does however share a theme of problematizing and civilizing predation. All four films tackle the issue with (sometimes comically) monstrous constructions of predation: the regressively "savage" carnivores in *Zootropolis*, the viper and Tiberius the hawk in *The Secret Life of Pets*, the deep-sea angler fish in *Finding Nemo*, the squid in *Finding Dory*, and most threatening of all, Shere Khan the tiger in *The Jungle Book*.

Shere Khan is constructed as a moral threat to the "law of the jungle" because of his pursuit of power as an end it in itself, exemplified in the charge leveled at him by Raksha the wolf, Mowgli's adoptive mother: "Hunting for pleasure, killing for power." For the other hunters, predation is civilized by the jungle law which can suspend carnivores' right to hunt in certain circumstances. For instance, the law dictates that "hunting is forbidden" at the "peace rock," a watering hole where all species can gather and drink free from the threat of attack. Khan is a transgressor of this natural law and is also revealed as being the killer of the infant Mowgli's human father. Raksha's indignation at Khan signals the wolves as more civilized hunters, though their own hunting also depends on an othering process that is less obvious to the audience in that it does not involve the explicit denial of subjectivity that Khan's degendering of Mowgli accomplishes. For example, early in the film the wolves want to "get the deer" and suggest, "let's go chase some mice." These predatory instincts are used to highlight Mowgli's difference: "I realise you weren't born a

wolf, but couldn't you at least act like one?" Mowgli's liminality is set in motion here, not quite in place within the wolf pack, but also estranged from human society – childhoodnature is a problematic construction. The deer and mice share no such liminality of course; they are othered as prey by the wolves through being massified and undifferentiated. Neither species are granted anthropomorphic subjectivity in the film, lacking voices, names, or individual characters. *The Jungle Book* shares this construction of herbivorous "prey" animals with *The Lion King*, most clearly in the strikingly similar stampede scenes in each film. In the latter, Simba the cub narrowly evades being trampled by stampeding wildebeest; in the former Mowgli escapes from Khan by jumping onto and riding a stampeding buffalo. No members of either herd speak, bear names, or are constructed as distinct individuals with a narrative trajectory in the films. It is examples such as these which typically attenuate the subjectivity of herbivorous, or we might say vegan, animals relative to more charismatically constructed carnivores or omnivores in children's films. As discussed above, the subjectivity of carnivores may also be attenuated in order to other them as threats to human or nonhuman protagonists, but their very threat still represents a greater degree of agency than massified herbivorous herds. The very capacity to threaten or consume others is itself a marker of subjectivity; that is, the exercise of power is represented as the capacity to both act as an autonomous subject and to constrain the autonomy of others.

Predation also assumes a monstrous and both literal and metaphorical constraining form in the python character Kaa (it is Kaa who reveals Khan's responsibility for his father's death to Mowgli). Khan's anthropomorphic construction is heavily gendered, relying on masculine constructs of physical strength, bravado, and intimidation. The female Kaa is contrastingly anthropomorphized by stigmatized feminine attributes of emotional manipulation and seductive deception. That is, while Khan presents a threat of overwhelming force, Kaa presents a threat of psychic control. Mowgli is rescued from Kaa's coils by Baloo the bear, a beneficent representative of masculine physical strength who takes on a role as Mowgli's educator. In Baloo's company, the film takes on a comic tone, with Baloo shown eating pawfuls of "funny ants" and informing Mowgli that bees make honey "just for you." The denial of subjectivity to insects is unproblematic in the film, corresponding with their lowly status in general.

From the discussion so far, it can be argued Khan can stand as an allegory for human environmental despoliation and the self-interested disordering of nature, while Mowgli's resistance of Khan allegorizes a model of human stewardship of nature that maintains or restores order. Khan's hunting is excessive and therefore *evil*, which is subtly indicated in his degendering of Mowgli when he utters, "Mowgli? They've given *it* a name" (emphasis added). Here Khan employs a typical trope of objectifying discourse by degendering the "other." The use of "it" is likely to jar with a human audience used to being acknowledged and addressed as gendered subjects. Khan's disparaging insult resonates with the audience indignant at being discursively positioned eastward in Fig. 1 by proxy or in other words rudely dethroned from the privileged northwestern corner. The film therefore dramatizes a

struggle by Mowgli and his nonhuman allies to reassert their subjectivity and autonomy in opposition to Khan's rule.

On the surface, Mowgli therefore invites audience identification on the basis of constructing (some) nonhuman animals as "friends" and agential subjects of responsibility to an ordered and harmonious (albeit still predatory) nature and thereby acknowledges and amplifies childhoodnature. The film simultaneously invites deidentification with Khan's willingness to use violence and intimidation to objectify and subjugate humans and other animals. In other words, the film promotes a notion of humans (especially children) as partially enmeshed within nature, rather than wholly distanced from it in order to dominate it, as embodied in Khan's tyranny. Here the film comes up against an historical tension between the more straightforwardly demonizing construction of Khan as a "man-eater" in Kipling's original story and the recent deployment of tigers as one of the most charismatic endangered species in conservation discourses. The construction of Khan in *The Jungle Book* is therefore somewhat against the Western cultural grain, but arguably a quasi-demonic Khan is a necessary fictive construct to sustain not only the dramatic narrative of the film but also to justify its subtle promotion of the human stewardship of nature. In other words, Khan has to be constructed as an "unnatural" tiger who transgressively exits the southwestern quadrant of Fig. 1, in order to provide a foil for the positive construction of Mowgli as nature boy.

However, the positive construction of humans as "natural" beings has limits in *The Jungle Book*. Mowgli occupies a liminal space between nature and culture, because it is his tool use, and especially his ability to wield fire that is used as a marker of human exceptionalism in the film. His tool use is problematized by other animals in the film and denigrated as a human "trick." His adoptive wolf-mother Raksha admonishes Mowgli's tool use, and Bagheera later instructs him that his "tricks" are out of place in the jungle. However, it is this exceptional ability of tool use that enables Mowgli to act as a savior and protector of the other animals terrorized by Khan. It is also possible to read Mowgli's tool use as a proxy for human intelligence and reasoning capacity. For example, Mowgli demonstrates the value of his "tricks" by using ropes to rescue an infant elephant from a pit. This impresses Bagheera, who is earlier shown revering elephants. Despite the vaunted intelligence of real elephants though, elephants in *The Jungle Book* lack speech or individual characterization. They, and in particular the infant, are thereby constructed as more helpless and dependent on Mowgli as their human savior. Baloo uses Mowgli's "tricks" to admonish Bagheera; "you gotta let him be what he is." This is also highlighted in the contrast between Mowgli's ontological fulfillment and the attempted ontological transgression of King Louie and his army of other nonhuman primates. Louie uniquely possesses the capacity for human speech among his army, with his followers only being able to imitate speech. Nonhuman primates, Louie partially excepted, are impoverished subjects relative to humans. Louie envies human exceptionalism and captures Mowgli expressly to extract the secret of controlling fire from him, which Louie believes will give him access to the "top of the food chain." Louie apes human exceptionalism (pun intended) and is thereby in denial of his own nonhuman ontology, which makes

him monstrous in the film. His monstrosity is represented by his Kong-like gigantism and a lust for power that matches Khan's but takes a different route – appropriating the human other and overcoming species-specific limitations, rather than overwhelming the human other with superior physical prowess. When Louie is frustrated though, he regresses to "animalistic" violence to assert his will, demonstrating his unworthiness of the human "throne" in the northwest of Fig. 1. Mowgli's worthiness is ultimately demonstrated by his use of cunning rather than violence to defeat Khan, following Bagheera's injunction that, "you're not a wolf, fight him like a man." Mowgli first attempts to use fire to thwart Khan, but in doing so accidentally sets the jungle aflame, inspiring fear in the other animals. Mowgli tosses aside his flaming torch, symbolically rejecting an imperial construction of human ontology that seeks the domination of nature. The narrative journey of Mowgli is therefore the fulfillment of a more nuanced human ontology, one that is tempered by his civilized and compassionate use of his species-specific power relative to Shere Khan's megalomaniacal use of his. Khan perishes in flames having been lured by Mowgli onto a tree branch that cannot bear his weight, but his grisly death is therefore framed as a just punishment for his tyranny.

In summary, *The Jungle Book* disturbs some of the terrain of Fig. 1, only to at least partially restore it by the end of the film. This restoration is in accordance with contemporary norms of human responsibility to care for the natural environment and to recognize our involvement with it (but not our full inclusion within it), rather than to reinforce our radical separation from it. Different types of animals, humans included, are put back in place in terms of Fig. 1, albeit *somewhat* closer together. The relative realism of *The Jungle Book* from our sample of four films makes it simpler to transpose subjectivity from the characters to their real "wild" counterparts. But this is also a less risky endeavor as the film does not directly confront human exploitation of "farmed" animals or others confined to the southeastern killing zone. Shere Khan is an aberrant and excessive subject, arguably proxy for the excesses of capitalist exploitation of nature, but the rewriting of the original Kipling story does not extend to critiquing the destruction of jungle habitats for "livestock" ranching (see Nibert, 2013). King Louie is also an aberrant and excessive subject, seeking the usurpation of human supremacy and punished for his temerity. But again, an opportunity for a critical commentary on human exploitation of nonhuman primates is missed. The contrast between the justice of the ape uprising against human violence in the recent sequence of *Planet of the Apes* remakes and Louie's moral turpitude is striking. Mowgli by contrast represents an enlightened subject, using his power for the good of others, but still doing so by ascending gradually toward the northwest from the southwest of Fig. 1. The shift is not as abrupt in the 1967 cartoon, where Mowgli is so entranced by the sight of a human girl that he ultimately finds it straightforward to exit the jungle in favor of the human village (Stewart & Cole, 2009). Growing up is no longer such a simple matter of eschewing "nature" and the companionship of other animals as it was in 1967. However, neither is childhoodnature straightforwardly recognized and celebrated: it is arguably still a matter of embracing an ontology of human

exceptionalism and a civilizing (rather than dominating) mission as regards "nature" and the other animals who inhabit it.

Conclusion

The five films analyzed in this chapter make for an interesting set of comparisons and contrasts, as despite their broadly similar financial success and superficial genre similarities, each populates the conceptual map in Fig. 1 quite differently. *Zootropolis* positions nonhuman animals as full agents in urban space, that is, in an environment that is recognizably "human" precisely because it is denatured. The replacement of humans with other animals in what remains a quasi-human urban environment in the film makes it easy to read the nonhumans as proxies of human characters, with accompanying moral messages about civilized human conduct. Among the four films, nonhuman animal characters therefore come closest to the northwestern corner of Fig. 1 in *Zootropolis* by virtue of their maximal anthropomorphism, but thereby audience sensibility toward real nonhuman animal is arguably attenuated: human audience identification with the nonhuman characters is primarily engendered by the modeling of moral lessons for the transcending of human differences, rather than for the envisioning of an interspecies community. *Finding Nemo/Dory* positions nonhuman animals primarily as "wild" inhabitants of "nature," such that they tend to be presented as out of place in captive environments. They are therefore afforded greater subjectivity than is typical for the southwestern region of Fig. 1, but primarily again through means of their anthropomorphizing. *The Secret Life of Pets* is the most conservative in its positioning of animal companions as quasi-subjects who willingly submit to their own domestication. It therefore reproduces the positioning of "pets" in Fig. 1. Despite the use of anthropomorphism to afford subjectivity to some of the film's nonhuman characters, that subjectivity remains in thrall to human control. Finally, *The Jungle Book* differs from its Disney cartoon progenitor by "rewilding" the human child Mowgli to some extent and thereby collapsing some of the conceptual distance between humans and (some) other animals. It therefore does the most to encourage childhoodnature as pivotal to self-identification among its young audience and therefore to dethrone humans from the northwestern imperial seat of Fig. 1. It envisions an interspecies community with human participants. However, human exceptionalism remains present in the film's narrative, and Mowgli's identity remains liminal, with "animal"/natural and "human"/cultured worlds irreconcilably bifurcated despite his personal choice to remain in the jungle – in other words, Mowgli cannot take us all with him, and childhoodnature is exoticized rather than normalized.

In this analysis, we hope to have drawn attention to the importance of mass media representations in the socialization process as regards childhoodnature. In our sample of movies, little progress is made toward a reconciliation of children with "nature," insofar as asserting a shared animal nature between humans and nonhumans. Such a recognition might help to reconfigure the socialization process

such that human humility and animal kinship with other species is fostered in childhood, rather than human exceptionalism. Instead, exploitative relations are variously reproduced, obscured, or at best left uncritically accepted. However, despite the problematic features of *The Jungle Book*, the updated character of Mowgli takes us closest to a sustained critique of the status quo through his ultimate choice of "nature" over "culture." In its modeling of interspecies companionship and community, *The Jungle Book* at least opens the hope for a future evacuation of the conceptual map. Mowgli's life outside of human culture suggests that it is (speciesist) culture itself that is responsible for our estrangement from other animals and from our own animal natures. This is not to call for a primitivist manifesto but for a critical awareness of the profound damage that is done by denying childhoodnature and denaturalizing children through the socialization process.

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