Feral Theory: Editors’ Introduction
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I was more or less feral, on my own and grasping for things...
—Lauren Berlant (2015, 19)

Because we both work in the areas of critical animal studies and feminist theory, we were intrigued by the title of the journal *Feral Feminisms*. What would it mean for feminism to go feral? Are some kinds of feminism, by contrast, *domesticated*? The founders of the journal offer some clues to what the name implies for them, writing that “*Feral Feminisms* takes the feral as a provocative call to untaming, queering, and radicalizing feminist thought and practice today.” The implication is that not all feminisms are feral; at least some feminisms have been tamed, or never escaped domestication to begin with. For the founding editors of *Feral Feminisms*, it seems that radical and queer feminisms are on the side of the wild. Indeed, as we discuss below, both radical feminist theorists and queer theorists have described heterosexist patriarchy as a process of domestication that involves the taming and breaking of those targeted. Consequently, they have theorized their own alternatives as feralizations or rewildings.

Feral is an adjective used especially to refer to a nonhuman animal—though sometimes to a human child—in a wild state, who has escaped from captivity or domestication. In the recent book *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Human Rights*, Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka “use the term feral to refer to domesticated animals and their descendants who have escaped direct human control” (224). Some feral animals, including feral children, have run away from situations of abuse; some children have been called “feral” because they have been kept in states of isolation, without socialization, language instruction, or education. Other feral animals have not so much escaped domesticity and captivity as they have been abandoned or lost by humans. In one way or another, ferals have been left to fend for themselves.

On the one hand, we can celebrate the freedom of ferals from human domination and control, but on the other hand, we should recognize that ferals are often abandoned, desperate, and highly vulnerable. When Lauren Berlant describes her younger self as feral, she explains that she was “on her own and grasping for things” (19). In some cases, forced rewildings or feralizations are cruel, as when chimpanzees raised as children, taught to communicate in sign language, and to see themselves as human, have been “rehabilitated” by being placed in jungle environments that are as alien and terrifying to them as they would be to a human child raised in the same conditions.

Ferals, for Donaldson and Kymlicka, are one of several types of liminal animals. Liminal animals are in between the domesticated and the wild; unlike wild animals, they live among humans but, unlike domesticated animals, they are not subordinated to human control, nor are they participating members of human society. Other liminal animals described by Donaldson and Kymlicka include opportunistic animals and niche specialists—such as raccoons, squirrels, and Canada geese who were never domesticated but have adapted to life in human-built environments. These animals may have adapted to urban and suburban environments when humans encroached on their wild territories, or they may have migrated opportunistically to cities and suburbs when they realized that these spaces offered steady means of sustenance and fewer predators. Having adapted to human-built environments, however, these animals and
their descendants become unfit for the wild, or may become irrevocably dependent on human-built spaces to survive.

Because humans tend to put animals into one of only two categories—domesticated or wild—non-domesticated animals who live in urban and suburban spaces are deemed out of place. If these animals are wild, humans often think that they ought to be in the wild, even if humans have destroyed the wilderness they once lived in or the animals could not survive in the wild. Since humans think that these animals ought to be living elsewhere, they are viewed as illegitimate, aliens, pests, or trespassers in human environments, with the result that they are often subjected to extermination campaigns. Donaldson and Kymlicka compare these animals to human denizens who, for various reasons, wish or need to live in places where they do not feel belonging and in whose political processes they do not wish to participate. Like liminal animals, these human denizens suffer from the stigma of being seen by the dominant population as illegitimate, alien, contaminants, trespassers, or invaders, and in extreme cases they are victims of what Donaldson and Kymlicka characterize as ethnic cleansing, more widely known as “pest extermination.”

We are drawn to the liminal animals who are apart from the society in which they nonetheless live. Although being liminal in the case of nonhuman animals may often be less voluntary, the liminality of these animals has parallels to being feminists in a misogynist society and vegans in a carnist society. The liminality of these animals also has resonance with being anticolonialist in a settler-colonial state. Beyond this precarious sense of identification, we are drawn to the feral because at least some ferals represent the prospect of escape from a former relationship of domination and control. In this Introduction, our aim is to explore the theme of the feral as it has been or could be formulated in feminist, queer, critical animal, and anticolonial theory, and to invite explorations of its potential relevance to critical race, environmental, mad, and critical disability studies yet to come.

The Feral in Feminism

One way in which women have been oppressed has been through their relegation to the domestic sphere and through the exploitation of their domestic labour; and so it makes sense to consider women as domesticated rather than feral animals. Indeed, in classic works such as “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex” and “In and Out of Harm’s Way: Arrogance and Love,” feminist theorists Gayle Rubin and Marilyn Frye have theorized sexual oppression as the domestication of the human female. Rubin and Frye each compare the sex/gender system to the “breaking” and training of nonhuman animals. For Rubin and Frye, being made into a woman is comparable to the transformation of wild horses into work horses, or the constitution through domination couched in affection of “man’s best friend.” More recently, in “After Alice, After Cats,” Jessica Polish notes that for Immanuel Kant women were originally and quite literally domesticated animals for men. In fact, Polish argues that women may have been men’s first domesticated animals. Kant writes that woman was initially a mule, “loaded down with his [the man’s] household belongings,” and later, with the development of polygamous marriage, became more like a dog in man’s harem—or, in Kant’s phrasing, man’s “kennel” (cited in Polish, 183). Polish argues that, for Kant, it was only with the domestication of nonhuman animals that “civilized,” intrahuman relations became possible between the sexes through the institution of monogamous marriage. If, following Rubin, Frye, and Polish, to become women was to be domesticated, it would seem that undoing gender, to borrow Judith Butler’s phrase, would mean
going feral (Butler, 2004). Monique Wittig long ago described lesbians as “escapees” from
gender. Wittig’s renegade lesbian is no longer a woman because she is no longer domesticated by
gender; like the avian inmate who flees the farm, or the dog who joins the wolves, she has gone
feral.

What are some other examples of women who have “gone feral”? We can first think of
runaway girls and young women who, like many feral animals, have escaped situations of
captivity, domination, and abuse, to live liminal lives in urban spaces. The 1980 film Times
Square depicts two teenage girls who escape the patriarchal domination of a mental hospital to
lead such liminal lives. Pamela and Nicki become lovers and collaborators in petty crime,
stealing to survive, and living in an abandoned warehouse. Nicki has a history of familial abuse
and abandonment, while Pamela is the daughter of wealthy parents who is escaping her
domineering father. As with the lives of many feral animals, however, the lives of these teenagers
on the streets should arguably not be romanticized as the radio broadcaster does in the film. To
lead a liminal life is often to be characterized by stigma, subject to more (and the same) forms of
abuse, and entails a desperate struggle to survive. Some of these girls and women, like many feral
animals, might like to return to domesticity if they could find nonabusive domestic spaces to live
in—which the wealthy daughter in Times Square ultimately does, returning to her upper-class
home and leaving her less-privileged lover to a life on the streets alone.

Women have left human society behind and gone to live semi-wild lives in other ways.
In Beauty and the Beasts: Woman, Ape, and Evolution, Carole Jahme discusses how women not
only outnumber and outperform men in the discipline of primatology, but are also far more
likely than men to do field primatology than laboratory primatology. This means that women
primatologists are much more likely than their male counterparts to spend years and even
lifetimes living in the jungle with primates, famously bonding with the apes they study and love.
While expected to undertake a short-term study and move on to other species, women
primatologists have tended to remain loyal to the first species of ape they go to the jungle to
observe, devoting, and even risking, their lives to protect their primates of choice from poachers
and extinction. Some of these women primatologists can truly be said to have gone feral—at least
for a while. Janice Carter, a psychology student who spent years trying to rehabilitate the
unfortunate Lucy into the wild, found it difficult to return to life among humans, communicate in
human language, move in human ways, and respond to human social cues. Dian Fossey noted
that it was hard to remember such social niceties as to flush toilets after adjusting herself to the
ways of gorillas. Male primatologists have rarely shown a willingness to go feral in these ways.
Jahme’s problematic explanation of these facts is that women, as the bearers of children, are
better at caring for and communicating with nonlinguistic creatures than men. Although Jane
Goodall famously and photogenically raised her blond child among the chimpanzees—learning
attachment parenting from mother chimps long before this parenting style was popular among
European women—many female field primatologists have bonded with nonhuman primates
despite not having raised children. Jahme’s explanation can thus only be seen as essentialist.

In works such as “Primatology is Politics by Other Means” and Primate Visions, Donna
Haraway offers a different explanation for the same phenomenon of women field primatologists.
She suggests that what is at stake in primatology is largely gender politics: while male
primatologists have wanted to demonstrate that patriarchal gender roles and dominant male
sexuality are natural and inevitable because we see them at our evolutionary origins, in our ape
cousins, female primatologists have used their observations of nonhuman primates to
demonstrate such phenomena as gender parity, strong female social roles, and female sexual
freedom. In these ways, female primatologists have shown that there is nothing natural or
necesary about patriarchal gender roles or oppressive sexual mores in human societies. For Haraway, what women are doing in the jungle is thus battling for human gender equality. Contra Haraway, however, it seems that women field primatologists are far more concerned with protecting the animals they love and those animals' native habitats than they are with human gender politics back in Europe and North America. Reading Jane Goodall's writings, for instance, we see no hesitation on her part to describe chimpanzee social hierarchies in ways that can only be demoralizing if we want a model for gender parity among humans: as she makes clear, male chimpanzees are socially and sexually dominant and female chimpanzees are socially and sexually subordinate. There is no feminist inspiration or motivation here. On the other hand, Goodall has devoted her life to preventing the destruction of the habitat of the chimpanzees she studied. Haraway's is an anthropocentric reading in which what is at stake in woman-ape relations always remains the human, but the writings of female primatologists do not always support her reading. If these women primatologists are feminists, we would suggest that they are feral feminists—unlike Haraway, theirs would be a non-anthropocentric feminism.

Finally, as another case of going feral, we can consider feminist separatism. In “Some Reflections on Separatism and Power,” Marilyn Frye argues that feminism always involves separatism of some sort. Separatism need not mean abstaining from sex with men, man-hating, or reverse discrimination; it merely means that people—including male-bodied or identified people—whose consciousness has been raised by feminism inevitably find themselves withdrawing from certain male-dominated and misogynist relationships, situations, and institutions, as surely happens when our consciousnesses are raised by other social-justice movements as well. Feminists make their time, homes, and bodies less available to certain people than they did before and, for Frye, this is separatism, even if, to not starve, one goes on working for men or in male dominated institutions. This kind of separation from relations of domination, even while remaining within the dominant society in order to survive, is not unlike the situation of ferals who have escaped captivity and the direct control of humans, even while they remain in human-built environments and depend on these to survive. Thus we would like to think of feminist separatism as one kind of feminist ferality.

Queer Theory

Queer theorist Jack Halberstam has argued that the term “queer” has been domesticated, or is now being used interchangeably with “gay” to describe homo-normalizing political agendas. For Halberstam, we need a new term to do the work that “queer” once did, and he proposes “going wild.” As Halberstam argues in an interview, “On Queer Failure, Silly Archives, and the Wild,” the political potential of “going wild” lies in its unpredictability to resist social norms that chart the course of human existence. He states: “The question asked by that category of the wild is whether we can return human life forms to, not simply to a more ecofriendly form of coexistence with other life forms on the planet, but also reproduce the terms under which unpredictability can thrive.” In Gaga Feminism, Halberstam argues that we are living in a time of chaos where the meanings of once stable phenomena such as gender and marriage have become definitionally unstable—once-solid concepts are “going gaga” or “crazy.” Rather than resisting this moment of instability and trying to put definitions back into place, or fearing the stigma of “craziness” and thus towing the line of normalcy, Halberstam argues that we go with the madness. Now should be a time of (queer) anarchy or “wildness.” As he puts it in “Go Gaga: Anarchy, Chaos, and the Wild”:
As a word, wild comes from Old or Middle English and refers to undomesticated modes of life, disorderly behavior, the lack of moral restraint, excess in all kinds of forms, the erratic, the untamed, the savage. When referring to nature, “the wild” tends to mean unaltered by human contact; in card games, a “wild card” lacks an intrinsic value but will change according to the game; “wild” also has meant barbaric, savage, or that which the civilized opposes. It often refers to a so-called state of nature, whatever that may be, and has recently been used to refer to the practice of going off the grid or behaving in a chaotic or anarchic manner.

“Wild,” in a modern sense, has been used to signify that which lies outside of civilization or modernity. It has a racialized valence and a sense of anachronism. It is a tricky word to use but it is a concept that we cannot live without if we are to combat the conventional modes of rule that have synced social norms to economic practices and have created a world order where every form of disturbance is quickly folded back into quiet, where every ripple is quickly smoothed over, where every instance of eruption has been tamped down and turned into new evidence of the rightness of the status quo.

...My use of this word, a word laden with meaning, saturated with sense drawn from colonial and ecological contexts, represents an attempt to stretch our critical vocabularies in different directions—away, for example, from the used-up languages of difference, alterity, subversion, and resistance, and toward languages of unpredictability, breakdown, disorder, and shifting forms of signification. (126–7)

Halberstam sees this argument for wildness as building on his earlier argument for embracing failure in *The Queer Art of Failure*, which takes as its exemplars animated chickens in revolt, the anarchic bodies of children, and the failed femininity of butch lesbians. Hinting to the potential of the concept of the wild for mad-pride and critical disability theory, in “Wildness, Loss, and Death” Halberstam writes, “let wildness speak not in the language of order and explanation but in beautiful, countermythologizing grammars of madness” (147).

While we admire what Halberstam is doing with the “wild,” we argue that “going feral” better describes the situation of returning to a less tamed or untamed state after domestication. Just as there is no “outside of power” for Foucault, there is arguably no longer any possibility of “going wild.” What we need, we suggest, is not so much to *rewild* queer theory as to *feralize* it. We also worry that while Halberstam uses the term “wild,” and mentions “ecological” theory in passing, the “eco-friendly” and all other lifeforms on the planet are reduced to a subordinate clause in his odes to the wild. In one lecture, Halberstam discusses the non-chaotic, collaborative, and altruistic social formations of bats as an example of what anarchy or wildness might be like, but in general “wild things” and “where the wild things are” are used without any apparent interest in all the species that are already leading wild and feral lives or the disappearing habitats in which they still struggle to survive. The feral theory we want would account for these lives and these habitats as well as the un-taming of human life. Indeed, we wonder whether thinking through the feral—and, indeed, learning to live ferally—might be necessary as humans prepare for the impacts of climate change in the decades to come.
Critical Animal Studies

In *Zoopolis*, Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka discuss the nonhuman feral, a category of animal that was previously undertheorized. They criticize animal ethicists for focusing exclusively on domesticated and wild animals, ignoring the billions of “liminal” animals who live within human communities without being of those communities or directly subjected to human control. Donaldson and Kymlicka argue that we should take up existing political categories—such as citizenship, denizenship, and sovereign states—and use them to conceptualize not only the rights of, but also our responsibilities towards, different groups of nonhuman animals.

Domesticated animals, for Donaldson and Kymlicka, should be understood as citizens because they have been fully integrated into our societies. Wild animals, on the other hand, should be seen as members of sovereign states given that they exist outside of human societies. Feral and other “liminal” animals do not fit neatly into the categories of domesticated or wild; they live among us and have no other home, but they do not choose or otherwise are not fully part of human society. Such animals are in different political relations to humans than domesticated and wild animals. As a consequence of these particular relations, Donaldson and Kymlicka argue that we require a specific set of moral obligations to these animals. This framework understands feral animals as denizens who would have the political standing currently ascribed to human denizens.

The problem with Donaldson and Kymlicka’s theory of political rights for animals is that it assumes that current liberal political theory does a fine job of theorizing human rights, and that we merely need to extend this theory to include nonhuman animals. Donaldson and Kymlicka frequently make statements with respect to animals such as, “Not all liminal animals need to be accepted as belonging here. In the case of highly mobile opportunists, we have a prima facie right to regulate immigration. After all, as we discuss below, we do this in the human case as well” (227). If, in countries such as Canada, we have a certain policy with respect to humans (such as incarceration for wrongdoers), Donaldson and Kymlicka often imply that the same policy must be just for other animals. What is never in doubt for Donaldson and Kymlicka is that *we* (a settler-colonial human “we”) have a prima facie right to be where they are, and to decide who else “belongs here.” If, however, we claim that liberal political theory and carceral tactics are inadequate ways of responding to human oppression, that we ought not take the settler-colonial state as a given, then we could conclude that it does not make sense to employ this theory to address the oppression of other animals (see Belcourt 2015). Thus, while Donaldson and Kymlicka’s theory is important because it extends critical animal theory to a previously ignored category of animal—those who are neither domesticated nor wild—their subsuming of ferality into existing neoliberal society risks evacuating the feral of its political potential. Theirs is an expansionist ethics, and we may recall ecofeminist critiques of animal ethicists such as Tom Regan and Peter Singer for also assuming that they (typically white, male, able-bodied, rational humans) are at the centre of the moral sphere, the rights-bearers who are never in doubt, who are in a position to decide who else might or might not be included as we expand the circle of moral concern outwards—with the centre always remaining intact (see Donovan; Cuomo).

But what if we are the feral? What if we do not recognize this “centre” to begin with? In contrast to Donaldson and Kymlicka’s perspective, in “Taming Ourselves or Going Feral: Toward a Nonpatriarchal Metaethic of Animal Liberation,” Brian Luke takes up the feminist association of patriarchy with domestication to argue for a feralization of the animal liberation movement. According to Luke, patriarchal society—and even masculinist approaches to animal ethics such
as Singer’s and Regan’s—“tame” our natural responses of compassion to other animals, insisting that we be “reasonable.” For Luke, allowing ourselves to care for other animals is a feralization of our human selves.

Anticolonial Theory

Indigenous peoples and bodies have been framed as wild or “savage” and are consequently expected to be domesticated within the reconciliatory ethos of settler colonialism. Andrea Smith writes that contemporary settler-colonial governments consider “Native nations as sufficiently domesticated to be administered through government policy, rather than seen as a continuing political threat requiring ongoing military intervention” (24). Here, Smith indicates that colonization used the hard infrastructure of military intervention, genocide, as well as American Indian boarding schools and Canadian residential schools to tame those who were indexed as “wild,” in historic, political, and theoretical registers.

In Dangerous Crossings: Race, Species, Sex in a Multicultural Age, Claire Jean Kim draws on colonial policy and political discourse to show that American Indians were likened to wolves. Unlike African Americans, who have historically been depicted as the missing link between man and ape, the colonial imagination constructed Indigenous people as “located in a space of antecedent time and ahistoricity, a[s] primitive[s] as incapable of cultural development as the wolves and trees [they] lived among” (Kim, 44). Indigenous people’s ways of relating to land and animals—specifically that they did not have private property relationships to either—was taken to be indicative of their savagery. By likening their use of land to that of wolves, colonists were able to expropriate Indigenous territory: “Because Indians live as ‘wild’ animals on the soil, hunting and gathering, they had no claim to it. By tilling the land, growing crops, and establishing animal agriculture, the English developed a legitimate claim to the land” (Kim, 45). The imposition of animal and crop agriculture served as a means to expand settler territories as they required increasing amounts of land.

Agriculture was aggressively imposed via colonial policy in the United States and Canada as the principal method of colonization, the belief being that “animal agriculture, and, specifically, individual property in livestock, would civilize Indians, turn them into industrious, God-fearing, peace-loving farmers” (Kim, 45). As such, we can note that colonialism in this sense worked to domesticate “wild” Indians by forcing them to participate in European farming practices which required the domestication of farmed animals. These efforts also rendered Indigenous persons sedentary, altered human-animal ontologies and relations, and changed relationships with land.

The trope of the Indian-wolf was not only employed to index Indigenous modes of sustenance or relationships to land, but also tracked along a “particular constructed notion of wolfness in the Puritan mind (as cruel, merciless, bloodthirsty, and evil)” (Kim, 47)—a wild beast in need of taming and management by European colonizers. When civilizing efforts “failed” or, we can say, when these wolflike beings were not sufficiently domesticated, Kim shows that the Indian-wolf identity was mobilized to eradicate Indigenous persons. Government officials such as Lewis Cass in 1830 expressed frustration that despite their efforts “…An Indian lives as his father lived, and dies as his father died…His life passes away in a succession of listless indolence, and of vigorous exertion to provide for his animal wants, or to gratify his baleful passions…he is perhaps destined to disappear with the forests” (qtd. in Kim, 48). The sentiment of the settler government at this point was that Indians were irredeemable and uncivilizable. As such, they
were placed in “anachronistic space” which sealed their fate in the minds of settlers: “Like the wolves in the forests and the buffalo on the plains, they had to give way in the face of advancing white civilization” (Kim, 48). Because the application of the term “wild” has been and continues to be used to oppress nonhumans and animalizable humans, ferality traverses racist routes—historically, politically, and theoretically. Building on Halberstam’s argument that anticolonial indigenous theory is anarchic—wild or feral—we can conclude that to be against the nation state, against the settler state, is to be against domestication. An anticolonial politics is thus for the wild and for the feral.

It is in this context—confronting the fact that there is perhaps no pristine wild to turn to, virtually no spaces left untouched by humans or registers not permeated by anthropocentric modes of domination—that this special topics issue explores the political potential of feralizations yet to come. In asking scholars and activists to consider the potential of the feral, we ask how ferality—as that which flees, resists, and seeks to be ungoverned by oppressive institutions such as humanism, settler colonialism, and patriarchy—might help bring about new ways of being and relating to ourselves and others that are more just and that respond to pressing concerns resulting from anthropocentric frameworks that permeate our societies.

The Content of this Special Issue

This issue brings together a video presentation with accompanying text by Fiona Probyn-Rapsey titled “Five Propositions about Ferals,” followed by four articles that theorize the feral by Billy-Ray Belcourt, Sophia Magnone, N.T. Rowan and Tracy L. Timmins, and Miranda Johnson. The issue also includes a dialogue on the feral between Dinesh Wadiwel and Chloë Taylor; “Vernacular Hearts,” a poem by Emilia Nielsen; a prose poem and two paintings by Vittoria Lion; three paintings of liminal animals by Sydney Taylor; and three drawings of feral insects with an accompanying text by Leyna Lowe. The issue concludes with a film review by Dylan-Hallingstad-O’Brien of Kornél Mundruczó’s White God.

We open this issue with Fiona Probyn-Rapsey’s video lecture, “Five Propositions about Ferals,” along with the transcription. Consistent with Rowan and Timmins’ paper on the treatment of feral pigs in North America, Probyn-Rapsey shows that the feral is a category that functions to recapture those who have escaped human-imposed categories and thus their human-appointed uses as, for example, pets or livestock. Probyn-Rapsey’s first proposition is that “Australian feral animals live and die between categories.” They are neither wild, pets, nor livestock, and thus exist in a borderlands between extreme violence (as they no longer serve human uses) and romanticized notions of having escaped domination. Though their escape from human domination might not be permanent, it does remind us that animals are not docile machines for humans to manipulate. The author’s second proposition is that “the word feral means ‘killable’ and ‘ungrievable.’” In other words, outside of the categories of pet or livestock, which constrain these animals as means to human ends, ferals are placed outside the bounds of human ethical responsibility. As such, they face violence that exceeds levels of violence deployed upon animals categorized as “useful.” The third proposition, that “ferals do not recognize themselves by that name,” shows that these are names developed by humans and imposed on animals as it suits our needs. When juxtaposed with the word “animal,” feral works to double the vulnerability and the violence faced by these animals. Yet these animals do not recognize themselves as killable, nor their peers as ungrievable. In fact, they show resilience, have complex methods of survival, and lead intricate social lives. Fourth, Probyn-Rapsey posits that “feral’
should remind us that the language of species is entangled with the language of race."
Specifically, this term reminds us that species, race, and gender are related taxonomies whose
categories all produce “ferals”—those who transgress, who do not meet the norm. Probyn-Rapsey
cautions that upholding these categories, particularly with regard to species purity, functions to
maintain the language of eugenics—a rhetoric that sticks to bodies with devastating
consequences for those considered “impure” or “mixed.” Finally, the fifth proposition is that
“ferals are a big distraction from the violence of animal agriculture,” meaning that the reasons
given for killing ferals in Australia—biodiversity and sustainability—work to blame feral animals
for the ecological conditions caused by human activity. Killing feral camels in the name of
cclimate change (because camels emit methane), for example, effectively distracts us from the fact
that animal agriculture is a leading cause of climate change, anthropocentric land use, water
stress, and loss of biodiversity. In sum, Probyn-Rapsey’s five propositions outline a way to think
about ferals as those who transgress our deeply held ontologies, who agitate us, who resist us,
and whom we meet with spectacular violence in return.

The first essay in this issue is Billy-Ray Belcourt’s “A Poltergeist Manifesto.” In this
piece, Belcourt suggests that decolonization might be a sort of feral becoming. Juxtaposing the
domesticating logic of colonialism to the radical potential of the feral, Belcourt reminds us that
the etymology of the “savage” refers to being wild or of the woods, and for humans, indicates a
state of being lawless or ungoverned. Belcourt’s reminder prompts us to ask what it would mean
to appropriate savagery in the name of decolonization. Ferality, in this sense, is a future-oriented
political project, a call to attend to affect and the body as targeted by settler-colonial power
relations. Belcourt invokes the figure of the queer Indigenous poltergeist—a demanding, loud,
angry, troubling, and unknowable figure who resists the reconciliatory ethos of the multicultural
settler state, “the feral monster in the horror story of decolonization.” For Belcourt, this ferality
should be an object of feeling, a queer Indigenous poltergeist that resists the happiness
narratives of the settler state. The decolonization that this feral is after is untethered to tradition
or to the figure of the anarchic Indian. Instead, this feral sociality has escaped the captivity of a
domesticating colonial state, strives to be ungovernable, and refuses the values and institutions
of a cis-normative settler project.

Sophia Booth Magnone’s article, “Finding Ferality in the Anthropocene: Marie
Darrieussecq’s ‘My Mother Told Me Monsters Do Not Exist,’” outlines how domestication is
foundational to our dominant anthropocentric order. Instead of focusing on moments of
“spectacular” feral resistance, Magnone considers what a process of mutual feralization in
everyday, mundane settings would entail. She accomplishes this via an analysis of Marie
Darrieussecq’s short story, “My Mother Told Me Monsters Do Not Exist.” The species of the feral
animal in Darrieussecq’s story is unknown to the protagonist; as Magnone shows, the
protagonist, who at first is fearful of nonhumans and wants her home free of this mysterious
creature, later adjusts to and is herself changed by this strange, uninvited, and unknown animal.
Through her reading of this story, Magnone shows that domestication entails the manipulation
and transformation of nonhuman animals toward dominant ends. Its processes include the
naming (and resulting taxonomic ordering), confinement, and subordination of nonhuman
animals. Domestication also works to impose a spatial ordering wherein animals, pests, and bugs
are relocated or exterminated, resulting in the illusion of properly divided, human-only spaces.
We can therefore understand domestication as producing anthropocentric epistemologies and
ontologies that place humanity above nonhuman life. Within this context, Magnone shows that
ferality can disrupt these logics of domestication and humanist orderings of life and space. For
Magnone, ferality is the “categorical unexpectedness, the eruption of untamed animality in
spaces (and even bodies) supposed to be securely human-dominated…” Ferality, in this sense, is that which disrupts, resists, and calls into question the physical, epistemological, and ontological dominance of humanism.

While Magnone outlines the liberatory potential of feralization as a means of resisting anthropocentrism, in “The Politics of Naming Feral: Anthropocentric Control and Feral Pigs in North America,” N. T. Rowan and Tracy L. Timmins argue that ferality can only be liberatory upon the abolition of domestication and the property status of animals. While we often think of ferality as resisting, escaping, or following domestication, similar to Magnone’s discussion of naming as a fundamental element of domestication, Rowan and Timmins show that the ability of humans to name a group of others “feral” recaptures those so named in relationships of subjugation. Using the treatment of feral pigs in North America as a case study, the authors argue that to name a population “feral” is to permit their eradication. For these authors, feral does not function as the opposite of domestication—instead, “feral” is another means by which humans assert control over animals.

Miranda Johnson’s essay, “‘The Other Who Precedes and Possesses Me’: Confronting the Maternal/Animal Divide through the Art of Botched Taxidermy,” analyzes visual artist Angela Singer’s botched taxidermy pieces to extend Julia Kristeva’s notion of the abject. Arguing that the abject body is feral in its wildness, somaticity, and willful refusal of social propriety, Johnson shows how botched taxidermy lends itself to un-domesticating anthropocentric orderings of life via its destabilization of the human/animal boundary. If traditional taxidermy domesticates wild animals by presenting them as clean and lifelike while simultaneously erasing the violent deaths which rendered them objects or specimens to be displayed, botched taxidermy can resist this through its employment of the abject. In particular, Johnson argues that Singer’s depiction of taxidermied animals covered in blood, their guts cut open and innards spilling out, or flayed of their skin, troubles the neat borders traditional taxidermy produces. Instead, she presents taxidermied beings as subjects whose violent deaths are evident; this presentation forces the audience to recognize that these beings share similarities with humans, as formerly bleeding, breathing, subjects of their own lives. For Kristeva, the animal is a symbol from which we can theorize the abjection of the maternal. Through an analysis of Singer’s work, Johnson brings the animal from the realm of the symbolic to the forefront, by arguing that the animal, the maternal, and the abject cannot be disentangled when considering the potentiality of the abject. Johnson focuses in part on Singer’s pieces featuring a rabbit and a possum, both animals who are vilified in Singer’s home of New Zealand where they are considered hyperfertile foreign invaders whose reproduction is uncontrollable. Johnson argues that the label of “feral” is applied to these animals in order to expel and exterminate those who threaten nationalist identity.

The next piece is a dialogue between guest editor Chloë Taylor and Critical Animal Studies scholar Dinesh Joseph Wadiwel, author of the recent monograph, The War Against Animals (2015). In the course of their conversation, Wadiwel examines the role of the feral in his scholarship over the last 15 years and in The War Against Animals in particular. Wadiwel and Taylor then discuss whether there is any emancipatory potential to the concept of the feral, with Wadiwel noting the violent deployment of the term and thus arguing for a position closer to those of Probyn-Rapsey and Rowan and Timmins, according to which feral is not a political status that anyone can want. Other topics explored in the conversation between Wadiwel and Taylor include the situations of particular feral and otherwise liminal animals in Australia and Canada; the intersections as well as dissonances between speciesist, racial, colonial, gender, and sexual politics; the role of ferals and other “denizens” in Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka’s
Zoopolis (2011); feral children and children’s relationships to nonhuman animals; and historical justice and our debt to ferals.

This special issue also includes a number of works of poetry and visual art, beginning with Vittoria Lion’s prose poem “Hyenas and Hymens” and the accompanying painting “Hyenas’ Birthday Party.” These works take up the hymen (the breaking of which by a penis, like menarche and childbirth, is an event marking “womanhood”) and hyenas (who show a predilection for homosexual behaviour and have both breasts and penises)—two forms that contradict tidy orderings of Western humanism. Inspired by Leonora Carrington’s short story “The Debutante,” Lion explores what a “return” to one’s animality would entail. That is, she ponders how a human’s transformation into a hyena could resist the domesticating logic of humanism and gender, suggesting that to become animal in this sense would be to refuse womanhood and its trajectory of dutiful companionship to men. Lion’s second painting, “Dionysus as a Leaping Bull,” refers to the Dionysian mysteries—a quintessential example of “going feral” in Western art.

Emilia Nielsen’s poem, “Vernacular Hearts,” features a heart’s recognition of its queerness and ferality. This heart is alone, seeking, searching for pleasure and companionship in dark alleys and living off scraps, always on the move. This heart has gone feral, it does not seek the “good life” that indexes normality—instead, in Nielsen’s words, “the heart’s on the prowl.” This poem was originally published in The Fiddlehead (2008), and also appeared in Nielsen’s volume of poetry, Surge Narrows (2013).

Nearly all of the accounts of ferals explored in this issue focus on the overwhelming violence that humans direct against the liminal animals who live amongst us, including liminal humans. These range from the campaigns to eradicate feral pigs discussed by N. T. Rowan and Tracy L. Timmins, to the militarized attacks on feral goats discussed by Dinesh Wadiwel, to poison dropped from airplanes on feral animals discussed by Fiona Probyn-Rapsey. Despite the general darkness of this situation, there are some species of animals who, although not immune to either extermination campaigns or to random acts of human violence, nevertheless thrive as liminals. Among these species are raccoons and squirrels, who are opportunistic animals drawn to human-built environments that offer them ample food and relatively predator-free spaces.

The three paintings by Cydney Taylor included in this issue—“Liminal 1: Raccoon,” “Liminal 2: Raccoon,” and “Liminal 3: Squirrel” (each 30 x 40 inches, oil on canvas)—depict these species.

Leyna Lowe’s three drawings, “Anthophila, the European Honey Bee” (9 x 12 inches, ink on paper), “Monarch and Milkweed” (9 x 12 inches, watercolour on paper), and “Hobomok Skipper” (9 x 12 inches, ink on paper) trouble the distinction between domesticated and wild. Lowe’s drawings are accompanied by short historical accounts of how human attempts to domesticate or attract pollinators have been frustrated by their escape and resistance. By focusing on pollinators, these drawings urge us to ethically address the consequences of industrial agriculture and the complex interdependencies of human, animal, and ecological life.

Finally, the issue concludes with a review by Dylan Hallingstad-O’Brien of Kornél Mundruczó’s 2015 film White God, which depicts stray, abandoned, and otherwise abused and neglected dogs who go feral and form an army in defiance of ongoing human domination.
Works Cited


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