Framing Nature

A discussion on the ethics of animal confinement in animal parks

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Abstract

The confinement of animals is today a widespread, widely accepted practice, regardless of the intention behind it. The confinement of animals for entertainment purposes, however, poses ethical questions that transgress the body of the animal itself and onto the boundaries of the human. What happens when a captured animal behaves differently from what we expect of it? Different from what we’ve trained it to?

SeaWorld and Kolmården are two parks that both display animals in different ways. Both advertise themselves as offering unique experiences; close up encounters with animals that would most likely not happen in the wild. Both parks have also been subject to predatory animals behaving in unexpected ways. Furthermore, the artificial relationships established between humans and nonhumans in captivity have in the cases of SeaWorld and Kolmården proven to create a dangerous environment for both humans and animals. The ethical dilemmas that arises in correlations with the deadly-outcome incidents that have occurred in the parks, takes the form of questions regarding if confining animals such as wolves and orcas are ethically defensible in the first place.

Keywords: Animal Rights, Animal Welfare, Animal Confinement, Experience Industry, Exhibition, Anthropomorphism, Ecological Justice, Radical Anthropology
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1. Introduction

The prisoners are always under scrutiny from the guards in the tower. Their every move can be seen constantly, and the prisoners know this. But because of the way the tower is designed, the prisoners cannot see if the guards are actually there. So, power resides in the inequality of visibility between the two groups. (Inglis, 2012: 183).

The gates of SeaWorld first opened in 1964. It had originally been planned as a marine-themed restaurant that would seat the guests along wide glass windows, providing them with a view over an artificial underwater landscape where sharks would casually swim by just overhead of the guests (SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment, History). The concept was expanded on rather quickly however, and soon became the marine animal-park it is known as today. Like other animal parks, SeaWorld invites their guests to view the spectacles of nature. Unfortunately, the maintenance cost for keeping one of their major selling points: orcas, have proven to be much higher than expected, with two people having lost their lives to the animal in their parks since the year of 1999.

Nature, or environment can according to British anthropologist Tim Ingold be seen as the surface of a globe, one that humankind may do with as we please (Ingold, 2000: 214). His theory states that the globe, or ‘global’, perception of nature is one where humankind, owns or means to own the surrounding environment. Defining It as something we live on, rather than inside or with. Animal confinement could be seen as an artificially reconstructed version of the nature that surrounds us, compressed for the convenience of the human race. Whether it is a shark-tank meant to serve as a stimulating backdrop for a restaurant or an orca performing tricks under the supervision of trainers, the confined animal finds itself imprisoned on the terms of another animal species; one that has taken the ‘right’ to the body of the animal on the principles of the survival of the fittest. However, the power wielded by the human race over nonhumans become less stable when the animal begins to behave unpredictably. Human deaths caused by animals in confinement quickly changes the way we think about them, regardless if the animal’s behaviour is considered ‘natural’ or not. For example, a captive predator killing a human would be considered more in line with their natural behaviour than if a captive herbivore killed a human. The animal we’ve chosen as a representative for their entire species suddenly becomes unfit for the job, and in many cases the animals are put down for not acting according to how we expect them to (SVT, 2018-11-01) (Dickson, 2016-05-31).
In this thesis I will attempt to illustrate how humans project certain behaviours and expectations on the animals we confine; how we construct a framework for how nature should be displayed through mediums such as animal parks, and how anthropomorphism (applying human traits to animals) ultimately creates a paradox where the appropriate representation of an animal clash with the intentions behind it. Moreover, I will be discussing the ethical dilemmas this constructed framework of nature presents in terms of commercial gains versus the endorsement of animal welfare. In order to do this, I have chosen two primary cases that this thesis will be centred around. The first is that of Tilikum, an orca who spent 36 years of his life in captivity and during this time became involved in the death of three people, the most out of any captive orca. Tilikum’s case will be taken from the 2013 documentary *Blackfish*, directed by Gabriela Cowperwraite. The documentary focuses on Tilikum’s life in captivity and discusses the three deaths caused by him in relation to the ethical dilemmas of animal confinement. The second is *Vargattacken* (2018), a reportage written by journalist Lars Berge which describes the circumstances surrounding the death of a zookeeper at Kolmården Zoo, Sweden in 2012.

### 1.1. Purpose/Research Question

My aim with this thesis is to discuss how we distinguish animal rights and welfare from humans’ through processes of objectification, ‘branding’ (i.e. treating nonhumans as business brands) and alienation. This will be done with the help of the notion of anthropomorphism – the tendency to imagine or represent animals along a comparison with humans. I will also use Tim Ingold’s theory on environmental perception to better grasp the human race’s behaviour towards her surroundings.

For my analysis, I will look at animals in confinement and how they are used for human purposes, i.e. exhibition and performance for human entertainment and generation of profit. Additionally, I will highlight the dichotomous relationship between that of anthropomorphism and animal exhibition and relate it to the commercial and ethical aspects of animal confinement.

Research questions:

- How can we use anthropomorphism to analyze the constructed relationship between humans and animals in confinement?
- How does the constructed relationship between humans and animals tie into the ethical and commercial aspects of keeping animals in captivity?
1.2. Essay Outline

Before I go on to describe the contents of this thesis, I would like to begin by describing how I’ve chosen to structure this text. In the following chapter (1.3), I will start by introducing the theoretical framework I have chosen for this study, as well as clarify some concepts that will be useful whilst discussing the empirical finds in relation to the selected theory. Thereafter, I will present my empirical material in Chapter 2 as well as motivate my methodological choice. This will be followed by an analysis of the concepts presented in Chapter 1.4, in relation to the empirical material in Chapter 3 before summarizing the text.

1.3. Theory: Perceiving Nature

In *Perceptions of Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* by Tim Ingold (2000), Ingold introduces his theory on how humankind perceives their natural surroundings, of which have already been briefly introduced. His argument is built around the ‘spherical’ versus ‘global’ perceptions of our environment. The globe, or ‘global’, represents the hard, physical and concrete. A globe is what we live on. Additionally, Ingold describes the ‘global’ perception as one where humans consume their surrounding environment through mere existence (Ingold, 2000: 215). This perception enables the human race to take full control over the globe and make of it what we want. In the context of animal confinement, this would mean that the human has the right to the bodies of nonhumans. On the contrary, the sphere, or ‘spherical’ represents the soft and transparent. A sphere is not lived on, but rather lived in (Ingold, 2000: 210). The essential difference made between the two definitions of natural perception, is how we view our surroundings depending on whether we see our world as a globe or sphere. Through the eyes of ‘the global’, nature is something we can control – we don’t live with or in it, but on it. It is ours to do with as we please. The ‘spherical’ notion instead enforces the ideas of radical anthropology and ecological justice (of which will be introduced further down); we live with nature and should thus treat it respectfully. For my analysis, the ‘global’ perspective will be the most used of the two because of its correlation to human’s power over nature.

1.4. Concepts

The concepts I have chosen to clarify have been selected because of their relevance in the area of environmental anthropology and how they relate to the topic of animal confinement. The concepts are animal rights, animal welfare, anthropomorphism, ecological justice and radical
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Anthropology. Animal rights and animal welfare are important to distinguish between while discussing the ethical dilemmas of animal confinement. These two concepts tie into the notion of radical anthropology and ecological justice, that both frame an approach to the area of environmental anthropology that I have chosen to involve in my analysis – one that enforces ‘equality’ between humans and animals.

1.4.1. Animal Rights & Animal Welfare

Animal rights is the recognition of nonhumans as beings equal to that of any other species, including humans. For example, an advocate for animal rights opposes animal confinement for commercial gains, since the same treatment of humans would be linked to slavery, and therefore be strictly prohibited. Animal welfare differentiates from animal rights, in that it refers to the prevention of suffering of nonhumans, confined or not (Kopnina, 2017: 4). Intrinsically, someone concerned for the welfare of animals doesn’t necessarily oppose the practice of animal confinement.

1.4.2. Anthropomorphism

Anthropomorphism refers to human attributes and characteristics applied to nonhuman beings. This might include religious deities, objects or animals. An example of this would be to portray an animal in a work of literature with human features, such as having the ability to speak or dress. Its opposite, counter-anthropomorphism refers to the prevention or subtraction of human attributes of a nonhuman. This could be linked with objectification and dehumanization and enables a complete alienation of the subject. Arnold B. Arluke describes anthropomorphism and counter-anthropomorphism as the distinction between attributing inanimate or animate qualities to a subject or object (Arluke, 1988: 5). As an example, Arluke describes the counter-anthropomorphism of animals used for scientific study, as animals that become treated and seen as any other research equipment by the lab-technicians (Arluke, 1988: 5-6). Similarly, orcas in the context of SeaWorld becomes but another part of the park rather than living, breathing beings.

1.4.3. Ecological Justice & Radical Anthropology

Anthropologist Helen Kopnina defines ecological justice as referring to ‘interspecies equality’ in her article *Beyond Multispecies Ethnography* (2017) (Kopnina, 2017: 4). According to Kopnina, an ecologically just society would feature total equality between humans and nonhumans. Additionally, Kopnina describes ‘radical anthropology’ as an anthropological
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discipline that takes ecological justice into consideration (Kopnina, 2017: 3). Furthermore, in relation to the theoretical framework of Tim Ingold, both ecological justice and radical anthropology plays into the environmental perception of the ‘spherical’, since it also endorses the notion of coexistence and therefore, interspecies equality.

2. Material/Method

The subject of animal confinement stretches many topics. From the ethics of mass-slaughter for the purpose of food, to the preservation of endangered animal species (in the vein of Zoos) to exhibitions of animals in an art-style setting (i.e. museums). The audience of an animal park, however, rarely get to see the entire picture of the confined animal. In a way, the ‘global’ perception of nature permeates the human mind – if what is presented to us is stimulating, and looks fine and dandy, why question it? After all, we live on this earth and its resources are ours to use. The primary empirical material I have chosen for this thesis have both been proven to highlight topics such as exploitation of animals, commercialization of animal bodies, as well as animal welfare and security. My primary sources of information are the 2013 documentary, Blackfish by Gabriela Cowperwraite and the 2018 reportage Vargattacken (lit. The Wolf Attack) by journalist Lars Berge. These sources introduce the problematics of confining large, predatory animals and the potential danger this form of captivity might pose for the animals themselves as well as the humans working alongside them. For my analysis, I will discuss the cases of Blackfish and Vargattacken in relation to the theoretical framework of Tim Ingold and the concepts listed above. Focus will be on the ethical dilemmas of animal rights/animal welfare in relation to the practices shown in the given examples.

Before I present the material in more detail, I’d like to point out that these sources both require some disclaimers. Blackfish is a documentary created with a specific purpose in mind and have after its release garnered criticism for its angled and biased views on animal confinement. SeaWorld specifically put out a statement where they rebutted some of the facts presented in the documentary, which the filmmakers of Blackfish responded with their own rebuttals to. Some of the disputed facts included the average life-span of orcas living in the wild versus orcas living in captivity and the accusation that SeaWorld breaks up orca-families (Juzwiak, 2013-03-19). The documentary in many ways succeeded with its goal when SeaWorld announced in March 2016, that they would stop their breeding program of orcas since the documentary created a hefty uproar against the park on social media (BBC, 2016-03-17). Despite its angled views, the documentary does provide plenty of concrete information about
the events surrounding Tilikum and how the former employees at Sealand of the Pacific and SeaWorld interpret the management of the parks in relation to the incidents with the orcas.

*Vargattacken*, like *Blackfish*, is evidently written with a biased view on animal confinement in mind – one that questions the human race’s authority over animals. The book, which focuses on an incident in June 2012 where a zookeeper was killed by the park’s wolf pack, explores the events leading up to the incident and questions the decisions made by the management of Kolmården Zoo regarding the wolves’ enclosure.

### 2.1. *Tilikum, the killer whale*

Tilikum, one of the largest orcas ever held in captivity was proclaimed dead on January 6th, 2017. Estimated to have been born in 1981, Tilikum was captured in 1983 off the eastern coast of Iceland. At the time of his death, he had spent a total of 36 years in confinement (Ruth, 2017). Tilikum has during his life in confinement become infamous for his involvement in the death of three people, all of which occurred on separate occasions with little to no possibility of predicting them.

During the first years of captivity, Tilikum was kept at Sealand of the Pacific in Vancouver, Canada, together with two female orcas. His arrival quickly caused a stir in the orcas’ pool, and problems for Tilikum developed quickly. In the wild, the orcas live in matrilineal groups led by the females called *matriline*. According to SeaWorld’s own website, the *matriline* typically consists of a female and her offspring, potentially containing more than one generation of orcas. In addition, the orcas within a *matriline* typically shares a strong bond, and it is extremely rare for an orca to permanently leave these groups. Being a female dominated species, the male orcas are usually kept at the perimeter of the *matriline* (SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment, All About Killer Whales). The result of an orca being forcibly taken from their matriline and put together with other, random orcas proved in Tilikum’s case to be highly dangerous. Not only was he placed with two orcas from the same *matriline*, but he was also the only male. Furthermore, the small pools at Sealand were naturally nowhere close to the size of a wild orca’s territory, and Tilikum was unable to distance himself far enough from the females as a result. In the 2013 documentary, *Blackfish*, former director of Sealand Steve Huxter made the following statement:

> When he was first introduced everything just went fine and dandy. But the previous head trainer used techniques that involved punishment. He would team a trained orca up with
The already tense situation between the three orcas escalated in combination with Tilikum’s failures to complete the various tasks he was given. The other orcas start to gang up on him, and over the following weeks Tilikum sustained several injuries such as bitemarks and blunt trauma after having been bitten and rammed continuously by the two females (Blackfish, 2013:16:00-18:00).

The first death occurred on February 20th, 1991 at Sealand. A young woman named Keltie Byrnes who was a part time employee at Sealand, accidently slipped into the pool of which the orcas were kept in. The orcas caught her and submerged her in the pool for minutes at a time, until she ultimately died from drowning (Blackfish, 2013: 18:35-21:00).

Sealand decided shortly after the incident to close down, putting the whales up for sale in the process. Tilikum ended up at SeaWorld Orlando in 1992, where he spent the remaining 25 years of his life. The messy reports regarding the incident at Sealand of the Pacific resulted in complete unawareness of Tilikum’s involvement in Byrnes death amongst the staff at SeaWorld (Blackfish, 2013: 28:00-31:00). Former SeaWorld trainer Samantha Berg says the following concerning Tilikum’s arrival at SeaWorld Orlando in Blackfish:

(…) I never got the impression that he was a scary whale. (…) I was under the impression that Tilikum had nothing to do with her death, specifically that it was the female whales responsible for her death. What I found really odd at first was the way they were acting around this whale and what they told us, seemed to me to be two different things. (Blackfish, 2013: 31:08-31:42)

Tilikum’s arrival at SeaWorld Orlando quickly mirrored his arrival at Sealand. He was placed in a pool with a number of female orcas who – like the females at Sealand - did not appreciate a large male not sticking to his position at the perimeter. Tilikum was viciously attacked by the other whales as a result (Blackfish, 2013: 29:02-29:35). As a solution, Tilikum was isolated from the rest of the orcas and was kept in his own pool, depriving him of social contact for long periods of time.

After Tilikum had spent seven years at SeaWorld Orlando, the second death occurred on the 7th of July 1999. The victim was a young man named Daniel Dukes, who had stayed at the park after closing hours and had managed to climb into Tilikum’s pool. Dukes was found dead, lying on top of Tilikum’s back the following morning with clear signs of lacerations and blunt trauma.
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*(Blackfish, 2013: 56:40-57:00).* Former trainer at SeaWorld, Jeffrey Ventre made the following statement concerning the man’s death in *Blackfish*:

> The public relations spin on this was that he was kind of a drifter and died of hypothermia, but the medical examiner reports was more graphic than that. For example, Tilikum stripped him, bit off his genitals. There was bitemarks all over his body. *(Blackfish, 2013: 56:40-57:00)*

The strangeness of this particular death is based on the apparent lack of security in the park. Despite SeaWorld having both guards and security-cameras on grounds, Dukes somehow managed to not only move about the park unnoticed during the night but get killed by Tilikum unnoticed as well. Moreover, like the incident with the young woman at Sealand, the circumstances regarding the man’s death was muddled in the media. Dukes simply became known to the public as a ‘drifter’ who had broken into the park, stripped off his clothes and decided to take a swim in the orca tank. The autopsy report however showed clear signs of aggression from Tilikum, with drowning being the official cause of death (Autopsy Report for Daniel Dukes, 1999-08-07).

Having been involved in the death of two people, Tilikum was still allowed to perform and interact with the trainers at the park. It wasn’t until the third and last death, on February 24th, 2010, that security measures were introduced in the park’s training program. The victim was the 40-year-old Dawn Brancheau, who had been a trainer at SeaWorld for roughly 16 years. It was during a ‘Dine with Shamu’ show (a show where the trainers feed and train the orcas which can be viewed by guests from the park restaurant) when Tilikum suddenly grabbed hold of Dawn’s ponytail and dragged her to the bottom of the pool in front of the park guests. The autopsy showed the official cause of death as drowning and blunt force trauma to her head, torso and extremities (Autopsy Report for Dawn Brancheau, 2010-02-25).

In *Blackfish* (2013) Tilikum is used as a case-example of how the captivity of animals is problematic not just for the animals themselves but for us humans as well. An important aspect of Tilikum’s case is that orcas are not usually aggressive to humans in the wild (Keartes, 2017), but Tilikum has since his confinement been involved in three deaths.

Tilikum is not the only example of confined orcas behaving aggressively towards humans. Kasatka was estimated to have been born in 1975 and was the matriarch of the Seaworld San Diego matriline. and was known during her time at SeaWorld San Diego as an orca that often
behaved aggressively towards the trainers (SeaWorld, 2017-08-17). One particular incident occurred on November 29th, 2006. Trainer Ken Peters was dragged down to the bottom of the pool by his foot which Kasatka had sunk her teeth into. She kept him there for minutes at a time before releasing him, only to submerge him again before he could get away. Peters managed to escape, only when the other trainers present strung a net across the pool of which he managed to swim over once Kasatka had released his foot (*Blackfish*, 2013: 50:30-54:40). Kasatka died in August 2017, reaching an age of 42 years.

In essence, *Blackfish* presents the confinement of large marine animals such as orcas as highly problematic. The incidents with confined orcas tell us that we humans are not as good at understanding their behaviour as we think. The last death caused by Tilikum occurring 20 years after the first death at SeaLand, also tells us that even the most experienced trainers are unable to predict the behaviour of these whales. The documentation of Tilikum’s life in confinement points towards a life riddled with psychological trauma that progressively turned him into a hostile force of nature (Berge, 2018: 183).

2.2. **Vargattacken**

The reportage *Vargattacken* by Lars Berge (2018) discusses the relationship between humans and larger, predatory animals in confinement (specifically wolves) and – like *Blackfish* - why the confinement of such animals could be both ethically problematic and potentially dangerous for humans. These concepts are discussed in correlation with the common thread of the book, which describes the 2012 incident where a zookeeper was killed by the park’s wolf pack after having entered the enclosure alone without any means of external communication.

2.2.1. **Terminology of Varg**

I would like to start my presentation of *Vargattacken*, by giving some context as to why the wolf in particular is an animal of controversy in Sweden.

Prior to the latter half of the 20th century, the Swedish population was predominantly agricultural (Berge, 2018: 78). For the farmers, the wolf was considered a pest that did nothing but kill the livestock kept by them. As a result, the wolf’s status as unwelcome became an episteme for the Swedish population. According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the hostile attitude towards the wolf was because of a (paraphrasing) ‘prevailing ignorance of the wolf and an unjustified fear for the pack-living predator’ (Berge, 2018: 94). It even went as far as for the Swedish name for the wolf, *ulv*, to become branded as taboo (Berge,
Varg became the ‘noa-name’ for ulv, the name which was used in place of the taboo-ridden one. For some, varg also became ridden with taboo. The wolf was instead called names such as ‘den andre’ or ‘gråben’, literally translating to ‘the other’ and ‘grey-legs’ (Berge, 2018: 79).

2.2.2. Close Contact: Wolf

Närkontakt Varg was a project initiated by zoologist Mats Ammundin in 1981, with the purpose to shift the widespread negative opinion of the wolf and prevent an eventual eradication of the animal in Sweden (Berge, 2018: 107). The project started when park trainee Annika Olsson began to initiate contact with the wolves under the supervision of Mats Ammundin. The intention was to establish a different kind of relationship with the wolves in the park, one that would allow for more interaction and further studies of the animal’s social behaviour (Berge, 2018: 113). The crux was that the entire project started out without the knowledge of the park management (Berge, 2018: 111). It was not until Olsson had successfully established a relationship with the wolves two years after her initial contact with them, that the project became known to the public and supported by the park management. The project grew over the following years. In 1983, a crew from the national swedish broadcasting company, SVT, made their way into the wolves’ enclosure. Annika Olsson were one of the zookeepers who were taking part in the televised show, and quickly establishes herself as the individual with the highest status in the wolfpack in front of the viewers (Berge, 2018: 120). The process of changing the long-lived episteme of the wolf as dangerous and mysterious was now officially up and running.

Närkontakt Varg eventually expanded to become a once-in-a lifetime offer, where park guests were invited to socialize with the wolves inside their enclosure for a fee. Supervised by the zookeepers, the wolves (nine and its maximum) were allowed to walk around freely during these sessions, and thus, the visitors got to spend time with the wolves in a way that would almost certainly be impossible outside of the park. The project functioned relatively well with no major accidents being reported. Närkontakt Varg came to a halt however, after the incident that occurred on the 17th of June 2012. One of the zookeepers, who also happened to be the wolves’ ‘pack-mother’, entered the enclosure alone without any means of external communication. She was later found dead in the enclosure by her colleague, maimed and lacerated by the wolves.
The woman had been working with the wolves since they were cubs. She and another man who was considered to be the ‘pack-father’, raised the cubs inside the park (Sveriges Radio, 2018-12-09). Because of this, the wolves were known to treat her with respect. During her time at the park, she had learned not to fear or hesitate whilst moving inside the wolves’ enclosure. However, during the weeks prior to the incident, the woman had expressed sensations of stress, nausea and headache after having taken it upon her to lead an EU-funded project at the park (Berge, 2018: 33). Additionally, the woman had expressed the will to possibly quit her job at the wolves’ enclosure to her boyfriend. All in all, the simple idea that the woman as a pack-mother was immune to any hazards inside the wolves’ enclosure was ultimately erroneous.

The death quickly became the subject of rabid questioning. How is it that the pack-mother - the very person who raised the wolves was killed by them? The consensus was that out of anyone, this woman in particular would be safe from the wolves due to the established relationship between them. While no one may never know for sure, Berge, in his attempts to riddle out the potential causes, points at the potential lack of secure work methods (i.e. allowing zookeepers to enter enclosures alone) and the changing dynamics in the wolfpack’s social hierarchy. Another major thread is the wolf’s natural behaviour. The wolf is first and foremost a pack animal with a strict social hierarchy. If a wolf is displeased with its status in this hierarchy, it may challenge the pack leader or just simply leave the pack. In the context of an enclosure, the problem naturally becomes the lack of distance, should the wolf fail to assert its dominance over the current leader. The wolf may end up on the bottom of the hierarchy – in a situation where it in the wild would’ve left the pack altogether to either find a new one or start its own. Specifically, one particular wolf, Volk, had prior to the incident been the lowest ranked member of the pack. Volk had as such been subjected to physical harassment and exclusion from the rest of the pack. He was not allowed to share meals with the rest of the wolves, take part in greeting the zookeepers and kept a distance between himself and the guests that came to visit the enclosure. While Volk had become the pack’s lowest ranking member, another wolf, Vilkas, had become the pack-leader. Vilkas was known amongst the staff at Kolmården as particularly unpredictable and aggressive. Although, he never showed any aggressiveness towards the human zookeepers (Berge, 2018: 138). After the incident on the 17th of June 2012 however, Volk had suddenly been allowed to join the rest of the pack (Berge, 2018: 220). Berge implies that Volk had challenged Vilkas as the pack-leader and killed the woman in the process of establishing his dominance.
Similar incidents have occurred at other animal parks. One in particular happened in 1996 at the Haliburton Forest & Wildfire Reserve. A 24 year old woman named Patricia Wyman had been killed by the park’s wolfpack after having worked a mere three days at the park. She had at the time of her death visited the wolves’ enclosure three times. After her second visit she had expressed concern for one of the wolves that she had experienced as particularly aggressive. The day after, the wolves’ attacked and killed her (Berge, 2018: 163). All wolves (5) were killed shortly after the incident.

The time before the incident at Kolmården, many of the other zookeepers who worked with the wolves had quit their jobs due to the exhausting working environment. One person who had been forced to quit her job as a wolf-guide was Anna. Having four years of experience at Kolmården Zoo prior to signing up to fill the position as a wolf-guide, Anna became known as one of the people who refused to quite despite the exhausting circumstances of the job (Berge, 2018: 149). Summer 2011, one year prior to the incident, Anna enters the wolf enclosure alone without any means of external communication. After the wolves have approached her, one of them suddenly takes hold of her hair with his teeth, causing her to tumble. The wolves quickly surround her, but she manages to get back up before anything further happens. As she backs away from the wolves, they sporadically lash out towards her, forcing her to cover her face and torso with her arms (Berge, 2018: 150). Somehow, she manages to make her way out of the enclosure without any major injuries. Berge writes the following regarding the previous incidents (my translation):

Despite the serious attack at Hannover Zoo in Germany (…) Despite an additional attack I Langedrag Zoo in Norway the same year (…) Despite the fact that Kolmården’s own staff have been attacked and driven out of the wolves’ enclosure (…) the defence attorney insists that the deadly attack was like a ‘bolt from the blue’.

The outcome of the 2012 at Kolmården Zoo incident was that the zoological chief of staff, Mats Höggren became convicted of breaking the security rules for a safe working environment and had thus indirectly caused the death of another human being, as well as being sentenced to pay a daily fine to the dead woman’s sister, for 40’000 SEK. Additionally, the park had to pay a corporate fine for 3,5 million SEK (Berge, 2018: 208). The Närkontakt Varg project was put

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1 Original Quote: ’Trots en allvarlig attack på Hannover Zoo I Tyskland (…) Trots ytterligare en attack I Langedrag naturpark I Norge samma år (…) Trots att Kolmården’s egen personal blivit attackerad och utkörd ur varghägnet (…) Vidhåller han [Mats Ammundin] och försvaradvokaten att den dödliga attacken var som en blixt från klar himmel.’ (Berge, 2018: 167)
on hold and have yet to return. 1st of November 2018, the management of Kolmården announced that the remaining wolves at the park will be put down (SVT, 2018-11-01).

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3. Captivity = Sacrifice?

In this paper I use anthropomorphism as a concept in order to better grasp the ways that human-animal relations are constructed and imagined. In the scenario of animal confinement in contexts such as SeaWorld, the animals are put on display through the lens of anthropomorphism. The representation of anthropomorphic behaviour is an important part of animal performance, since it’s considered appealing to the human audience. For example, at SeaWorld, the orcas are taught to ‘dance’ and the seals are taught to act as if they’re talking to their human companions, making for a show where the animals behave in ways that the audience might relate to (Blackfish, 2013: 06:26-06:40) (YouTube, 2009-08-18: 03:45-04:00).

The purpose of confining the animals in the first place is of course, extremely varied depending on the facility. In the case of SeaWorld, the drive is to showcase certain animals in order to (paraphrasing) ‘inspire guests to protect animals and the wild wonders of our world’ (SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment, About Us). This form of exhibition, however, creates a paradox. The animals that are put on display are meant to represent their respective species but are at the same time exhibited through the showcasing of anthropomorphised behaviour. In this way parks, even when aiming at educational activities for better respect and protection of nature, reproduces certain ideas of human animal relations that are based on hierarchy (i.e. human and human-like behaviour are superior to animal behaviour). In other words, what features as interesting and valuable in animal nature is what makes animals similar and of equal value to humans – i.e. anthropomorphic features.

The spherical versus global theoretical framework of Tim Ingolds might help us better understand the initial reasoning for the human’s established ‘right’ to showcase animals in animal parks. The absence of a ‘spherical’ perspective creates a scenario where no one is really
second-guessing the sovereignty of the human race over nature. Combined with the notion of anthropomorphism, this also allows for a gradience in anthropomorphic behaviour where the animals are rewarded based on how close they are to behaving like humans.

Arnold B. Arluke argues in his article Sacrificial Symbolism in Animal Experimentation: Object or Pet? (1988) that objectification in the form of counter-anthropomorphism (stripping away or altogether preventing the addition of human traits to an animal) is a necessary practice for those whose work revolves around the killing, or ‘sacrificing’ of animals. The purpose is to distance oneself from the animal as much as possible, so as to not develop sentimental feelings that complicates the sacrificial-process (Arluke, 1988: 5). Taking SeaWorld’s stated purpose of keeping and showcasing the animals into consideration, it could be argued that the orcas featured in the various shows are kept there just for that (i.e. to inspire guests to protect animals in the wild) - despite their educational intentions. In a way, in the context of the park, the orcas are sacrificed for ‘the greater good’ of the entire species. In contrast to the examples given by Arnold B. Arluke however, the orcas are in this case not counter-anthropomorphized to ease the process of the ‘sacrifice’ (i.e. the confinement of the orcas).

However, it can be argued that at both Sealand and SeaWorld, counter-anthropomorphism takes place in a different shape. Tilikum has since his arrival at Sealand been deprived of his matriline and thus, his basis for social interaction. The orca’s need of space and social stimuli are both ignored completely in the context of the animal park. If one would take both of these things into consideration, Tilikum would most likely not be confined in the first place. Tying this deprivation of stimulation that would in the wild come naturally to the orca to the notion of counter-anthropomorphism, the humans counter-anthropomorphize Tilikum by acting as if these were things that he doesn’t need. This attitude allows putting him in a small tank together with two female orcas from a different matriline, despite the potentially dangerous situation for Tilikum. Tying this to the words of Arnold B. Arluke, this entire process is in a way made possible by the counter-anthropomorphising of the orca; by ignoring essential aspects of orca-behaviour to fit the needs of the park.

Justifying direct or indirect harmful actions, or ‘sacrifices’ of animals, can according to Rene Descartes be done because of the animal’s lack of intelligence rendering them unable to register sensations such as pain (Blish, 2012: 12). Philosopher Jeremy Bentham took it one step further and meant that animal suffering should always be considered secondary to that of humans. He meant that since animals don’t have the same ability to grasp the concept of time, they would
unknowingly spend most of their time alive in suffering. A quick death at the hands of a human could thus be considered a form of mercy (Bentham, 1789: 143). While both ideas are evidently, outdated, these thoughts of human-nature relations line up with Ingold’s ‘global’ perception of nature. This perception combined with the notion that the animals on display are sacrificed for the greater good might also contribute to the blind acceptance of animals as beings that are incapable of feelings, since the very question of an animal’s sentimental side never arises in the first place if it’s assumed it has none.

Whether keeping the orcas of SeaWorld confined was a form of mercy, was one of the disputes between the staff management of the park and the filmmakers of Blackfish. According to Blackfish, SeaWorld claims that the orca’s natural lifespan is between 25-35 years, and that the veterinary care the park provides causes them to live longer (Blackfish, 2013: 40:36-41:00). SeaWorld’s official website also lists males to live roughly 30 years and females to live roughly 50 years in the wild (SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment, Killer Whale). The filmmakers of Blackfish argue that the wild orca’s lifespan is equal to that of humans (up to roughly 80 years). Whether the orca lives longer or not in confinement is essential in deducting whether confinement could be considered a form of mercy. Of course, there are other aspects to take into consideration. What kind of life does the orca live confined? Is there potential for an orca to live a fulfilled, happy life in confinement, or should the negative portrayal of their confinement in Blackfish be trusted blindly? Additionally, are the benefits from the ‘sacrifice’ enough to justify their confinement?

3.1. The ‘Experience Industry’

According to Lars Berge, nature has become an ‘experience industry’ - an industry where nature is framed and capitalized upon for commercial gains. One of his arguments lie in the initial purpose for the establishment of Kolmården Zoo: To provide an economic boost to the municipality that was at the time struggling financially (Berge, 2018: 69).

The animal park as a medium for ‘experience’ arguably focuses on research and supporting endangered animal species, funded by exhibiting the animals in question. The animals are exhibited in enclosures that may be shared by other animals or are entirely their own. Arguably, the goal with this kind of exhibition is to make sure the enclosure properly shows the animal who lives there (e.g. arranging the enclosure in such a way that you as a visitor may know before seeing the animal what kind of animal lives there). While the work behind these enclosures may be entirely different and more demanding to that of say, an art exhibition at a
museum. What the visitors see may just as well be some form of art-installation – that in this case happens to contain live animals.

In relation to the theoretical framework of Tim Ingold, the Närkontakt Varg project could be seen as an attempt to provide the guests with a ‘spherical’ experience – one where visitors are encouraged to socialize with the wolves, rather than watching them from behind a window. The problem with these kinds of interactions is the unpredictable nature of the animal in question. In the court proceedings regarding the death of the zookeeper, zoologist Olof Liberg expresses uncertainty towards the applicability of Kolmården’s Närkontakt Varg approach. He means that while the wolf may learn to not fear humans when raised in captivity, its natural instincts will not change (Berge, 2018: 132). To the question ‘Can the wolf be trusted?’, Liberg answers that the relationship between that of human and wolf will remain one without communication. The boundaries of belonging to different species will never enable us to fully understand them (Berge, 2018: 132). Continuing in the same vein as Liberg, Helen Kopnina means that any nonhuman who is incapable of communicating through the use of a language will always be regarded as an object, more or less (Kopnina, 2017: 340-341). Connecting this to Tim Ingold, the ‘global’ perception of nature causes an unequal balance of power that favour human characteristics.

Going back to the incident at Kolmården Zoo, June 2012, the following statement was prompted from the zoological chief of staff Mats Höggren at Kolmården (my translation):

> It’s terrible, we are chocked and are of course thinking about her family and our staff. (…) And not least, even if it may sound secondary, we’re also thinking about the wolf and the wolf’s brand. (…) we realize that this is going to affect the wolf-debate and the wolf-politics and that we have a responsibility in that.² (Berge, 2018: 20)

Linking the animal, wolf, to a brand ties back to park’s initial intentions of profiting the municipality. Moreover, there seems to be an ambiguous side to the mentality surrounding the wolves at Kolmården. As described by Berge, the Närkontakt Varg project endorsed a relationship between the humans and the wolves that were meant to be on the wolves’ terms. The animals are not directly subjected to anthropomorphism because of Kolmården’s approach to raising their wolves. In their case, the zookeepers are meant to mimic the behaviour of the wolves.

² Original Quote: ‘Det är fruktansvärt, vi är chockade och vi tanker givetvis på henne och hennes anhöriga och vår personal (…) Och inte minst, även om det kanske låter sekundärt, så tanker vi på vargen och vargens varumärke. (…) Vi inser ju att det här kommer påverka vargdebatten och vargpolitiken och vi har ett ansvar i det.’ (Berge, 2018: 20)
wolves instead – in a way the zookeepers counter-anthropomorphize themselves. However, it could be argued that the wolves - being raised in captivity by humans and having two zookeepers acting as their alphas - are not representative of their wild counterparts. It also prompts me to wonder where the line between forced and natural behaviour goes. If the wolves are born in captivity and raised by humans, is it equal to a form of unavoidable anthropomorphism? Moreover, does the Närkontakt Varg approach to socializing with the wolves on their own terms also tread the line between anthropomorphic behaviour, simply because of the interaction takes place within the context of a human-made version of nature?

What we see in the Kolmården’s case, is an attempt to strictly categorize the animal: wolf, as something it is not. The attempts to better the wolf’s reputation by portraying them as friendly, while obviously not ill-meant, could after the incident be linked with a projection of the animal forced by the park. A wolf is of course, not an animal that is actually considered dangerous for humans, but that does not mean that it is not in its nature to attack a human while it feels it is necessary. Moreover, the ‘branding’ of wolves in this case has a clear agenda. As the zoological chief of staff expressed himself shortly after the incident, the ‘wolf’s brand’ was endangered by the increasingly bad reputation the wolves were about to receive from the public. This demonstrates the underlying commercial interest that also seems to permeate the mentality regarding animal confinement.

In the case of Tilikum, the commercial aspect of the experience industry becomes evident when getting to the core of why Tilikum was allowed to perform after having caused the deaths. When Sealand first sold him off to SeaWorld, the park’s interest lied in Tilikum’s potential as a breeder. Simply put, Tilikum was kept because of the value of his semen (Berge, 2018: 183). Additionally, Tilikum’s role as a breeder have caused roughly fifty percent of the whales at the various SeaWorld parks to have his genes, despite his history of aggressive behaviour towards humans (Blackfish, 2013: 58:10-58:20). This adds another layer to the notion of the ‘global’ perception of nature, where humans not only control the animals, but also control their breeding habits. Despite the explicit reasoning of educating the public about our nature, the commercial aspect becomes a clear reason for keeping animals in captivity.

Helen Kopnina writes the following in Beyond Multispecies Ethnography (2017):

This symbol-induced passivity stems back to the nature-culture dualism or human–environment dichotomy. Part of this dualistic vision presupposes that nature or wilderness as socially constructed, denying nonhuman elements their agency and rights. Even when
nature’s physical presence is recognized, it is often merely as “background to the human drama which is played out in a diversity of ways in different societies”. (Kopnina, 2017: 341)

In an experience industry such as the animal park, the ‘backdrop’ for human interaction is the artificial nature constructed for the purpose of entertainment. Of course, the animals kept in the park are very much real and alive. But it doesn’t change or erase the ‘global’ and anthropocentric perspective that permeates the public opinion about animal rights and animal welfare. Although real and alive, the animals are bound by the will of humans, and not their own.

Arguing for the endorsement of radical anthropology, Kopnina recognizes some of the problematic questions such a ratification might bring to western culture. She means that eradicating the dualism between humans and nature would firstly, make the confinement of animals completely inexcusable, since animal and human rights would be measured equally. Additionally, Kopnina means that as human wealth and consumption increases, nonhumans get caught in the cross-hair more frequently (Kopnina, 2017: 338). Radical anthropology should also establish itself as mainstream discipline within the framework of ethnographic studies, promoting animal welfare and interspecies equality (Kopnina, 2017: 351).

4. Conclusion

In this thesis, I have described the cases of Vargattacken and Blackfish and discussed their content in relation to the ethical aspects of animal confinement. This discussion has been put against the theoretical framework of Tim Ingold, which describes the ‘global’ and ‘spherical’ perception of nature and how this may affect human interaction with their environment. The research questions concerned the use of anthropomorphism as an analytical tool whilst discussing the relationship between humans and confined animals, as well as how the constructed relationship between the two ties into the ethical and commercial aspects of animal confinement. In this conclusion, I will introduce a possible answer for these questions based on the contents of this text, whilst also summarizing the thesis.

Animal parks as a medium for animal confinement have proven to be problematic platforms for human-animal interaction, not just for the animals themselves but for the humans working alongside them. The unpredictability of nonhuman behaviour creates a potentially dangerous environment for both parts. For example, the orca, an animal that is usually not aggressive
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towards humans in the wild, have caused multiple human deaths when kept in captivity. The situation is similar for the wolf. The staff of Kolmården’s attempt to adapt to the strict social hierarchy of a wolfpack have also proven to have a deadly outcome.

Nonetheless, anthropomorphism is a valuable tool whilst attempting to differentiate the natural versus domesticated behaviour in an animal. The artificial relationship between that of humans and confined animals could be seen as an attempt to break down the ‘global’ perception of nature that seems to dominate amongst the human race. The problem is that the confinement in of itself is a ‘global’ action, where the human asserts their dominance over the environment.

Overall, the context of an animal park blurs the line between anthropomorphism, objectification, wild, and domesticated. The animals put on display are in a way, objects of the park, free for the park guests to watch. At the same time, they are subjected to anthropomorphism by simply being raised and/or domesticated by humans. The wild, is what the human attempts to display at these parks. It also represents the purpose many of these parks seems to have regarding their confinement of the animals; to inform and encourage people to care for our surroundings.
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**Documentaries**
