

# Thinking Like a Mountain

Supplement

## Like a Balanced Rock: Aldo Leopold, Val Plumwood and turbid ecology

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*We reached the old wolf in time to watch a fierce green fire dying in her eyes. I realized then, and have known ever since, that there was something new to me in those eyes, something known only to her and to the mountain.*  
(Aldo Leopold)<sup>1</sup>

*The golden eyes glinted with interest. I tensed for the jump and leapt. Before my foot even tripped the first branch, I had a blurred, incredulous vision of great toothed jaws bursting from the water. Then I was seized between the legs in a red-hot pincer grip and whirled into the suffocating wet darkness.*  
(Val Plumwood)<sup>2</sup>

*What does this bottomless gaze offer to my sight? What does it “say” to me, demonstrating quite simply the naked truth of every gaze, when the truth allows me to see and be seen through the eyes of the other, in the seeing and now just seen eyes of the other?*  
(Jacques Derrida)<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A. Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac. And Sketches Here and There*, Oxford University Press, New York 1949, p. 130.

<sup>2</sup> V. Plumwood, “Human Vulnerability and the Experience of Being Prey,” *Quadrant*, March 1995, p. 30.

<sup>3</sup> J. Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, Fordham University Press, New York 2008, p. 12.

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Feminisms have shown how dualistic approaches constitute a very broad basis on which numerous interconnected forms of oppression proliferate: one of the main ways they function is by naturalizing both the cuts it makes into the continuum of life in order to separate and establish hierarchies of value, and then the two sides of the cut, in order to classify the terms of the opposition in terms of being essentially superior or inferior. This division and the consequent attribution of value are, however, social and historical operations. For the continuum between them to emerge and become visible, we must start by addressing the division, i.e. the methods and tools we use to observe reality, categorize it, and represent it.<sup>4</sup> We can only make a difference by articulating our relationship with the world differently, not simply by equipping ourselves with more adequate tools to say what things are *really* like: there is never a single edge in the relationships between humans and other animals, but a multiplicity of lines that no exteriority can fully define.<sup>5</sup> Thus it is not merely a question of broadening the field to include new observables, but of bringing about change in the subject of speech in such a way that it stops disanimating all other life even when it believes it is operating with respect.<sup>6</sup>

This premise is necessary to understand how, and whether, it is possible to reconcile Aldo Leopold's land

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<sup>4</sup> K. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, Duke University Press, Durham 2007.

<sup>5</sup> D. Haraway, "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others," in *Cybersexualities*, Jenny Wolmark (ed.) Edinburgh University Press 1999, pp. 314–366; Jacques Derrida, cit.

<sup>6</sup> D. Haraway, *When Species Meet*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2008, pp. 19 ff.; F. Timeto, "La specie è un ossimoro," in *Studi Culturali*, XIV, 2, 2017, pp. 241–262.

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ethic with the figure of the “holistic” hunter that he himself promotes and embodies in a way not unlike other conservationists. Leopold’s proposals, based on ethical-philosophical values and not merely utilitarian and economistic ones, certainly represent an important turning point in the direction of a non-extractivist vision of natural resources, and the acknowledgement of the belonging of human life to “nature” from which it started out has contributed to the development of contemporary ecological awareness.<sup>7</sup> However, from an ecofeminist, antispeciesist, and ethical-political perspective, it cannot be ignored that his theories today present evident limitations that are mirrored also in the differences between ecofeminist approaches and those of deep ecology, influenced by Leopold. My reflections are part of a debate that has involved several ecofeminist theorists, and by addressing the issue, they intertwine with those of another ecofeminist, Val Plumwood, with a view to continuing the discourse on predation opened by the latter, and giving it a further twist.

Along with the “happy” and the “spiritual” hunter, with whom he shares various attitudes and outlooks, albeit with slightly different motivations, the holistic hunter does not hunt out of necessity but out of a sort of natural instinct, or rather to be in tune with his instincts and at the same time exercise full control over them, and to return to a time when humans lived more in touch with the natural

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<sup>7</sup> Mallory 2001, “Acts of Objectification and the Repudiation of Dominance: Leopold, Ecofeminism, and the Ecological Narrative,” in *Ethics and the Environment*, 6, 2, 2001, pp. 59–89.

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world.<sup>8</sup> The holistic hunter claims to hunt to contribute to the wellbeing and balance of the biotic community of which he himself is a part, and this makes him a more presentable version of the happy hunter.<sup>9</sup> It matters little that the hunt in question is not dictated by the need for survival, apart from the fact that the prey has no interest in being, or desire to be, killed.<sup>10</sup>

Leopold's vision was shaped in the US at a time in history when it was becoming necessary to reconcile the growth of the economy and population with the limited availability of resources. Leopold taught Game Management<sup>11</sup> (later renamed Wildlife Management) at the Department of Economics at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, in an intellectual context where active social engagement characterized academic activity according to a German-style historical and empirical approach, which made him skeptical, for example, of bookish education in ecology.<sup>12</sup> In his writings, Leopold recalls the traditions of rural America and revitalizes the frontier myth as a more

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<sup>8</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the three typologies, see M. Kheel, "License to Kill. An Ecofeminist Critique of Hunters' Discourse," in *Animals & Women. Feminist Theoretical Exploration*, C. Adams & J. Donovan (eds.), Duke University Press, Durham 1999, pp. 85–125.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>10</sup> For the issue of consent by the prey in non-Western and multinaturalist cosmologies, see M. Robinson, "Veganism and Mi' Kmaq Legends," *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, XXXIII, 1, 2013, pp. 189–196; C. Womack, "There Is No Respectful Way to Kill an Animal," *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, 25, 4, 2013, pp. 11–27; E. Viveiros de Castro, *La mirada del jaguar*, Tinta Limon, Buenos Aires 2014.

<sup>11</sup> "Game" is the term used to indicate animals (variously interpretable on the basis of cultural differences) hunted for recreational purposes. The term derives from the Old English *gamen*, "amusement."

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Qi Feng Lin, "Aldo Leopold: Reconciling Ecology and Economics," December 20, 2015, <https://humansandnature.org/aldo-leopold-reconciling-ecology-and-economics>.

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“authentic” way of establishing a relationship with nature. The collection of trophies typical of ecotourism is for him a sort of youthful age of man, who seeks nature but who has not yet refined his perception to the point of existing in harmony with the wilderness, the myth of an original and untouched natural state.<sup>13</sup> Wilderness, as opposed to progress, is therefore antithetical to history, yet it forms the very precondition of the private ownership of land and of “hyperseparation” between humans and other living beings.<sup>14</sup> An abstract Eden<sup>15</sup> in which three elements are combined: the return to a primal bond with the land, like that—for example—maintained by the Native Americans,<sup>16</sup> writes Leopold (only to then turn it into an epic on the birth of the nation); the awareness that our life is never completely external to it; and the sportsmanship intrinsic to the human approach to wildlife, which he traces back to the lifestyle of the pioneers, embodied in the ethics of hunting, where resistance, independence, and skill find their fulfillment and balance.

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<sup>13</sup> A. Leopold, “Wildlife in American Culture,” in *A Sand County Almanac. And Sketches Here and There*, Oxford University Press, Oxford–New York 1949, 2020, pp. 167–175. On the difference between the notion of wilderness and that of nature, see also V. Plumwood, “Wilderness Skepticism and Dualism,” in *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, J. Baird Callicott and M. Nelson (eds.), University of Georgia Press, Athens GA 1998, pp. 652–690.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Plumwood’s critique in “The Concept of Cultural Landscape: Nature, Culture and Agency of the Land,” in *Ethics and the Environment*, 11, 2, 2006, pp. 115–150.

<sup>15</sup> V. Plumwood, “The wisdom of the balanced rock: The parallel universe and the prey perspective,” in V. Plumwood, *The Eye of the Crocodile*, L. Shannon (ed.), E Press, Canberra 2012, p. 41.

<sup>16</sup> On the homogenization of native practices and the stereotype of tradition in ecological discourse, see M. Kheel, “License to Kill,” cit.; V. Plumwood, *The Eye of the Crocodile*, cit.; C. Kim, *Dangerous Crossings. Race, Species, and Nature in a Multi-cultural Age*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge MA 2015.

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It is no coincidence that with regard to the ennobling and wholesome activity of “bloodsports,” Leopold mentions the US president-cum-hunter Theodore Roosevelt, who restored the central role of the United States Forest Service (where Leopold had worked before he was appointed to his university post) placing it under the control of the Department of Agriculture, and contributing to the creation of hundreds of national parks and reserves. At that specific juncture in American history, the hunting as a bloodsport that Roosevelt promoted, not unlike the “holistic” kind, was part and parcel of a paternalistic outlook that encouraged a healthy and decorous lifestyle in the great outdoors, functional to the disciplined and civilized advancement<sup>17</sup> of the social fabric. Leopold was critical of the leisure economy, and in this he was very much ahead of his time.<sup>18</sup> He was also critical of technology and excessive top-down planning which, by artificially mediating the relationship between humans and nature, was progressively distancing them from their original relationship with nature (Leopold believed landowners were better suited to this “authentic” relationship than the state). One consequence of this mismanagement was the evident ecosystemic imbalances, whereby certain protected species (such as deer) ended up becoming “invasive,” to the detriment of others (such as wolves), decimated by short-

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<sup>17</sup> While encouraging the protection of the weakest, it is during this period that the biopolitical subjectivity of the child emerges, for example, and urban parks and scouting are promoted: cf. D. Haraway, *Primate Visions. Gender, Race and Nature in the World of Modern Science*, Routledge, New York–London 1989; M. H. Glick, *Infrahumanisms. Science, Culture and the Making of Modern Non/Personhood*, Duke University Press, Durham 2018.

<sup>18</sup> A. Leopold, “Conservation Esthetic,” in *A Sand County Almanac*, cit., pp. 155–166.

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sighted containment measures (this is easy to understand if we think of what is happening to wild boars and bears in Italy today).

It is from this latter consideration that Leopold's *mea culpa* sets out, after the slaughtering of the she-wolf and her cubs, an episode at the center of the short text "Thinking Like a Mountain" that gives the title to the Italian translation<sup>19</sup> of the collection of essays *A Sand County Almanac* (1949). Her dying gaze shows him all the ignorance of human action before the memory of the place: "I thought that because fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean hunters' paradise. But after seeing the green fire die, I sensed that neither the wolf nor the mountain agreed with such a view."<sup>20</sup> Too many deer, the suffering mountain vegetation, the eroded rock, the persecuted and exterminated wolves. You can make use of nature, as long as you learn to understand it, to read it, says Leopold.

But reading it does not always imply paying *the right* kind of attention. Before being killed, the dignity of the dying animal is mirrored on the hunter, restoring his image and ennobling him<sup>21</sup> in its reflected glow. The ground on

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<sup>19</sup> A. Leopold, *Pensare come una montagna*, unabridged edition, Italian translation by A. Roveda, Piano B edizioni, Prato 2019.

<sup>20</sup> A. Leopold, "Thinking Like a Mountain," in *A Sand County Almanac*, cit., pp. 120–121.

<sup>21</sup> Even the artist-scientist Carl Akeley, taxidermist, hunter and inventor of the rotating camera, heir to Marey's chronophotographic *gun*, in his accounts of his hunting trips would linger to describe the intelligence and sociality of animals, insofar as dignifying them also meant elevating the human who dared confront them. For the same reason, Theodore Roosevelt, having failed to bag any prey during a hunt in Mississippi in 1902, refused to kill the bear that others had captured for him, deeming it an act not worthy of his conduct as a sportsman—only to then give the order

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which the human/animal confrontation takes place can only be imagined as a moral ground, for the two parties do not have the same means at their disposal: although Leopold criticized the excessive use of technological means even in hunting, it is clear that neither he nor his American contemporaries hunted with their bare hands, much less did they do so out of necessity, and that the asymmetry on the material level called for a sufficiently lofty ethical justification. In measuring himself against the animal, the human being could reach the heart of his own essence; indeed, they share a common animality—albeit one immediately sublimated—in the killing of the prey: a moment necessary to re-establish the superiority of the predator.

The fierce green fire in the eyes of the wolf dies, and the spirit of Man is kindled.

How can the consciousness of the animal be honored by killing it? And yet the predator *usurps* the consciousness of the animal, and then even that of the mountain that is its home, and by taking on the part of the mountain and the animal, he elevates himself to guardian of creation. The rhetoric of the Western hunter—cultured, sporty, upper-middle class and a landowner—reproduces the body of nature together with the ways of relating to it. The eyes of the animal only reflect what is already in the gaze of the human hunter observing it, and this happens just as the animal's gaze is lost forever: the animal mirror leads back to the Ego, and the *passage*<sup>22</sup> closes with a

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to have the bear shot anyway to spare the animal further suffering: see F. Timeto, "La specie è un ossimoro," cit.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. V. Plumwood, "The wisdom of the balanced rock," cit.; D. Bird Rose, "Val Plumwood's Philosophical Animism," in *Environmental Humanities*, 3, 2013, pp. 93–109.



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rediscovered moral superiority (given that physical superiority is explicitly bound up in the survival of the entire ecosystem). Not only the nature/culture dualism but also the mind/body dualism are thus reinforced. The animal's body remains "essentially" killable,<sup>23</sup> and the *proximity*<sup>24</sup> of the hunter to his prey does not trigger any *looking back*.<sup>25</sup>

*He will see land as a community of which he is only a member, albeit now the dominant one.*<sup>26</sup>

In this "moral ecology,"<sup>27</sup> the animal is a source of salvation for humans, and aesthetics—a fundamental component of Leopold's theory—is ultimately contemplative rather than ushering in any broader affective dimension. In order for the fusion to take place, the animal must disappear, killed twice over by both the material and symbolic weapons of the human predator. Death, however, teaches many things, and from the perspective of death, Val Plumwood writes, "I glimpsed the world for the first time 'from the outside,' outside the narrative of self where every sentence can start with 'I'."<sup>28</sup> Australian environmental activist and scholar Plumwood is considered one of the leading theorists of ecofeminism, and certainly among those who have best exposed the workings of dualistic thinking and its consequences for animalized and

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<sup>23</sup> D. Haraway, *When Species Meet*, cit., pp. 78 ff.

<sup>24</sup> J. Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, cit., p. 47.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. note 4.

<sup>26</sup> A. Leopold quot. in M. Lorbiecki, *Aldo Leopold. A Fierce Green Fire. An Illustrated Biography*, Falcon, Guilford and Helena 2005, p. 175.

<sup>27</sup> Isenberg, "The Moral Ecology of Wildlife" in *Representing Animals*, N. Rothfels (ed.), Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis 2002, cit., pp. 48–64.

<sup>28</sup> V. Plumwood, "Meet the Predator," in *The Eye of the Crocodile*, cit., p. 17.

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naturalized subjectivities. Since her name is often found alongside Leopold's,<sup>29</sup> and she indeed mentions him, it is worth recalling here the well-known episode of her almost fatal confrontation with a crocodile that marked Plumwood's life, and comparing it to Leopold's encounter with the wolf.

"The eye of the crocodile—the giant estuarine crocodile of northern Australia—is golden flecked, reptilian, beautiful. It has three eyelids. It appraises you coolly, it seems, as if seldom impressed, as one who knows your measure. But it can also light up with an unexpectedly intense glint if you manage to engage its interest. This was the mistake I made on that day in February 1985."<sup>30</sup> In the middle of the rainy season, Plumwood embarks on a canoe in Kakadu National Park, in search of a sacred Aboriginal site, despite the risks of passing through the East Alligator River, where crocodiles had returned in large numbers, a sign of the rude ecological health of a territory for which she herself was fighting. While searching for cave paintings, she instead comes across a strange balanced formation, in which a large rock rests on a smaller one, which would become a protagonist in the writing up of the experience in the text "The Wisdom of the Balanced Rock," or rather the key to *looking back* at it years later. On her way home, due to heavy rainfall, her canoe ends up being washed into the main river. At first Plumwood mistakes

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. for example K. Warren, "Feminist Environmental Philosophy," 2015, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-environmental/>; C. Diehm, "Arne Naess, Val Plumwood, and Deep Ecological Subjectivity: A Contribution to the 'Deep Ecology-Ecofeminism Debate'," in *Ethics and the Environment*, 7, 1, 2002, pp. 24–38.

<sup>30</sup> V. Plumwood, "Meet the Predator," in *The Eye of the Crocodile*, cit., p. 16.

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the crocodile that will attack her for a floating branch: but when the animal's golden eyes turn towards her and stare at her *first of all* in an interrogative manner, she realizes she is the one being addressed. As she tries to make it to shore and climb a tree, the crocodile attacks and grabs her, dragging her underwater in a death roll three times. Plumwood tries to hold together the pieces of her inner world just enough to feel she is still able to act, but once catapulted into the absolute darkness of the river, she loses all sense of direction that might bring her back to herself. Between one attack and the next, she also tries to blind the crocodile by sticking her fingers into two damp cavities that she can feel but *does not see*, as she is facing away from them. These were most likely the animal's nostrils or ears, as she would later write. The gesture is poorly aimed and does not stop the animal from attacking. Hours after having fortunately saved herself, and seriously injured, she is rescued by a forest ranger, who wants to go back and kill the crocodile despite Plumwood's objections, feeling that she was the intruder in the area.

Plumwood finds it difficult to write about what happened; unlike Leopold, she doesn't find an external, objective point of view that gives her the right detachment to represent the scene. She doesn't want to resort to the dominant Western narratives on predation, for she knows how speciesist, sexist, and steeped in all sorts of dualisms they are. Moreover, they insist on the separation of human from nature and of spirit from body, unable to grasp the continuum of the living, as, for example, aboriginal cosmologies to which Plumwood's philosophical

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animism<sup>31</sup> often refers. And nor does she wish to fall into the trap of mythologizing the “monster,” which serves to highlight the heroic—testeronic—confrontation with one’s prey. In a table-turning of the usual roles of prey and predator that casts her right down to the other end of the chain of predation, in an Heraclitean universe in which she is spun helplessly in the animal’s jaws, Plumwood loses the anchor of the ego, seeing herself—and being seen—as edible. But in this twist that never comes to a halt on one definitive side, she recognizes that other lives too transcend the mere consumability we attribute to them. When Plumwood makes the difference between animal “meat” and “flesh,” she does so also to avoid the dualism between matter and spirit, on the basis of which the opposition between human and animal would draw even more strength. In this radical animist overcoming of essentialism and speciesism, Plumwood preludes the developments of contemporary feminist neomaterialism which—while also reconnecting with non-Western cosmologies—reveals a dimension of vulnerability common to all living beings.<sup>32</sup> This is a key premise for critical animal studies in order to better focus on the fact that equality in the food chain does not exist in the “meat chain,” and to ask why and how this occurs. On this level, the ecological animism proposed by Plumwood and the ontological veganism theorized and practiced by many ecofeminists may certainly converge.

However, we mustn’t forget that Plumwood, who is very

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<sup>31</sup> D. Bird Rose, “Val Plumwood’s Philosophical Animism,” cit.

<sup>32</sup> C. Stefanoni, “Ecofemminismo e antispecismo: il ‘caso Plumwood’,” in *Liberazioni*, 31, 2017, pp. 65–70.

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mindful to avoid any kind of universalism, does not condemn hunting outright—something that instead separates her from ecofeminist vegans by a long way, even though she is aware of its patriarchal overtones and the violence it entails. This is because, to put it simply, not considering predation among human activities would risk reintroducing hyperseparation between humanity and nature, attributing such an achievement of civilization only to Western humans, and ignoring the historical and social specificities of other populations, both human and non-human, that practice hunting.<sup>33</sup> Plumwood considers ontological veganism to be ethnocentric,<sup>34</sup> and warns against the “hegemonic universalism”<sup>35</sup> that may be seen, for example, in the repetition of the hunter-man vs. gatherer-woman dichotomy projected onto many cultures. As Acampora notes in his critique, however, it is always difficult to keep the role of animals and our relationship with them from their reduction to mere means of production and consumption, but even if we considered humans to be potential prey for other animals so as to establish a perfect ontological symmetry between species, the

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<sup>33</sup> V. Plumwood, “Animals and ecology: Towards a better integration,” in *The Eye of the Crocodile*, cit., p. 84.

<sup>34</sup> This is why Twine, for example, in criticizing Plumwood’s somewhat dated view of ontological veganism, considers its assumptions to be fruitful for anticolonial and intersectional veganism: cf. R. Twine, “Val Plumwood’s contribution to intersectional veganism,” Val Plumwood Memorial Lecture, Australasian Animal Studies Association (AASA), October 13, 2022, in *Trace. Journal for Human-Animal Studies*, 10, 2024, pp. 220–239. For a more detailed analysis of Plumwood’s arguments, I refer to C. Stefanoni, “‘The Eye of the Crocodile’: Val Plumwood’s Epiphany and Critical Animal Studies,” Vegetarian Epiphanies Conference, Université Rennes 2, November 27, 2020.

<sup>35</sup> V. Plumwood, “Animals and ecology: Towards a better integration,” in *The Eye of the Crocodile*, cit., p. 89.

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reciprocity conceived by Plumwood would never take place on the level of specific relationships (the relationship itself ceasing to exist the moment the prey is killed), but rather on the systemic level.<sup>36</sup> Plumwood criticizes the idea of innocence and purity in food practices, as does Haraway, but by absolutizing these anti-absolutist arguments, they both paradoxically end up making it a point of arrival instead of a point of departure for a truly situated understanding and critique, despite the fact that both favor standpoint epistemology.<sup>37</sup> A critique not only of anthropocentrism, but also of the anthroparchy<sup>38</sup> exercised on natural and naturalized bodies is in fact fundamental not only to analyze, but to deploy against the system of interlinked oppressions, rooted in dualistic thought and all the hierarchies of value triggered by it.

Leopold longs for an ethic of the earth in which ecological ethics, typical of the natural world, might be coupled with philosophical ethics, typical of the social world, to distinguish social from antisocial behavior. In the natural

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<sup>36</sup> R. Acampora, "Caring Cannibals and Human(e) Farming: Testing Contextual Edibility for Speciesism," in *Ecofeminism. Feminist Intersections with Other Animals & The Earth*, C. Adams & L. Gruen (eds.), Bloomsbury, New York 2014, pp. 145–158. It's more or less the same problem that arises when we consider that, even if we assume that the animal is a worker, according to an antispeciesist vision that presupposes the agency of the animal as a social being, we neglect to consider that animals at work are mostly "significantly unfree partners": see D. Haraway, *When Species Meet*, cit., p. 72.

<sup>37</sup> F. Timeto, "Haraway contro Haraway. Mettere in pratica l'antispecismo con l'epistemologia situata," in *Aut Aut*, 401, 2024, pp. 23–36. Cf. also A. N. Feltrin, "Advocating for a Political Vegan Feminism: A Rebuttal to Val Plumwood and Donna Haraway's Criticisms of Ethical Veganism," in *Relations. Beyond Anthropocentrism*, 11, 2, 2023, <https://www.ledonline.it/index.php/Relations/article/view/5375>.

<sup>38</sup> E. Cudworth, *Developing Ecofeminist Theory. The complexity of difference*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York 2005.

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world, limiting individual action is advantageous for the sharing of resources and their renewal. This ethic ought to transform the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror to citizen of the natural community, another link in the chain just like all the others, for changes introduced by man that are too violent are not compatible with the slower pace of ecological change. Above all, it is important that economic principles do not preempt ethical and aesthetic considerations, nor that they prevail over them, and that the ethics of the earth be conceived emotionally and not only rationally. But the rediscovery of the original essence of the human being—who is also an animal (albeit only for a short time)—as one truly civilized insofar as he is *not* an unchecked predator, are aspects of a precise historical type of human: the all-American white landowner who has to come to terms with diminishing resources and increasing new migratory flows, and who also wants to represent this.

We cannot overlook the subjects of speech and the contexts to which they belong, be they dominant or dominated, even when they are not necessarily propagandistic or insincere. While it is true that a relationship with nature that is not only rationalistic and instrumental offers common ground between Leopold's vision and the eco-feminist outlook, it is also true that the latter, as happens in feminisms in general, stands out by virtue of the subject of the relationships always being considered "marked" and situated, but it is also partial and in continuous articulation with other lives that are also situated. The moral ecology of the earth brings Leopold back to his own inner dimension, which makes way for itself by becoming a

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mountain for the dying gaze of the she-wolf; this restores to him all the reckless immaturity of the young-self as a trigger-happy hunter, and at the same time shows him his complete evolution, both heartfelt and conscious, towards full ecological maturity.

However, *regard* and *respect* are not a way of retracing the origins of the ego, but a bodily invitation to risk co-existence, as Haraway<sup>39</sup> would say. As happens to Plumwood's exposed body, which in the incident is not the hunter but the hunted. As in the reversible "*que donc je suis*" that Derrida talks about,<sup>40</sup> the life-death cycle between prey and predator, human and animal, can only be stopped by pulling oneself out of it. For years, Plumwood feared she didn't have the right words to talk about it, despite constantly *swirling around it*.<sup>41</sup> The reversal of space-time coordinates places her side-on, rather than frontally, with respect to the experience of confrontation with the animal, and this makes it impossible for her to simply get out of it: "[...] to see from both perspectives at once," Haraway writes, "reveals both dominations and possibilities unimaginable from the other vantage point. Single vision produces worse illusions than double vision or many-headed monsters."<sup>42</sup> Respectful coexistence is

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<sup>39</sup> D. Haraway, *When Species Meet*, cit., p. 239. Haraway uses this expression to refer to interspecies communication during play, but her observations on reciprocity that precedes the shaping of experience are well suited to comparison with Plumwood's reflections.

<sup>40</sup> J. Derrida, *L'animal que je suis*, cit.

<sup>41</sup> Haraway speaks of "*swirling semantics*": cf. D. Haraway, *Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium.FemaleMan@Meets\_OncoMouse™: Feminism and Technoscience*, Routledge, New York-London 1997, p. 215.

<sup>42</sup> D. Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention*



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also a viable path for antispeciesist feminist politics: by *looking back* I realize I am not only being looked at, but also interpellated, and this means my gaze and the gaze of other animals pass from the level of representation to that of responsibility, without me answering in place of the animal, yet without remaining firmly in my *proper* place either.

We might define Leopold's as transparent ecology of Plumwood's as turbid ecology. The parallel universe in which everything swirls, into which the accident with the crocodile plunged her, is one of dark and turbulent stuff that by no means leads Plumwood to *become* a crocodile in the way that Leopold *becomes* a wolf. Plumwood doesn't stop at the animal, and nor does she stop the animal, neither when she was unable to herself nor when she was offered the chance to have it killed. In the eye of the crocodile that views her as prey, she experiences *the passage*, a dimension where both perspectives may be inhabited at the same time. It is a continuous crossing that neither separates nor assimilates, like in the internal exteriority/external interiority of quantum physics,<sup>43</sup> or in the philosophical animism elaborated by Plumwood in the wake of her contact with indigenous natural cultures. In the "radical equality"<sup>44</sup> of the sympoiesis of the living, life but also vulnerability and death are shared. However, when we shift from ontological to political discourse, we realize this almost never happens, for the asymmetry of

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of *Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 154.

<sup>43</sup> K. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, cit.

<sup>44</sup> V. Plumwood, "Tasteless: Towards a food-based approach to death," in *The Eye of the Crocodile*, cit., p. 92.

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power in relationships distinguishes the roles of predators and prey in a hierarchical manner. During the Covid-19 pandemic, for example, it became clear just which human and non-human bodies could be sacrificed and which should be protected or saved, despite the opportunity to gain awareness of our interdependence with health of, and therefore with the alterations to, the ecosystem caused by the unbridled extractivism of the capitalist economy.<sup>45</sup>

Plumwood is also aware that the prospect of justice cannot be abandoned: the point is not to make it just an individual issue, measured from the dominant human perspective. How to make the crocodile's story also a tale of justice is a lesson Plumwood draws from the balanced rocks, where the experience of the edge is re-proposed against the Australian landscape. Balanced rocks are very ancient sandstone formations, composed and layered in a way that appears precarious, and yet they persist over the centuries, transforming and giving life to new forms in a continuous cycle of life and death. For Plumwood, "re-imagining in terms of concrete practices of restraint and humility, not just in vague airy-fairy concepts of unity"<sup>46</sup> is a good starting point for not pulling out of the picture. These words are incredibly close to the concept of *humusity* that Haraway would develop in her most recent writings, using it instead of humanity, and removing the human from its frontal/apical position, drawing it back to the mud (i.e. into the *trouble*) from which it comes, also

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<sup>45</sup> S. Alaimo, interview.

<sup>46</sup> V. Plumwood, "Tasteless: Towards a food-based approach to death," in *The Eye of the Crocodile*, cit., p. 92.

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etymologically.<sup>47</sup> But the perspective of ecological and multispecies justice, while coming from radical immanence and relational ontologies, requires us to consider the injustices that distance us from this ontological symmetry, certainly redefining the subject of justice and speech in terms that are not only anthropocentric, but also looking at all the contexts in which traditional—i.e. dominant—subjects have disrupted the functioning of ecosystemic relationships in *unjust* ways. Returning to radical equality requires analytical tools that are *respectful*, dense, skeptical of transparency, multi-optical,<sup>48</sup> capable of not overlooking inequalities and practices of situated and responsible reparation, far from the commonplace and, if anything, oriented towards the place of the common.

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<sup>47</sup> D. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Duke University Press, Durham NC 2016.

<sup>48</sup> C. Kim, *Dangerous Crossings*, cit.

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## Biographical Notes

Federica Timeto teaches Critical Animal Studies, Sociology of the Arts, and Feminist Visual Studies at Ca' Foscari University in Venice. She deals with cultural studies, visual arts, and science and technology studies from a situated, transfeminist and antispeciesist perspective. She has published *Diffractional Technospaces. A Feminist Approach to the Mediations of Space and Representation* (Routledge, 2015), *Bestiario Haraway. Per un femminismo multispecie* (Mimesis, 2020), *Animali si diventa. Femminismi e liberazione animale* (Tamu 2024). She is co-director of the journal *Studi Culturali* (Il Mulino) and is a member of the editorial staff of the antispeciesist journal *Liberazioni*, the IRI (Institute of Radical Imagination) collective of artists and cultural activists, the CRITT (Inter-university Research Center on Transnational Technocultures) research group, and the *International Association of Vegan Sociologists* network.