(UN)NATURAL PROVOCATION: ABJECTION, OTHERNESS, AND NONHUMAN REPRESENTATION IN ISABELLA ROSSELLINI’S *GREEN PORNO* WEBSERIES

A Thesis Submitted to the Committee on Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in the Faculty of Arts and Science

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ABSTRACT

(un)Natural Provocation: Abjection, Otherness, and Nonhuman Representation in Isabella Rossellini’s *Green Porno* Webseries

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My thesis examines anthropomorphism and many avenues in which humans represent nonhumans to evaluate their own lives. Using Isabella Rossellini’s *Green Porno* webseries, a collection of two-minute films starring Rossellini as a multitude of nonhumans with costumes transforming her into nonhuman, I posit that a new form of anthropomorphism — one that values the nonhuman in all his or her nonhumanity — is emerging in contemporary media. Rossellini describes the mating, seduction, and maternal instincts of these nonhumans, regularly drawing parallels between nonhuman and human behavior and uncovering crucial intersections in femininity, masculinity, queer theory, and abjection. In more recent films, I see Rossellini performing certain nonhumans to critique particular characteristics of Western human society and incredulously addressing the human viewer as a member of a species that might not be as high in the caste system of living beings as he or she is led to believe. In turning this sense of grotesque Otherness onto the human, I identify Rossellini as engaging in *counterabjection*, or the reversal of extreme degradation often projected upon nonhuman bodies by humans.
Keywords: Derrida, Darwin, Kristeva, Heidegger, animal studies, feminist studies, gender studies, abjection, queer theory, animal philosophy, otherness, psychoanalysis, deconstruction, continental philosophy, performance, representation, humanity, nonhumanity, Isabella Rossellini, *Green Porno, Seduce Me, Mammas*, Hamster, masculinity, femininity, animality.
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Chapter 1: Humanocentrism and Subjectivity: Nonhumans as Subjects

Once upon a time, in some out of the way corner of that universe which is dispersed into numberless twinkling solar systems, there was a star upon which clever beasts invented knowing. That was the most arrogant and mendacious minute of "world history," but nevertheless, it was only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths, the star cooled and congealed, and the clever beasts had to die. One might invent such a fable, and yet he still would not have adequately illustrated how miserable, how shadowy and transient, how aimless and arbitrary the human intellect looks within nature. There were eternities during which it did not exist. And when it is all over with the human intellect, nothing will have happened.


The uncompromising world of posthumanism is continually achieving new heights of communication and accessibility, allowing for science and humanities — specifically art — to merge in clever new ways that engage participants in both domains. From within this intellectual amalgamation scientific explorations may be considered within art: such as human *performances* of the nonhuman rather
than human observation of the nonhuman\(^1\). This form of art may use scientifically accurate data to express the life of the nonhuman being formerly studied and analyzed primarily by trained biologists, offering new perspectives on both humans and nonhumans through a more artistic conveyance of such data. The posthuman is simultaneously ever-dependent on technology and media while actively conscious of his or her deteriorating humanocentric life, while nonhuman beings fuel technology through research and environmental engineering and empirical knowledge, persistently reminding humans that they are mammals categorized with the rest. Posthuman society has arguably created several media offerings examining humans and nonhumans in more progressive fashions than traditional narrations of past generations, such as Discovery Channel’s *Man vs. Wild* or PBS’s *Nova* and *Nature* television programs. Isabella Rossellini has contributed to this emerging realm of human awareness of the nonhuman by creating the *Green Porno* short film webseries, which draws humanity closer to the animality that humans habitually conceptualize as lesser than or polar opposites to humanity and gaze upon as a spectacle of alterity. Rossellini’s films maneuver through these inequalities through illustrations of a transition into posthumanity in part because of their exemplification of the struggles within the spread of a posthuman Western tradition.

\(^1\) I use the term ‘nonhuman’ in an effort to avoid, as Derrida states: “a notion as general as ‘the Animal,’ as if all nonhuman living things could be grouped without the common sense of this ‘commonplace,’ the Animal, whatever the abyssal differences and structural limits that separate ... all ‘animals’” (Derrida 402). For the duration of this project I will use terms such as ‘nonhuman beings’ or other nonexclusive descriptions.
In order to adequately direct attention to Rossellini and her project, this chapter will act as a substratum to the larger argument of this thesis: Rossellini’s collection of films embrace nonhuman subjectivity and, in doing so, convey alternative solutions to social problems within human culture thereby revealing the triviality of tenacious humanocentricity. Using a form of anthropomorphism that avoids being anthropocentric, along with a dualism of the body, Rossellini’s corporeal cinema critiques human social objectifications through alternatives and solutions proposed by the nonhumans she embodies. Many of the films in the webseries conclude by shifting abjection and alterity onto the human viewer. I will study individual films from all three series in Rossellini’s *Green Porno* enterprise to shape the analyses in forthcoming chapters. While others may view some moments in Rossellini’s use of the nonhuman as facilitating justification for or defense of human behaviors, I see the use of the nonhuman in the webseries as displaying predominant critiques of humanity and explore this perspective throughout the project. For the remainder of this chapter I will draw on early philosophy to identify the nonhuman being as a subject, and then offer an argument for a more contemporary nonhuman subjectivity, like one we see in Rossellini’s films, in preparation for future chapters that will engage more thoroughly with specific moments in Rossellini’s films and unite their analysis to contemporary literary and media criticism.

GREEN PORNO
Initially airing on Sundance Channel, Rossellini’s films are often shown there in lieu of commercials, in small groupings after thirty- or sixty-minute shows. These short comedic clips aim to captivate the attention of the unsuspecting viewer and take very little of their time. While Rossellini has openly stated that these films are meant to be comical and bawdy, the facts they portray are scientifically accurate (NPR interview, 6 Oct 2013). Rossellini’s filmic embodiment of the nonhuman species is rudimentary at best, yet the costumes are designed with a deliberate coquettish awareness of the human body being filmed. Rossellini’s body is thus able to communicate the science of the nonhuman in an artistic fashion, reaching her audience through this collaboration.

Sundance Channel’s description of *Green Porno* is as follows: “The series features Rossellini as she acts out the reproductive habits of marine animals and insects, both scientifically accurate yet extremely entertaining” (*Sundance TV*). In each film, a human performs the introductory mating tactics of a particular species on a physically jarred Rossellini, who embodies the species in question. Each series’ introduction has a catch phrase to signify the shift into nonhuman subjectivity, after which Rossellini embodies and narrates the habits of a specific creature and expects her audience to experience the transition into nonhuman existence with her. When she asks the quintessential question, “Is he seducing me? What am I, a [bedbug, dolphin, seahorse, etc]?,” she imposes the subjectivity of the nonhuman species onto the audience of humans who presumably objectify the nonhuman. In most films, the next shot portrays
Rossellini already costumed as the nonhuman being and ready to narrate the ritual. Many films conclude with another center shot of Rossellini, still as nonhuman, comparing a specific element of the particular nonhuman’s mating tactics to those of humans, with grin or a feigned incredulity, encouraging the viewers to consider their own sex acts.

Isabella Rossellini brings a unique collection of experiences to the *Green Porno* webseries. As a performance artist, she is well acquainted with the art of pleasing an audience. The daughter of film icons Roberto Rossellini and Ingrid Bergman, she was born into the celebrity spotlight. From 1980 to 1996, she modeled for various agencies and cosmetic labels. By the mid-1980s, Rossellini had also starred in popular films such as *Blue Velvet* (1986) and *Wild at Heart* (1990). Rossellini’s work in the superficial and sexist industries of modeling and acting would not have secure positions for an aging woman, however, and between occasional film work throughout the 1990s and 2000s Rossellini turned to academia in 2007. After enrolling in a Master’s program at Hunter College in New York to study animal behavior, Rossellini partnered with Sundance Channel to produce her directorial debut: *Green Porno* (2008). Following the success of three *Green Porno* seasons, Rossellini began creating a second series, *Seduce Me* (2010), focusing on rituals of attraction and, following two seasons of that, aired *Mammas*, the first season of a series documenting the varying maternal instincts of nonhuman mothers (2013). The series share an overarching theme drawing parallels between nonhuman behavior and human behavior, yet each installment contains subtopics revealing opportunities to appraise theories of
gender, sexuality, and maternity within individual contexts of the larger matter of embodiment.

The first installment of Rossellini’s animal studies project, *Green Porno*, aired in three installments and focuses on the mating rituals of various nonhuman species. The final season of *Green Porno* was subtitled *Bon Appetit!* and focused on aquatic species affected by the corrupt and environmentally harmful fishing industry. The majority of the films in *Bon Appetit!* ended with Rossellini declaring, “I've lost my appetite” (*Green Porno*). *Seduce Me*, which aired in two seasons, explores seduction tactics used by nonhuman species, a topic briefly addressed by *Green Porno*, but without notable depth. Sundance Channel’s website quotes Rossellini stating: “‘After my comical series, *Green Porno*, on how animals mate, I wanted to showcase a new series about how animals seduce each other with different, varied and incredible strategies...they might give us some new ideas about how to conquer our mates!’” (*Sundance TV*). *Seduce Me* films often address gender roles as they fluctuate between nonhuman bodies, offering ample material for an analysis of gender studies and bodily inscription. These elements greatly influence Rossellini’s performance of the nonhuman and will be discussed in the next chapter.

Rossellini’s newest series, *Mammas*, debuted on Mothers’ Day 2013 and centers on the maternal instincts of a wide array of species. Sundance Channel’s website states that: “Featuring fantastical costumes and weirdly delightful enactments, the actress writes, directs and slips into the role of animal mothers, examining the different ways their maternal instinct is put into action in
nature.” (Sundance TV). Each series channels a message, however direct or elusive, to coax the viewer into considering a broad range of humanity and the relationship between human and nonhuman bodies. Rather than relying on a catch phrase or recurring gesture like in Green Porno and Seduce Me, Rossellini concludes Mammams films as a human pondering nonhuman maternal instincts if they directly translated into human society. In doing so, Rossellini explores the depths of motherhood and uncovers a certain, sometimes uncomfortable closeness that weakens the dichotomization of human and nonhuman.

While Rossellini is a producer, director, actress, and artist, she is not, however, a philosopher or a cultural critic. While her art does not state profound ideas about human or nonhuman life overtly, I detect an underlying contempt with certain customs within humankind. With this project, I aim to convey Rossellini’s theoretical relevance through extraction and analysis of elusive human-nonhuman comparisons. More important than Rossellini’s relevance, however, is the pertinence of the films in the webseries to contemporary animal studies: an interpretation of the nonhuman through the body of a human presents a previously unexamined evaluation of human attitudes toward nonhumans. I also aim to offer an elevated literary criticism, in turn reinforcing the cultural relevance of the existence of the Green Porno webseries. Despite the imperfections of the Green Porno webseries, Rossellini offers an accessible mimicry of human social codes that are left open to interpretation within the context of the nonhuman world. Furthermore, the webseries provides an exhibition of nonhuman artistic representation and a productive engagement with corporeal nonhuman worlds.
As individual texts, the short films collect in groups that offer intriguing connotations when the various nonhuman habits are performed by Rossellini and played against human traditions.

PHILOSOPHY AND THE NONHUMAN

My interests in Rossellini’s webseries as performance art reside within the existing interdisciplinary thought on biology and animal philosophy. This section will supply a review of the scientific thinkers that observed nonhumans and gathered data on the beings humans sought to understand centuries ago. Using this data, philosophers began a debate about the subjectivity of the nonhuman: once used as the ultimate example of the other, the nonhuman slowly became recognized and accepted as its own subjective body. When nonhuman subjectivity circulated, activism and compassionate consideration for the nonhuman followed, eventually leading to the current appraisal of embodying, representing, and learning from the nonhuman.

Scientists and philosophers have been pondering the idea that nonhuman beings are subjects in their own right for the better part of the past century. Perhaps the first notable debate between biology and philosophy regarding the animal as subject is between renowned philosopher Martin Heidegger and his biologist counterpart Jakob von Uexküll. In his article “A Stroll Through the Worlds of Animals and Men: A Picture Book of Invisible Worlds,” Uexküll comments that a biologist’s ideology conflicts with that of a physiologist’s, as is evident in Heidegger’s initial writings on the animal. As subjects, Uexküll argues
that humans recognize sensory objects and apply them to our perceptions of existence. A physiologist views animals as a collection of operators working in response to particular triggers within nature, thus deducing that the animal is a machine. A biologist, however, sees the particular components of an animal (organs, limbs) as receptors to their specific stimulus, suggesting that the animal is a subject dependent on stimulation by various objects (Uexküll 320). Uexküll uses the example of the tick, which responds to heat and smell to detect mammals and drop from a tree down to the necessary object of survival: the mammal filled with blood. The tick’s *umwelt*, or semiotically marked environment, is a rather small one only containing the sense to jump off a plant and hope to land on a mammal, repeating the sequence until it is successfully able to feed, reproduce, and die. Humans undoubtedly find it challenging to comprehend such a small *umwelt* in comparison to the ever-increasingly intricate one humans immerse themselves in, but the *umwelt* is the figurative spider’s web: suspended within other existing worlds but only serving one to its utmost capacity. Uexküll asserts that “all animals, from the simplest to the most complex, are fitted to their unique worlds with equal completeness. A simple world corresponds to a simple animal, a well-articulated world to a complex one” (324). The spectrum of subjectivity begins with *umwelt* and the comprehension of nonhumans’ existence outside of human worlds.

With environments established as specific for each living being, nonhumanity becomes accessible to the intellectual in new dimensions. As humans begin to consider nonhumanity and make traceable changes in
philosophical viewpoints on nonhumanity, Martin Heidegger takes on the notion
of being in a monumental way. Heidegger’s proclamations regarding nonhuman
beings have been rather contradictory; he is initially resistant to acknowledge
human connection to nonhumans, but his later works draw influence and
reasoning from Uexküll and thus migrate toward the possibility of nonhuman
subjectivity (Hayes 55). Scientists consider language to be the deciding factor
differentiating nonhuman beings from humans, but despite the fact that scientific
research has proven that there is more to cognition than the ability to speak,
humans have still created a dichotomy between ‘us, humans’ and ‘them,
nonhumans’ insomuch as the capabilities of nonhumans (and their blatant
similarities to us) are typically ignored or avoided. Spinoza, however, believes
that humanity is not divorced from nonhuman existence but rather a “kingdom
within a kingdom” (Uexküll ix). Heidegger initially published works conflicting
such a notion, separating humans as weltbildend (world-forming) and
nonhumans as weltarm (poor-in-world) (Fundamental Concepts 259). Since
animals are unable to perceive in a manner comparable to humans, he argues,
they must lack the capacity to harbor their own subjectivity. Heidegger scholar
Josh Hayes investigates these shortcomings in his article “Heidegger’s
Fundamental Ontology and the Question of Animal Life” and, after tracing
Heidegger’s own research into Aristotelian logic used in Being and Time,
concludes that:

[the] unbridgeable separation between fundamental ontology and
zoology betrays an anxiety which haunts the history of metaphysics
and [Heidegger’s] own thought. The capacity of the animal to possess \textit{aóyos}\textsuperscript{2} raises a series of ontological questions regarding the boundary between the human and the animal which deserve a more sufficient investigation. (55)

The aforementioned capacity, which is accepted by Uexküll and others, is, in part, what Rossellini is advocating in her film series. Much of my later analysis will feature direct examination of Rossellini’s scripts and performances where she provokes the viewer to compare Dasein and its capacity to that of her featured intelligent nonhuman.

The nonhuman’s capacity is precisely what intrigues Jacques Derrida, who begins his lecture-based essay “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)” by offering his audience this question: “An animal looks at me. What should I think of this sentence?” (374). In the next chapter I will incorporate Derrida’s thoughts on nonhuman subjectivity in greater detail; as a precursory device, the first phrase shakes Heidegger’s ontology on a very basic, sentence-structure level. How can humans identify the subject from the object? The animal is doing the looking, yet the person, the pronoun, the \textit{subject} that is speaking the sentence, is the object being gazed upon. Does the animal in this phrase not bear subjectivity? Similarly, Giorgio Agamben believes that it is within the interests of the being, human or nonhuman, that humans can locate subjectivity; that is, instinct is the contingent factor that maintains nonhumans’ identities as subjects (\textit{The Open} 12). Where humans have historically fixated on existing in

\textsuperscript{2} derived from Aristotle, a cognitive existence predating Heidegger’s \textit{Dasein}. 
the threshold between animal existence and divinity, animals are unable to practice such snobbery. Nonhuman life is the macrocosm human life struggles to exist within-yet-above on a microcosmic level.

Once philosophers acknowledged the subjectivity of the nonhuman, writings within animal philosophy shifted toward the study of animal consciousness and educating humans on animal activism. In 1975 Peter Singer\(^3\), a moral philosopher, influenced early animal liberation groups arguing in *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for Our Treatment of Animals* that “the ethical treatment on which human equality rests requires us to extend equal consideration to animals, too” (1). Thomas Nagel published one of the first attempts at understanding nonhumanity from the perspective of the nonhuman in his article “What is it Like to be a Bat.” In it, Nagel writes: “our own experience provides the basic material for our imagination, whose range is therefore limited. It will not help to try to imagine that one has webbing on one’s arms, which enables one to fly around at dusk and dawn catching insects in one’s mouth” (3), enforcing a differentiation between experiences and capacities. Imagination, as Nagel notes, is insufficient for comprehending the functions and lives of nonhumans because imagination cannot always correlate to experience: nonhumanity is unreachable for humans and humans need to acknowledge this fact in their research and analysis. Nagel’s work allows humans to think of nonhumans as bearing an

\(^3\) Singer later published material reflecting dismissive attitudes toward the equality of disabled persons and an extremely narrow stance on abortion, subsequently reducing use of his material on nonhuman rights (“Why We Must Ration Heath Care” 4).
identity outside of human understanding because his writings face the nonhuman’s foreignness head-on.

Following Nagel and Singer, human comprehension of the nonhuman came under greater inquisition and led to elevated thinking on nonhumanity as it influences human societies. For example, contemporary art and animality theorist Steve Baker draws concepts from the aforementioned thinkers and applies them to various representations of women and nonhumans in art and media installations in Europe and North America, often drawing out the inconsistencies in animal studies publications and stressing the interdisciplinarity of such knowledges and theories. In *The Postmodern Animal* Baker states:

> Many postmodern or poststructuralist artists and writers seem, at one level or another, to adopt or to identify with the animal as a metaphor for, or as an image of, their own creativity. Whether it connotes a sense of alienation from the human or a sense of bodily freedom and unboundedness, this willing taking-on of animal form casts a fixity of identity as an inhibition of creativity. Is this part of a genuinely open-minded process of thinking anew, or just another badge with which to secure an intelligible identity? (18)

The remainder of *The Postmodern Animal* explores various examples of new intellectualism and superficial representation, offering opportunities to bond and separate the human from the animal in new and abstract ways. Anthropomorphism and hybridity are at the forefront of Baker’s research, creating a collective ideology around the postmodern body — both human and nonhuman
— and its implications for human life and human-made arts. More importantly, Baker regards nonhuman life and its representations in art with respect garnered from the many prior theorists’ evaluation of the nonhuman. Baker generally analyzes gallery pieces and larger works, overlooking the more accessible forms of nonhuman representation such as the Green Porno webseries. From nonhuman superficiality to posthuman abject identification, I bring several of his ideas to my later analysis of the webseries as they are crucial to the study of the human performing the nonhuman.

I focus on the representation of the nonhuman through anthropomorphic embodiment and the calculative composition of the Green Porno series when compared to other depictions of human-animal interactions and uses of anthropomorphism in art. Regardless of the methods by which these philosophers reach their conclusions about the nonhuman, they all share the inquiry and, at the very least, the hesitance to exclude nonhuman species from our subjective world. It is with this consensus — albeit a fluid one — moving toward a biocentric outlook for all forms of life that I proceed to an elaborate scrutiny of the Green Porno webseries. Rossellini’s evolution within the series occurs through variations including Green Porno’s representation of subjectivities that approach and parallel the human, Seduce Me’s appraisal of tropes of gender and patriarchy, and Rossellini’s political aggression toward traditional Western hegemony and anthropocentrism in the most recent Mammas series. Through the use of these thinkers and many others, I see a shift in the way humans are able to think about nonhumans. Specifically, I see Rossellini shifting a sense of
abjection humans typically project upon nonhumans so that the familiarity of human life is made abject or degrading. This idea of counterabjection is the culmination of challenging gender and sexuality stereotypes, the use of Rossellini’s body opposing the subjectivity of the viewer and reclaiming identity — abject identity — of the nonhuman, and other elements of representation regarding nonhumanity and the body to be unfurled throughout this project.

NONHUMANITY IN ART AND LITERATURE

From the bestial fears of Grendel and his mother in Beowulf to the affectionate children’s literature genre featuring E.B. White’s Charlotte’s Web and A.A. Milne’s Winnie the Pooh, humans have regularly documented the creative possibilities of human-animal interactivity with a vast range of emotions depending on the audience. Moving into the surreal, Franz Kafka’s The Metamorphosis is an early example of zoopoetic human and animal microcosms colliding in fear: Gregor Samsa, the protagonist, is torn away from his own humanity and thrust into animality without being extracted from the human microcosm and becomes a biological anachronism, not to mention a species loathed by humankind. As a cockroach-type vermin, Gregor loses language, is quarantined and feared, but fed and contained by his family while he becomes acclimated to his new insect body (Kafka 12). The Metamorphosis concludes with his family’s inability to accept Gregor’s animality and Gregor’s subsequent death. The philosophical fascination surrounding The Metamorphosis lies partly in the Samsa family’s declining care of and for Gregor once he becomes both
nonhuman and consciously settled in his nonhumanity. Rossellini seems to uncover this distancing of the human and nonhuman body in the embodiment of various species and their mannerisms of sexuality and responsibility. Rossellini’s efforts are arguably directed toward informing her audience and separating the feelings of fear and disgust depicted by Kafka in Gregor Samsa and guiding the viewer’s eye instead to relativity and a narrowing of alterity between humans and nonhumans.

NONHUMANITY IN GREEN PORNO

In an effort to depict the antics of a so-called ‘simple animal’ Isabella Rossellini has chosen to create her series with a simple, rudimentary set of construction paper puppets and contraptions paired with bodysuits and paint. In a later chapter I will look more deeply into Rossellini’s production choices and how they contribute to the biocentricity of the series, but for now I note that Rossellini inhabits what Uexküll describes as a “soap bubble” surrounding each creature’s series of simple or complex stimuli. Rossellini draws her audience into Uexküll’s ‘soap bubbles’ to become exposed to new or differing perceptions of sexuality, seduction, and parenting which these nonhuman bodies rely on for survival, commenting on their successes and failures in comparison to the stimuli in our human soap bubble (350). When speaking of the human understanding of animal existence, Uexküll confesses that “we are easily deluded into assuming that the relationship between a foreign subject and the objects in [his or her] world exists on the same spatial and temporal plane as our own human world. This fallacy is
fed by a belief in the existence of a single world, into which all living things are pigeonholed” (327). Rossellini identifies the separation between the multitude of animal and human worlds and actively seeks to bring those other spatial and temporal planes into a human umwelt. In some cases these worlds are simpler than ours, but the successes and failures of the particular species’ life overshadows the relative simplicity or complexity.

Regardless of an organism’s intricacies, cognition is key in understanding the capabilities of human and nonhuman beings alike. Early research tested various species to detect levels of knowledge and learning abilities in comparison to human problem solving. Marian Stamp Dawkins argues in her book *Through Our Eyes Only?* that verifiable cognition happens when an animal solves a problem under unconventional conditions (86). Rossellini often draws to her viewers’ attention that nonhuman problem-solving can be more logical than methods normalized by human society. The notion of a ‘goal’ is humanocentric and does not apply to nonhumans according to Uexküll (352). The idea of a goal is often mistaken for cognition, a necessary element for identifying nonhuman subjects. A human plan of nature does not correspond to the life of a tick or earthworm, but humans depend on goals and worry about success and intention, imposing such feelings onto nonhuman existences. The earthworm’s plan, as Rossellini portrays in one of the first of the *Green Porno* films, is one of hermaphroditic reproduction:

If I were an earthworm I would have no brain … At one end I would have a mouth but no teeth; I suck up my food [slurping noises]. At
the other end of my body I would have my anus to defecate, but I
would pee from each segment and breathe from each segment. I
am a very common worm, yet the names of two Greek gods,
Hermes and Aphroditus, are needed to describe me: I am both
male and female. To have babies, I need to mate with another
hermaphrodite in the sixty-nine position. Sexually mature worms
like me have a clitellum, a kind of a muff that I can slide along my
body. First I push the clitellum to collect my eggs, then to collect my
partner’s sperm. Then I slip it over my head and drop it to the
ground. My little worms will be born in two to three weeks.
(“Earthworm” 2008)

In this film, Rossellini is encased in a worm-shaped bodysuit with only her face
exposed. Rossellini as nonhuman rarely breaks eye contact with the camera,
triggering a tangible discrepancy between subject and object for the viewer.
Despite the physical inaccuracies of leaving her human facial features exposed⁴,
Rossellini performs the earthworm and its intentions within the world of the
earthworm, explaining the function of the clitellum for reproduction. Rossellini
draws out the schematics of nonhuman life and thrusts them into human
existence: humans can relate to digestion processes, sexual positions, and the
necessary parental urges to procreate and protect. In later seasons, this throttling
of the vague space between human and nonhuman will become more

⁴ I will account for Rossellini’s human body as it disrupts the representation of the nonhuman
body and the value of Rossellini’s human face in the films in the next chapter.
aggressive, questioning the faults in human politics and civilization while portraying a successful nonhuman means of existence.

PERSONHOOD AND NONHUMANITY

Not only do I argue in this thesis that the nonhuman being is a subject, I posit the nonhuman being to bear personhood. Countless interpretations of personhood exist that present ‘person’ as linguistically interchangeable with ‘human’ or ‘individual,’ suggesting personhood is both elitist and a form of exclusionary speciesism. Scholars in human-animal studies have recently challenged this tradition by deconstructing the language of the humanist and revealing the underlying inconsistencies. In his essay “Animals as Persons,” David Sztybel attempts to separate the seemingly innate junction made between humanity and personhood where the basis of being-person is rooted in humanity. Sztybel uses children as an example: inferring contingencies such as rationality and autonomy to personhood eliminates viewing children as persons, yet the vast majority of any group of people will agree that children are in fact persons. For Sztybel, “the traditional definition of ‘person’ is unacceptably anthropomorphic” (241), and yet reasoning, subjectivity, and autonomy are not exclusive to Homo sapiens. Sensation is central for Sztybel as a condition for identifying persons: cognition, although measured differently, is essential for evaluating personhood. The personal experience is in part what Rossellini’s films represent. The films in the webseries specifically depict the sensations of sexuality, maternity, and cross-cultural procreation, suggesting that Rossellini,
too, is fortifying an argument for cross-species personhood and a greater comprehension of all forms of persons. A powerful example of this depiction of personhood can be found in Rossellini’s film on the barnacle. As a barnacle, covered in a drab, grey cloak to represent shapelessness, Rossellini states:

If I were a barnacle, a *semibalanus balanoides*, I would have a shapeless body and I would be stuck to a rock. I would have to develop a long, long penis to reach inside a female barnacle. There are 1,220 barnacle species; some have a different strategy to reproduce. When I would still be a baby, called a larva, I would climb up the body of a sexually mature female and drop myself inside her. Here I would degenerate into a sexual organ, just releasing sperm. (“Barnacle” 2008)

Here, the barnacle is exhibited to be quite the autonomous being. Some barnacles must extend their appendages to reach another for copulation, others become a literal embodiment of a sex organ. Despite being “stuck to a rock,” a barnacle is subjective enough to determine the physical proportions needed to mate and the rationale to surrender a portion of its subjectivity to fulfill sexual functions and continue the processes of barnacle life. During Rossellini’s second depiction of a barnacle, she attaches a human baby-shaped plush figure to her neck, acting as a humanoid barnacle larva traveling up the body of the mature female’s barnacle, offering the viewer what I see as a playful gesture toward the tendency to attribute personhood to children: human children lack autonomy, yet a young barnacle instinctually inserts himself into a mature female solely to
become her personal sperm facility. Furthermore, the reduction of the subject to an appendage deepens the complexities of a subjectivity based upon the body and the limits of a body-based subjectivity.

Personhood engages more than mere autonomy, however, and must be pondered in greater depth to diverge from common humanocentrism and consider nonhumans to be persons. Emmanuel Lévinas might seem like a questionable individual to rely on given his sweeping, exclusionary claims about the shortcomings of nonhumans when compared to the ethical responsibilities humans have to other humans, but, following Matthew Calarco’s intense readings for naturalist perspectives within Lévinas’s humanist writings, I will attempt to extract a small sample of useful Lévinasian ideas surrounding the moral philosophy of nonhumans. In *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida*, Calarco is quick to criticize Lévinas for dichotomizing humans and animals in a way that “uncritically reinforces the metaphysical anthropocentrism of the Western philosophical tradition” (62) but uses the oppressive material to present Lévinas as a rupture in philosophical discourse that can lead to a connection between altruistic tendencies in nonhumans resembling those observed in humans. Through this subversion of Lévinas I detect an opportunity to establish the nonhuman as a credible subject and intuitive person.

Lévinas focuses on the passivity of the human being as a source of appraisal; if the primary factor in determining subjectivity is the ability to respond, absence of such a response in predetermined subjects (read: humans) is quite
noteworthy. Lévinas posits that the Other presents a vulnerability detected through the passive response a subject has to Otherness (Cavalieri 103). For the responsive subject to post no response leads Lévinas to a conclusion that Paola Cavalieri eloquently describes in the following way: “the subject turns out to be passive to the passivity of the Other” (103). While Lévinas himself would disagree with the nonhuman’s ability to call into question a human’s subjectivity or function as the passive and challenging Other, therein lies an opportunity for Isabella Rossellini to use nonhumans in the webseries to represent a destabilization of superior human subjectivity as we (and certainly Lévinas) know it. Lévinas is hesitant to verify whether or not, according to his own moral philosophy, an animal can have a ‘face’ and thereby function similarly as the human Other by calling human egoism into question, but in an interview, “The Paradox of Morality,” Lévinas does admit that he could consider a dog to have a face, suggesting that he, too, is considering the shift toward biocentricity to be a logical and ethical one (174). Calarco believes this to signify a form of companion species subjectivity similar to arguments Donna Haraway has made in the last decade⁵, but also emphasizes that Lévinas’s noncommittal and agnostic approach to nonhuman subjectivity is evidence enough that the risk of arguing for a nonhuman subjectivity is a risk worth taking.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

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In the chapters to follow, I will explore a series of methods used by Rossellini to alter the interpretation of nonhuman existence into juxtapositions familiar to Western culture and present an accessible biocentric media project. Chapter Two addresses the *Green Porno* series as a media spectacle, where I argue that Rossellini’s artistic representation of nonhumans expresses nonhuman subjectivity in an accessible and phenomenological manner that prepares viewers for the manipulation of embodiment and humanity. Chapter Three focuses on the parallels between women and nonhumans through body dualism and cultural reversal, as evidenced in Rossellini’s depiction of nonhuman femininity, masculinity, gender fluidity, and death-fearing alterity. These engagements will lead into a fourth and final chapter in which I suggest that Rossellini is using the embodiment of the nonhuman in *Green Porno* as a form of counterabjection to make the viewer Other in a biocentric frame of animal embodiment where the viewer must redirect his or her gaze upon his or her own bio-eccentricities.
Chapter 2: On Becoming Nonhuman: Representation, Anthropomorphism, and Subjectivity

Humans and nonhumans share the same air, water, and soil but live in different macrocosms. What exists beyond these borders, and in what capacity can humans begin to comprehend life outside of humanity? Rossellini’s work exists on the threshold of these worlds where her human body is still the instrument for comprehension, but emotes an interpretation of the nonhuman essences that would otherwise remain unknown to humans. Until now, I have been writing about humans and nonhumans as separate entities existing in separate Uexküllian bubbles. While Heidegger uses the animal’s Otherness to examine human subjectivity, Derrida considers humans and nonhumans on the same plane of existence. Humans typically observe the Other from a position of superiority, but what happens when they coexist in the same space, merging the soap bubbles for cohabitant life? This chapter will examine the underlying structures of human and nonhuman subjectivity appearing together in Rossellini’s films. In the conclusion to this chapter I will discuss the effects of Rossellini assuming the role of the nonhuman, as she approaches something resembling a phenomenological performance of the thinking animal. Through this (albeit imperfect) representation of the nonhuman, Rossellini begins to reveal an argument to the viewer about humanocentric hegemony and underlying radical Otherness.
ANTHROPOMORPHISM AND SUBJECTIVITY

For the *Green Porno* webseries, the nonhuman is a source of knowledge and discovery in addition to being a facet of life: a position that has long been debated among philosophers. The struggle between humans and nonhumans extends beyond the question of nonhuman subjectivity as mentioned in the previous chapter, but into nonhumans’ relevance in human society and even their status as persons. Humanism and posthumanism continue this debate into the present day, but the majority of originary philosophy can be found in the writings of Heidegger. Heidegger’s humanist attitude is ever-present in *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, where he devotes several chapters to establishing the nonhuman as being *poor in world*. This sense of being poor is not meant to hierarchize humans and nonhumans, as Heidegger qualifies this distinction:

> [It is] a fundamental mistake to suppose that amoebae or infusoria are more imperfect or incomplete animals that elephants or apes. Every animal and every species of animal as such is just as perfect and complete as any other … Being poor does not simply mean possessing nothing, or little, or less than another. Rather being poor means *being deprived*. (194-95)

Although Heidegger’s outlook prioritizes Dasein and general human existence, he does not haphazardly dismiss all nonhumans into the irrelevant; rather, Heidegger sees the nonhuman as an opportunity to reveal the richness of humanity. Animal philosopher Ron Broglio represents this dichotomy well in his book *Surface Encounters: Thinking with Animals and Art* in stating that
“Heidegger’s more preposterous and dogmatic claims about animality may well have stemmed from the fact that his interests in animals was mainly … in their happening to offer the philosopher a striking image of otherness” (95). While a human such as Heidegger might consider the nonhuman to be deprived of certain opportunities or cognitions in comparison to the seemingly vast expanse of human intellect, Rossellini uses the webseries to present the ways in which these species are rich in sensation and sustainability, and occasionally perhaps richer or more successful than humans because of their perceived poverties. As previously mentioned, Uexküll offers an alternative consideration to Heidegger’s where worldly relevance devoid of human-originated goals is vast and inconceivably significant. Rossellini’s representation of nonhumans’ world(s) narrows the gap between what Broglio refers to as the ‘uprightness’ of humans, defining this notion as “both physical and metaphysical, while the animal world is decidedly flat … To consider animals and take seriously the role of surfaces to thought and language means to reevaluate the physical and metaphysical uprightness of humans” (87). Rossellini explores the problematic elements of this uprightness by reversing Heidegger’s hierarchy of identity and situating the human in a number of positions that are not distinctly or exclusively above nonhumans.

Derrida has also reflected on the interactions between human and nonhuman after watching his domestic cat and the ways in which the cat viewed Derrida, seemingly shrinking the uprightness of humans through his emphasis on the nonhuman point of view. In contemplating humans and nonhumans in
tandem, Derrida considers the complexities of the human-animal relationship he shared with his cat, observing that “[The cat] can look at me. It has its point of view regarding me. The point of view of the absolute other, and nothing will have ever done more to make me think through this absolute alterity of the neighbor than these moments when I see myself naked under the gaze of a cat” (380). Derrida’s vulnerability occurs from within a human prioritization, a flaw in the understanding of humans as tiered differently than the rest of life. This relation to his cat forces Derrida to consider the dichotomization with which humans consider the ‘animal,’ writing that “the animal is a word, it is an appellation that men have instituted, a name they have given themselves the right and the authority to give to another living creature [à l’autre vivant]” (392). If, linguistically, animal is a signifier of alterity, humans must consider new means for identifying those bodies that are nonhuman without participating in such rankings.

Derrida argues that human and animal are neither beings resistant to one another like poles, nor are they concise categories. He states that the rupture between this human-made division between human and animal has a subjective anthropocentric history which can be examined, and, finally, that humans exist as a heterogenous blend of life (and, thus, death) organized into vague organizations and civilizations that don’t allow for isolated objectification (399). If this is the case, the physical body presents a social element of subjectivity reminding humans of their own animality and subsequent need for humility beyond, for example, being naked in the presence of a cat. Throughout
describing this problem, Derrida traces a history of singularity and oversimplification:

I will venture to say that never, on the part of any great philosopher from Plato to Heidegger, or anyone at all who takes on, as a philosophical question in and of itself, the question called that of the animal and the limit between the animal and the human, have I noticed a protestation of principle, and especially a protestation of consequence against the general singular that is \textit{the animal}. Nor against the general singular of an animal whose sexuality is as a matter of principle undifferentiated -- or neutralized, not to say castrated. (408)

Derrida's protest is rooted in the simplicity of an ‘us versus them’ dichotomization presented by past philosophers trying to evaluate the nonhuman against the human under conditions not always fit for reasonable comparison. The \textit{Green Porno} film series avoids this fault by comparing the physical and social functions of varying species without allowing the presentation of the nonhuman to become derogatory or pandering to human empathy. These beings are, after all, not-so-poor in world. Derrida instead offers the term \textit{ecce animot}, loosely representing a creature without identifying sex or species as a more accurate and heterogenous term for identification than ‘animal,’ which is problematic in its literal heterogeneity and bestial colloquialism (415). Nonhumans should be identified with plurality, for “there is no animal in the general singular, separated from men by a single indivisible limit” (Derrida 415). Using a simple dichotomy between
human and animal creates too large a chasm between humanity and animality, failing to understand that human falls under the umbrella of the animality, which humans actively marginalize. Derrida notes that “Animal is our word, a human word for all that crawls, slithers, creeps, stalks, and walks the earth — other than ourselves, of course, or at least that part of ourselves that is not the least — namely, that which is culturally recoverable from our animal bodies” (392), reaffirming the existence of the dichotomy he seeks to dispel. Humans marginalize based on species alone despite the fact that the above verbs describe human actions as well as nonhuman ones. Derrida’s are the verbs of subjects: ones not necessarily divided into the categories Western society recognizes or enforces in the same manner as human categories are upheld.

Unfortunately, Derrida’s considerations are not widely incorporated into media; instead, subjectivity and personhood are often reduced to human characteristics simply imposed or overlaid upon the nonhuman. Merely understanding nonhumanity in the terms of humanity robs the nonhuman of its existence outside of human comprehension or exploitation; it is instead suppressed by the layer of subjectivity, which humans can relate to and so humans walk away from a nonhuman encounter feeling as though they’ve engaged with animality when in reality they’ve only replaced the human image within a human world with a nonhuman image. While there are countless examples of this, one stands out as a particularly useful depiction of this loss of identity: Icelandic musician and visual artist Björk offers one particularly useful depiction of this loss of identity in the music video for her 2005 single “Triumph of
"Triumph of a Heart," directed by Spike Jonze. In this music video, Björk gets into an argument with her partner and leaves her rural home, only to get intoxicated in a nearby city’s pub and pass out drunk in a field, later to be picked up by her valiant partner and brought home to resolve the initial spat. Her partner, however, is cast as a common house cat, dressed in human clothes, driving a Volkswagen, reading a paper, and functioning as a heteronormative male partner. The cat’s lack of recognizable human facial emotions is meant to mirror that of the stoic heterosexual man in contrast to the emotional woman. Perhaps the creators of the video are poking fun at interpretations of gender expectations, and perhaps this element of the video is successful through the crude anthropomorphism of a cat, but from the view of animal philosophy there are several peculiarities within the performance of this thinking, emoting, nonhuman being.

The anthropocentrism found in “Triumph of a Heart” is conventional in the sense that it is a type that we see regularly in media. Human characteristics are draped over the nonhuman in an effort to give voice — a human voice — to the nonhuman mind. Jonze and Björk’s success lies in the absurdity of the familiar: the domestic house cat is a companion species — already an identifiable animal in the human world — but the way the costumed cat’s image is crudely enlarged to be able to drive the vehicle and dance with Björk in the final scene reminds the viewer quite bluntly that despite clothing, the cat will never be interchangeable with a man, and fixed notions of masculinity or femininity seem weak and silly when performed by a body that, in spite of all its familiarity to humans, cannot explicitly express such constructions of masculinity, femininity, or love found in a
human relationship. Postmodern theorist Steve Baker reminds us that “most forms of contemporary animal representation, whether or not in lens-based media, fail effectively to communicate an animal’s individuality, singularly or particularly (and this is generally not because such representations are intended to reflect a postmodern mistrust of the very notion of individuality)” (179-80). “Triumph of a Heart” is a strong depiction of this communication failure in illustrating the superficiality of mass media anthropomorphism, a notion Rossellini must also approach delicately: some of the anthropomorphic hurdles that the *Green Porno* series encounters are connected to Rossellini’s language, an impossibly human characteristic and prerequisite for such a medium. The use of human language, however, does not supplant the subjectivity of the nonhuman species represented by Rossellini.

Where embodiment connotes folly in the “Triumph of a Heart” music video, Rossellini and the producers of Green Porno use similar elements with relative fastidiousness. One might challenge the fact that the *Green Porno* series relies on baseness derived from crude costuming and abstract visual perceptions of nonhuman species, but Rossellini’s language maintains a delicate division between human and nonhuman capacities, thus divorcing her narration from her appearance.

The respectful acknowledgement of this division was first noted by Thomas Nagel in his article “What is it Like to be a Bat?” In the article Nagel offers significant qualifications to the human urge to know what it is like to be another: one simply cannot know such things with any sensation of tangible truth
without major evolutions in language and phenomenological capacity. Nagel argues that “if the facts of experience — facts about what it is like for the experiencing organism — are accessible only from one point of view, then it is a mystery how the true character of experiences could be revealed in the physical operation of that organism” (4). Despite the fact that the films in Green Porno, Seduce Me and Mammas are performances of nonhumanity adapted to the human body and for the human intellect, I believe there is still an element of character that is not lost in the corporeal translation. Rossellini expresses to her viewers what it is like to be sexualized or seduced as another species, but her descriptions (and our ability to imagine) are limited by our human language and intellect. Nagel argues that humans can study bats and gather infinite scientific data but there will never be words to describe the sensation of having echolocation, just as humans are unable to sufficiently describe vision to an individual born blind or hearing to an individual born deaf (2). Nor can humans adequately fathom the life experiences of a male worker bee, an ovulating bird, or a hermaphroditic earthworm, but humans can translate the basic scientific observations into a language that approaches the description of events in a nonhuman’s life through installments.

The representation of nonhumans in the Green Porno webseries interprets the nonhumans’ intention using human language and cultural applications, yet avoids any suggestion that anthropomorphism alone can establish equilibrium between the human and the nonhuman intellects. In her article
“Anthropomorphism and the Animal Subject,” Nik Taylor eloquently identifies a respectful, posthuman anthropomorphism:

…I argue that anthropomorphism is unavoidable given that humans interpret the natural world and other animals (and indeed other humans) through their own embodied materiality. Precisely because of this inevitability it is my contention that we adopt a different way of ‘seeing animals’: Anthropo-interpretivism. Thus, it is my contention, that while the human element cannot be avoided in any human interpretation of others (and this includes interpretations of other humans) it need not necessarily lead to, or stem from, an assumption of human superiority. (265)

Taylor addresses a general human behavior of self-association and uses it to offer a form of human-animal consideration without hierarchy, leaving traditional anthropocentric habits like portraying nonhumans as language-speaking, upright-walking, civilization-conforming bodies with alternative appearances behind for interpretation at a respectful distance. The creators of the Green Porno webseries use a version of Taylor’s anthropo-interpretivism that considers nonhumans in their nonhuman conditions, yet narrates their stories through human reasoning that, depending on the case, may or may not correlate to a relative human condition. When those similarities happen, the human materiality is not automatically assumed to be superior; oftentimes it is mocked or narrated by Rossellini with a tone of incredulity, connoting a silliness to the way humans consider themselves to be superior in their proximity to nonhumanity. In a later
chapter, I assess these occurrences, examine the way in which they shift the subject/object relationship Rossellini has with her viewer, and turn abjection onto the human in a pivotal resistance to anthropocentrism.

ROSELLINI: THE PERFORMING BODY

I see the Green Porno webseries as performance. Antonin Artaud famously coined the Theater of Cruelty in his cultural manifesto The Theater and Its Double in which he longed to “restore to the theater a passionate and convulsive conception of life” that was not particularly cruel in terms of torture or violence, but a violent awakening from the dullness of the community’s perceived reality of itself (66). Films from the Green Porno webseries are, too, members of this Theater of Cruelty in that they destabilize Western traditions, ideologies, and hierarchies that prioritize human capacity and intellect above all other life forms and persons. Rossellini is an Artaudian figure in that she shares the lifestyle of another species through embodying it and breaking the fourth wall when communicating that lifestyle to her viewers. These films are rooted in the breaking of the fourth wall in order to create the sensation of dialogue within a dramatic narration of sexual events. Artaud comments on the use of the body in his essay evaluating the life and mishandling of famed painter Vincent Van Gogh’s mental health in stating that: “society does not wish to hear but wants to prevent from uttering” (144). Similarly, Bernadette Wegenstein identifies this

\(^6\) A dramatic effect used by actors to eliminate the boundary between the performers and the audience first coined by Denis Diderot when writing about 19th Century theatrical realism (Bell 203).
silencing as a movement toward domesticating bodies and, according to Artaud, killing brilliant minds like Van Gogh’s (116). Rossellini’s performances, however, both passionately express (nonhuman) life and communicate the sexualities society typically chooses to repress or censor. Where humans might easily fail to acknowledge the spoken and unspoken utterances of the nonhuman, Rossellini gives voice and body to the nonhumans.

Rossellini’s films also capture the omissions that remain in our supposedly posthuman world. The increase in anthropocentric attitudes is evident even in days of posthuman existence: where human lives are digitized into social media archives and accessible to anyone who follows the necessary account, news journalism is a collective effort between trained reporters and citizens capturing and posting data online with their mobile devices, and pets become internet fads in the form of memes, therein lies the domestication of the collective posthuman body. The *Green Porno* webseries exists outside of collective media interaction and consumption by making the lives of the nonhumans who are unable to be digitized, liked, and followed accessible both in means and fashion: the films are brief, can be streamed from mobile devices as well as televisions, and are presented under the guise of comedy. Rossellini’s style of anthropomorphism is, I believe, evolved past the cheap pedestrian forms of anthropomorphism in contemporary media. Rossellini gains the attention of the viewer through wit, informs the viewer of a nonhuman instinct with her body, and educates the viewer about one element of nonhuman existence in comparison to the viewer’s presumed own existence. The Uexküllian bubbles described in the previous
chapter yield a certain degree of distortion as the nonhuman world is translated to the human.

The performance structure of Rossellini’s films allows me to focus on a core element of the films: Rossellini’s body. As a cultural artifact, the body is an integral part of understanding and relating, and the body performing the behaviors of other, less familiar bodies, offers a distinctive sample of the culture it emerges from. The body is used in a number of ways: Rossellini herself has experienced and executed many degrees of body performativity, from modeling and acting as human for an audience of humans to acting as nonhuman for an audience of humans. Judith Butler argues that “for Foucault, as for Nietzsche, cultural values emerge as the result of an inscription on the body, understood as a medium, indeed, a blank page; in order for the inscription to signify, however, that medium must itself be destroyed — that is, fully transvaluated into a sublimated domain of values” (166). In order for cultures — in this case nonhuman cultures — to emerge, the human body as a medium must be stripped of its existing values and overwritten with the inscription of the nonhuman. When viewing Rossellini embodying the nonhuman, a piece of the marginalized puzzle is located within the viewer’s acknowledgment of this notion: that Rossellini performing as nonhuman narrates nonhuman behaviors and nonhuman cultures that are foreign to humans, yet are able to be inscribed onto a familiar human body in order to draw humans closer to the liminal space the nonhuman occupies. The inscription of the female body comes with particular grievances, however. A human viewer might instinctively associate Rossellini with familiar,
human characteristics such as age or physical appearance. These elements associated with the actress Rossellini are absent from her *Green Porno* performances. Instead, Rossellini portrays new forms of masculinity and femininity that differ from recognizably human gender identifications: at times Rossellini wields a fabricated whale penis or a labyrinthian duck vagina, or engages in homosexual relations, or even changes sex. In these moments, the viewers’ suspension of disbelief is necessary for Rossellini’s narration to be successful: Rossellini the blank body used for signifying the underrepresented nonhuman bodies. At other times, parts of Rossellini’s body are decomposing, thus forcing the viewers to suspect their knowledge that Rossellini is a living being for the duration of the scene. The complications arising with such familiarities will be discussed in the next chapter.

Rossellini’s body is always at the front and center of the frame, and reliably wrapped in a leotard before costuming attachments transform her into the nonhuman. Rossellini’s face, however, is left recognizably human. Rossellini breaks the fourth wall, making eye contact with and addressing her viewers to tell the story of the nonhuman rather than narrating a plot between characters within the film. With the exception of a few films (such as “Shrimp,” where Rossellini’s interpretation of a nude shrimp takes on hybrid human characteristics, like costume nipples and pubic hair, for comedic effect\(^7\), or “Spider,” where Rossellini affixes six paper eyes to her face) the transformation into nonhuman always

\(^7\) These human elements do not greatly affect the message of the *Green Porno* films, nor do they detract from the scientific data being represented by Rossellini in the film, therefore I do not take this comedic humanness into any realm of deeper analysis.
takes the form of costuming attachments such as legs, shells, feathers or phalluses. Rossellini’s humanness is retained in her face, a keystone characteristic of this particular form of embodiment offering several venues of analysis in the realm of phenomenology such as bodily intermediaries and essences.

The value of the human face in the *Green Porno* films is rooted in the dissonance one potentially feels when observing Rossellini’s body imitating the habits of a nonhuman while her exposed human face narrates and emotes about these actions. Rossellini’s body functions as a nonhuman object to be seen by the human world as well as a worldly representation of a nonhuman perceived through the transformation of her human body: in other words, Rossellini acts as a phenomenological dualism. French phenomenologist Henri Bergson describes the body as an intermediary between what is known and what is unfamiliar, suggesting the body translates a perception of the unknown, stating that: “matter [is] the aggregate of images, and perception of matter [is] these same images referred to the eventual action of one particular image, my body” (22). For Bergson, the relation between image and body is paramount and the body is the translator or interpreter of the image to the mind. The human body imitates the unfamiliar tactics of the nonhuman in these films, offering the viewer a human sensation of a nonhuman act. Maurice Merleau-Ponty understands phenomenology in terms of essences, arguing that the body distinguishes the world outside of it through its engagement with the world of other subjects and objects, thus the body is a collection or signifier of foreign corporeality (qtd. in
Wegenstein 30). Subjectivity, then, becomes a compilation of realities belonging to humans and nonhumans alike. Rossellini embodies a very specific foreign corporeality in the form of a particular species of nonhuman, but retains her human face. I argue that this retention implants a phenomenological essence into the Otherness of the nonhuman body that is being represented by her human body. Through Bergson’s logic, the face is also a major factor in the translation of the image by preserving the body’s capacity to translate images. As Wegenstein argues in *Getting Under The Skin*, “Everything else can lie, but the face cannot. Individuals, when they encounter each other, cannot but react to that. The face in this phenomenology is the only ‘naked truth’ situated not on a referential metalevel, but on the very ground of existence” (88). Rossellini advocates a sensation of trustworthiness regarding the content of the particular film, be it about mating or maternal instinct, because regardless of the unfamiliarity created by her nonhuman body transformed via leotard and costume, her human face allows the encounter between the viewer and the screen to be a trustworthy one. Conversely, when the face is costumed or enhanced beyond recognition: “[t]he surface of the face is made into a mask, behind which we can no longer decipher the person” (Wegenstein 89), and the sensation of credibility is breached.

Lévinas describes human interaction as an acceptance that a face-to-face interaction with another person makes one actively the object, the other, to another person’s gaze (*Totality and Infinity* 192). Lévinas writes in *Totality and Infinity* that: “the face is present in its refusal to be contained. …It is neither seen nor touched — for in visual or tactile sensation the identity of the I envelops the
alterity of the object” (194). This idea of facial liberation affirms both the
Otherness and power Rossellini holds when she appears as a nonhuman body
with a definitive human face. Staring into Rossellini-as-nonhuman’s face, viewers
become object to the nonhuman subject who is breaking the fourth wall to
narrate his or her sexual processes. As explained in the introductory chapter, this
breach of the theatrical fourth wall is a common tactic used to initiate interaction
with the viewer and to redirect the gaze onto the traditionally defined gazer,
thereby redirecting the focus of alterity as well.

ROSSELLINI: SPEAKING AS NONHUMAN

In a special installment, the third season of Green Porno was subtitled
Bon Appetit! and focused on types of seafood consumed by humans. The film
“Shrimp” is a strong introduction to the richness of nonhuman life and the
surfaces of sea creatures as represented by Rossellini. “Shrimp” begins with
Rossellini as human, in a stage kitchen preparing a traditional Italian dish: shrimp
and risotto. As she parodies the format of a cooking show, she pauses and looks
at her paper-crafted shrimp and contemplates the life of a shrimp, as she
transitions into nonhuman. Rossellini narrates: “If I were a shrimp, I would be a
male when young, but with age I would become a female. Oh! I would have to
get undressed! Get rid of this stark armor. I would have to molt” (“Shrimp” 2010).
Rossellini pulls off her paper mustache, goatee, and red paper shell to reveal her
body dressed in a pink bodysuit with red lace bra and underwear, which she also
removes. Rossellini also lets down her long hair and stands ‘nude’ with human
pink nipples and labia drawn onto her bodysuit. She then continues: “And when soft and naked I would mate. I would hold my eggs tightly to protect them, but we shrimp are fished by the millions with nets!” (“Shrimp” 2010). The camera then pans to fishing nets dragging across household furniture such as desks and lamps, catching random objects including small paper sea creatures. The film closes with Rossellini’s face among countless paper sea creatures, stating that “for every shrimp caught, ten other lives are lost. These wasted lives are called bycatch,” and the shot of Rossellini’s paper bycatch fades to a photograph of actual bycatch. Rossellini, human once again and in the kitchen, looks into the camera and confesses: “I lost my appetite” (“Shrimp” 2010). In losing her human appetite for her represented nonhuman, Rossellini turns the attention at the end of the film from mating to activism. This film reveals itself to be a political statement in addition to the lighthearted performance of nonhumanity expected from Rossellini, and foreshadows a shift in the message of the films to come.

The *Bon Appetit!* series is atypical to the rest of the series in that Rossellini appears as human for a significant portion of the film, but her narration as human is necessary for the second portion of the film, featuring biologist Claudio Campagna escorting Rossellini through the biological implications of fisheries and the seafood industry as a whole. Nevertheless, as Rossellini embodies the gender shifting shrimp, her body becomes an unfamiliar entity that not only transitions genders and textures, but ultimately becomes lost in the sea of other bodies trapped by the fishing net. A human lifespan seems to pale in comparison to the life of a shrimp: humans maintain one skin and the majority
maintains one gender. Those humans who do identify as transgender are often ostracized for their supposed meddling with nature, but it is the very nature of the shrimp to transition. For Heidegger to assume that nonhumans lack complexity is, as Broglio states, a failure to consider nonhumans beyond their surfaces.

Rossellini's face in “Shrimp,” particularly in the shot representing bycatch, is staggeringly effective in expressing human indifference to the viewer. When she explains bycatch, her human face stands out in the expanse of representative death: Rossellini’s face is one among countless faces unseen, staring into the camera at the viewer. Lévinas states that “the Other remains infinitely transcendent, infinitely foreign; his face in which his epiphany is produced and which appeals to me breaks with the world that can be common to us, whose virtualities are inscribed in out nature and developed by our existence. Speech proceeds from absolute difference” (Totality and Infinity 194). By placing her own face into the infinitely foreign sea of bycatch, Rossellini is, at least momentarily, exceeding the expectations of the viewer by materializing herself as not only nonhuman Other, but nonliving Other for the sake of human consumption. “Shrimp” is one of only a few that alienate the viewer using the human face rather than the nonhuman face or body.

When contemplating maternity, Rossellini disseminates the notion of maternal instinct in ways that are not always pleasant or comforting. The *Mammas* film on the wasp is short and succinct, swiftly commenting specifically on the vast needs of a mother in Western society. Rossellini simply explains:
If I were a *podalonia hirsuta*, I would have the thinnest waist and on my ass I would have a stinger; venomous! ... I’d sting the caterpillar in each segment and inject my venom; not to kill, but to paralyze.

When my baby comes out, it will have fresh meat.

If I were a wasp, I wouldn’t need all these appliances like this refrigerator. (“Wasp” 2013)

In her frustration with a lifestyle dependent upon electricity, plumbing, and manufactured formula, Rossellini’s human character draws the viewer’s eye to the simpler life from which humans escaped only to further complicate their lives with the civility of machinery and artificiality. Here again, Rossellini draws humanity and nonhumanity together through the misconception that females harbor a maternal necessity to provide for one’s offspring but displaying the potentially gruesome ways maternal instincts are revealed. By highlighting the complications of industrialization Rossellini challenges the hierarchy of intelligence among species while comically handling the visceral nature of insect existence. Human uprightness brings technology, innovation and a more life preserving way of caretaking for the young, but “Wasp” conveys a recognition of simplicity and survival also being sufficient in the case of the *podalonia hirsuta*.

In keeping with the earlier seasons, Rossellini is not without thoughts on sexual activity in the *Mammas* series; it is, after all, an installment originating from a concept surrounding copulation. When depicting the dunnock, a mid-sized bird, she addresses sexuality and the restrictions that are currently beginning to fall away from human culture. Rossellini begins the film by observing: “If I were a
prunella modularis, I’d sit on my eggs. My chicks might have different fathers. I might take two or three fathers to provide for my family. He has another wife too!” (“Dunnock” 2013), motioning to another bird passing through the background of the shot. Rossellini then qualifies this statement by comparing polyandry to the norm: “If I were a prunella modularis, I would have several husbands. One husband, one wife: monogamy. It’s for the very wealthy,” (“Dunnock” 2013), thus arguing that traditional human behavior fails as a means of survival. When observing the inverse relationship between two passersby, she comments “One man, several wives, several children! Bad idea!” (“Dunnock” 2013), again stressing the maternal necessity to provide for her young. Rossellini ends the film with the simple declaration: “Polyandry; that’s the best” (“Dunnock” 2013). The mother dunnock is oriented around the ability to provide the most for her offspring whether it takes the form of eliminating babies or increasing sources of dependency. The wasp shares similarities in its carnal urge to sacrifice the lives of others for the betterment of her offspring. Each of these films reinforce a particular stance on contemporary political and environmental concerns, suggesting that human-made politics sometimes fall short in the name of humanity in comparison to nonhuman solutions evident in these other worlds. Regardless of flaws, Rossellini emphasizes the undeniable similarities between the household familial problems faced by both nonhumans and humans.

When speaking as a nonhuman, Rossellini tackles complications within the human-nonhuman relationship in an unbiased manner despite her identification as a human. This approach bears similarities to what Nik Taylor
sees as a new anthropomorphism, noting that “emerging research points to the fact that those who regularly interact with animals do so anthropomorphically” (267) by seeing human and nonhuman perspectives as epistemologically equal to one another rather than talking down to the species they are giving (inferior) voices and reasoning to. Taylor offers a potential remedy to the misrepresentation occurring within anthropomorphism: actor-network theory (ANT) developed by Bruno Latour and Michel Callon. ANT is a concept that entrusts that “society is an achievement of people engaging in producing a variety of associations of human and nonhuman elements” (Lagesen 442). ANT focuses on dispelling essentialism and strengthening the connections between heterogenous groups of individuals and the outcomes they can produce: a collective of actors collaborate to make meaning in the form of whichever medium they might be catering to (film, television, social media) and must do so repetitively in order for the intended outcome to be successful. Similar to Haraway’s case for affinity politics, the actors or actants in ANT must agree to collect and contribute their talents to the network and dissolve into other networks upon completion. ANT consists of a presumed understanding that actors with the network are identified as actors regardless of their humanity or non-humanity; animals and objects prove to be invaluable to the meaning-making process within some networks (Lagesen 444). ANT applies to human-animal

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8 Affinity politics: collectivity for the purpose of carrying out a task related to one particular interest shared among a large variety of people. Upon task completion, the participants disband and recollect for other tasks. Haraway argues that affinity politics is an idealistic alternative to generalized cultural or political identification because it caters to the continuing fragmentation of identity politics without dismissing common interests of individuals who might not typically collect under other, broader circumstances. [*Manifesto* 156-57]
relations by reconsidering several of our interpretations. The inclination to reinforce binaries typically limits and/or prevents the embodiment of another being; ANT removes identification through a binary. Asymmetry of contributing actors leads to prioritization of power or authority, but in ANT every actor’s contribution is deemed equally necessary and thus the remaining power maintains collective weight and dismisses power structures such as anthropocentrism. ANT offers intersubjectivity and thus heterogenous relationships between species. Taylor believes that bringing nature into social theory corners the human into making patriarchal, hegemonic, and anthropomorphic allowances of power (273-75). Although Taylor offers ANT aspirational opportunity, hybridity and ANT lead to social disruption and risk resistance; ANT is, after all, only an ideological suggestion for reimagining anthropomorphism. Because ANT is a method that can be used to recognize animals as subjects through anthropomorphization I find it a concept worth briefly considering when meditating over the Green Porno webseries in the following ways (Taylor 279).

Elements of ANT are evident in the Green Porno webseries in a few ways. First, the nonhuman is linguistically treated as equal to human. When Rossellini embodies any nonhuman she approaches the nonhuman experience as closely as possible without transcending the human body. She begins Green Porno and Mammamas films by stating: “If I were a [nonhuman], I would have…” and holds the subjunctive mood for the duration of the film. She only claims to be or have become a nonhuman species in the Seduce Me series, where each film’s
opening monologue features Rossellini as human being seduced by another human (or humans) in a particularly unusual manner, leading her to ask the question: “What am I, a [nonhuman]? If I were…”, reversing the norms of anthropomorphism and displaying the nonhuman’s seduction tactics upon her human body. This dignified technique transitions Rossellini into the nonhuman embodiment where she narrates her hypothetical life as the nonhuman that would in fact be seduced by the conduct of the human in the introduction of the film. This maneuver allows Rossellini to avoid a certain sensation of gimmick associated with common comedic anthropomorphism, thereby preserving her respectful approach to applying human traits to the nonhuman. Rossellini adapts her human body to the needs of the representation of the nonhuman body, leaving her face recognizable yet her body remarkably Other. Rossellini safely vacillates within the realm of nonhuman representation by identifying with the nonhuman body in ways that resist demeaning the nonhuman body.

Secondly, ANT is useful when Rossellini-as-nonhuman addresses the viewer. Rather than making the nonhuman markedly Other by non-humanness, the nonhuman (and in certain films, the human as well) addresses the viewer as the marginalized individual. Speaking articulately and posing questions indirectly applicable to both human and nonhuman existence, Rossellini casts the viewer into Other — into the position of equality with the nonhuman, a position that humans view as inferior through typical anthropocentrism — and destabilizes the liminal space in which anthropomorphized nonhumans often reside. This recalibration of subjectivity will reappear in my fourth chapter under elevated
inquiry as it pertains to counterabjection and the redirection of marginalized subjectivity, itself a new surface by which to evaluate humans through this restructured identification.

SURFACES

Derrida concludes *The Animal That Therefore I Am* by reminding his readers that there is an evident animality in the word *I* that most humans fail to identify. When humans anthropomorphize nonhumans, modern language restricts the speaker into sharing pronouns as identification, thus reminding us all of our physical and linguistic closeness to one another (418-19). Animality and media theorist Ron Broglio summarizes Derrida’s treatment of the *ecce animot* by stating that: “When the animal looks back, the hegemony of human vision becomes confounded … Animals look at us, and we are confounded by their radical Otherness as well as the fact that we may be objects in their world as much as they are objects in ours” (58-9). Both Broglio and Derrida effectively affirm the layered complications of both existing with and looking upon nonhuman animals and the ways humans seek to relate to them.

Following Broglio’s model, I am considering nonhuman representation in this project in terms of what he calls ‘surfaces.’ Decades before Broglio, Foucault too thought of the body as surface, arguing that “the body is the inscribed surface of events” (148), concentrating on the human body as a site inevitably vulnerable to cultural impression. Broglio elevates this vulnerability when considering the nonhuman body, addressing the fact that humans struggle with considering the
perspective of another species without reducing it to the likeness of our own: “In its foreignness, the animal other becomes radically Other” (xvi). Like many philosophers and theorists before him, Broglio emphasizes yet again the essences that become untranslated when thinking about nonhuman life. However, Broglio has a useful solution to this void: to avoid the unfair comparison of nonhumans to humans, Broglio instead examines what he calls living on the surface, or the physical and cultural depth of considering nonhumans without holding human self-reflexivity or interiority above the nonhuman being. Broglio takes this supposed lack and instead attempts to use it against our human tendency to reduce or dismiss intellectually engaging with the animal world through the use of art (both fixed and performance) as a surface for examination. Broglio comments that the artists chosen to draw out this project of surfaces “have become unmoored in order to take seriously the world of the animal on its own terms. In other words, these artists take seriously the problem of an animal phenomenology” (80). The surface “also refers to the means of thinking and productivity removed from the interiority of the subject” (Broglio 81). Humans can only know nonhumans through these surfaces. Rossellini fits into this realm of artists with the qualification of two possible sites for criticism. First, Rossellini has very intentionally presented the Green Porno series as comedy. The comedy, as I will reveal in later chapters, is at first at the folly of the nonhuman, but in later seasons shifts into the comedy of the nonhuman’s successes and similarities to problems humans have yet to determine solutions for. I argue that in the latter situation comedy becomes a surface for humans to digest or comprehend
humanity through the image of Rossellini’s nonhuman with cerebral noteworthiness. Secondly, a small amount of dilution must occur in the *Green Porno* series because of its large span of accessibility. Rossellini doesn’t leave the species she embodies “tamed or cute or defeated” as Broglio warns, but maintains a balance of pedestrian definition and description of the species while incorporating scientific data into the performance (80). Rossellini balances the accessibility of a nonhuman performance and the phenomenological reality of each particular nonhuman species’ world by using her body as the artistic instrument for comprehension of nonhumans as legitimate *ecce animot* and as veritable persons.

How do humans identify personhood in posthuman existence? The physical limitations of personhood create a problematic cycle of anthropocentrism that, through studying this film series, I hope to effectively argue against. Animal studies scholar David Sztybel writes that the “traditional definition of ‘person’ is unacceptably anthropomorphic” (241). It is unfair to identify personhood and humanity and to base personhood on humanity. The widespread views on who is and is not a person don’t even match our views on our own personhood. Peter Singer states that humans must extend ideas of equality to animals in the same fashion done with humans (*Animal Liberation* 2), invoking more than the linguistic trickery highlighted by Joan Dunayer: the animal-noun-person summation\(^9\) is superficially settling if only relying on the logic

\(^9\) Joan Dunayer writes in *Animal Equality* that linguistically “animal” is a noun and therefore must be a person, place or thing (7). Animals are clearly not places, and the general consensus that animals have minds of some sort would eliminate their identity as things. However simple this anecdote may be, it is effective in framing Sztybel’s eloquent argument.
of categorization that leads to hierarchization and creates this cycle. Personhood is about capacity; simply inferring rationality or autonomy to personhood misleads because children lack those traits but are still traditionally considered persons above nonhumans (Sztybel 241). A person has the ability to sense and react; however that reaction is culminated is crucial to the understanding of that body.

Sensation — a hefty part of what Rossellini’s whole project is about— is centered on the consideration of personhood. Sexual and maternal sensation are traits of a person, a recognized subject, and a being. Merleau-Ponty provides this artistic assertion of the body: “My body is the fabric into which all objects are woven, and it is, at least in relation to the perceived world, the general instrument of my ‘comprehension’” (235). While this is not written in direct reference to personhood, I find it useful when thinking about surface, sensation, and personhood in that Merleau-Ponty qualifies the body as a material relative to its surroundings. To some extent, humans and nonhumans are woven into one another’s fabric of comprehension, strengthening the argument for the acknowledgement of nonhuman personhood. In *The Open: Man and Animal*, Agamben writes with parallel logic by arguing that:

It is possible to oppose man to other living things, and at the same time to organize the complex --and not always edifying-- economy of relations between men and animals, only because something like an animal life has been separated within man, only because his
distance and proximity to the animal have been measured and recognized first of all in the closest and most intimate place. (16)

Human bodies are in near proximity to those of nonhumans despite an emphasis on human intellect, language, and community. If human bodies are in fact the instrument of comprehension and human bodies are within the vicinity of nonhuman bodies, particularly within human intimacies, then I can’t believe human perceptions are as drastically different as humanist ideology would like to impress upon us. Instead, I would argue that intellect, be it human or nonhuman, is merely one of the objects woven into our respective worlds. Rossellini’s films offer an extension between these worlds, these bubbles, so that such intimate places can, within limitations of the body, be shared.

Deleuze and Guattari argue that “there are other optical and spatial phenomenologies than our all-too-familiar human ones” (Surface Encounters 67). Acknowledging the nonhuman experience is essential to posthumanity and the terms of this project. If humans can understand nonhumans as persons they can then begin to understand and relate to the marginalizations of these familiar-yet-foreign bodies and transition out of an anthropocentric Western ideology and into a phenomenological existence appreciative of those bodies whose lives humans are unable to fully experience. Until then humans are limited to examining artistic representations such as Rossellini’s in an effort to understand embodiment, personhood, and likeness through performances of Otherness.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON NONHUMAN REPRESENTATION
As I understand it, the Western humanist tradition relies on an anthropomorphism that eclipses the majority of nonhuman traits of the nonhuman, with the exception of physical appearance, in an effort to understand the nonhuman as a subject and as a person, equating person and human as interchangeable terms. Rossellini’s webseries resists falling into this channel of laziness by attempting to make the human (in this case, Rossellini herself) utterly nonhuman to draw the viewer closer to the nonhumanity of whichever species Rossellini represents at a particular moment. Rossellini’s films propose that humans and nonhumans are not separated by the vast molecular or intellectual distance Heidegger suggests in his early writings, but are bodies sharing similar experiences of commonality and alterity. In taking this path, she approaches a Derridean understanding of the human-nonhuman relationship. The films on the shrimp, the wasp, and the dunnock follow an intellectual line exploring Broglio’s surfaces through means that discount the purported uprightness of humans: perhaps Heideggerian world-forming human identities deprive humans of a primal richness that offers solutions to social controversies humans encounter by considering themselves above other beings. These films bring forth the limitations or logistic flaws of the human being’s flagrance: an occurrence evident in many films across several topics to be taken up in the next chapter.
Chapter 3: Other Representing Other: A Hollywood Icon’s Posthuman Interpretation of Nature and the Abject Nonhuman Body

Shifting away from the theoretical scrutiny of nonhuman representation in the Green Porno webseries, I will now explore the webseries as an art project surveying bodies. Through the dualism of the body, specifically Rossellini’s body as both human and nonhuman, the Green Porno webseries addresses parallels between animals, women, and other marginalized groups in a patriarchal Western cultural viewership. This chapter confronts the many forms of Otherness present in the webseries by individually analyzing the bodies represented as Other in the films within multiple sections. Then I discuss Rossellini’s position as a posthuman artist whose body, by representing an array of bodies and species, emphasizes the value of liminal spaces and the bodies that inhabit them, as well as calling attention to hierarchal hegemony. Finally I begin exploring her tactics for redirecting Otherness onto the human, leading into Rossellini’s shift in abjection: the topic of the next chapter.

Prior to the popularity of Green Porno, Isabella Rossellini was on the cover of Vogue over twenty times, recognized as the face of Lancôme, and starred in many avant-garde blockbuster films. Rossellini’s body was a representation of the ideal feminine and was marketed as such. Days after her fortieth birthday, however, her contract with Lancôme was terminated: in the 1980s, a woman in her forties was no longer a representation of ideal beauty, but instead deemed no longer desirable, lustworthy, sexy (Peppers 1). Feminist
philosopher Iris Marion Young writes that “although a certain cultural space is reserved for revering feminine beauty, for example, in part that very cameo ideal renders most women’s bodies drab, ugly, fleshy, loathsome by comparison. Old people, gay men and lesbians, disabled people, and fat people are other groups perceived to have ugly, fearful, or loathsome bodies” (201). Beauty and desirability, Young notes, are dichotomizing factors that inevitably leave bodies left outside of these categories to be identified as ugly and undesirable. As a woman past the age of forty, Rossellini experienced life as a new form of other: the aging woman. This unfamiliar label undoubtedly transformed her life, leading her to seek new artistic opportunities.

After being involuntarily removed from the modeling spotlight, Rossellini took on other tasks both inside and outside of show business, from motherhood and university student to directorial and other behind-the-scene roles in cinema, eventually leading to her partnership with the Sundance Channel for the creation of the first installment Green Porno (Peppers 2). Initially shot for small, low resolution screens and intended for viewing on cellular phones, Green Porno offered Rossellini the creative freedom to represent different species and share their differences on the internet (Stevens). Using her own body as the primary device, Rossellini placed herself back in front of a camera, this time representing alternative types of bodies experiencing Otherness and alterity, while writing the scripts as the nonhuman Other as well. As the initial Green Porno installment acquired notoriety, Rossellini was able to continue with the creation of the short films and evolve their content from the informative comedy found in the first
season of *Green Porno* into the more formulaic composition of subtle, informative commentary on human and nonhuman behaviors and societies evident in *Seduce Me* and *Mammas*.

Beyond commentary on social groups or behaviors, many of the most valuable characteristics among the *Green Porno* films border topics of attitudes and emotions connected to sex, love, and life. Young assesses that “despite our society’s explicit normative and legal commitment to equality and respect for all persons on their individual merits, group identifications nevertheless continue to structure relations of privilege and oppression through feelings, bodily reactions, images and stereotypes, linguistic and behavioral habits” (202). Without regard for the official treatment of the groups Young mentions, humans are still active participants in habits that reinforce the oppression of groups through our attitudes and learned customs. These attitudes are brought to the attention of the viewers of the *Green Porno* webseries in a number of ways that, through the contortion of Rossellini’s body and warped voices within performing the nonhuman, address these troublesome habits. Mel Y. Chen urgently notes that: “mining sometimes disparate cultural works for [racial, sexual, or abled otherness in animal figures] reveals the more complex psychic investments of a whiteness triple-dipped in heteronormativity, ableism, and speciesism and tells of the precise quality of the animacies in which it is invested” (102). Chen’s argument is evident in the approaches used within the webseries to express both human and nonhuman gender, death-fearing alterity, and anthropocentric obstacles and I intend to uncover many of them in this chapter.
As the star of the *Green Porno* webseries, Rossellini reifies several intersections within feminism and biology. First, she moved out of the youth-valuing fashion industry and Hollywood ‘culture’ and into the sciences, where, as Haraway notes, women “became the locus of highly productive discourses and other social practices” (*Primate Visions* 290), a move that intelligently merges Rossellini’s knowledge of the film and art industries with her new fascination: animal behavior. The critical acclaim garnered for the initial series, leading to so many additional installments, solidified the market for nonhuman presence in the film format and Rossellini garnered established followers — a fandom — for her comically educational nonhuman representations. Secondly, the series itself opens up a genre of adult-targeted films rooted in science but masked in the art of seduction and suggestion, topics I will continue to explore in detail for the remainder of the chapter. Finally, the webseries introduces Rossellini as a woman writing on topics of animality. Female creative writers who write on animality, as Marian Scholtmeijer writes in her essay “The Power of Otherness: Animals in Women’s Fiction,”

employ the creative freedom of narrative to liberate otherness from the norms of dominant ideology. Women writers use fiction to concretize, affirm, and empower the state of being ‘other,’ which dominant ideology objectifies as a site of weakness, but which finds living expression in nonhuman animals. (233)

I suggest taking Scholtmeijer’s statement a step further when appraising Rossellini’s work: While her films are creative nonfiction, they too are fueled by a
celebration of nonhumanity and Otherness that initiates in the viewer an evaluation of that-which-is-Other and the social-animal hierarchy by which humans prioritize humans at the top of the chain. Using several Rossellini films as examples, I will analyze the ways that Otherness and femininity are intertwined into a subtle criticism of dominant patriarchal ideology.

BODY DUALITY

In an interview with Joseph Schneider, included in his book *Donna Haraway: Live Theory*, Haraway emphasizes that nonhumans often do not resemble the representations humans associate with nonhuman bodies and existences, highlighting a distinct flaw in the ways humans represent nonhumans and the laxity with which humans accept such representations (qtd. in Schneider 140). In the last chapter I mentioned the importance of Rossellini’s artistic attention to detail in the representations occurring in the *Green Porno* webseries and the significance of the most accurate costuming techniques used on Rossellini’s body, sans-face, for phenomenological effect. In this chapter, I return to representation in another manner: to align it with representations of human identifications performed in the films. While Haraway reminds us of the gray area in which humans connect nonhuman signs and signifiers, I intend to point out Rossellini’s use of the human body-as-nonhuman to accentuate moments in these films where instincts and actions not bound to nonhuman sexes are crucially (and problematically) fixed to human sex and gender expectations.
In the previous chapter I discussed the use of Rossellini’s body and face in the representation of nonhumans in her films. Building upon those ideas of the phenomenological relation to the other, I would like to consider the social implications of these actions in this chapter. Rossellini engages in a nonhumanocentric form of anthropomorphism approaching the actor-network theory that showcases nonhuman-oriented representation onto her human body; this is not anthropomorphism as humans know it, but a new, more respectful way of thinking about and representing bodies, which humans attempt to understand through their own human characteristics. Although Rossellini still identifies as herself in her hypothetical narrations, she carries subjectivity and personhood into nonhumanity through her feminine body — something reminiscent of Butler’s theory on drag performance, but performing a nonhuman drag. In Gender Trouble Butler writes:

The performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed. But we are actually in the presence of three contingent dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance. If the anatomy of the performer is already distinct from the gender of the performer, and both of those are distinct from the gender of the performance, then the performance suggests a dissonance not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender, and gender and performance. (175)
By separating drag performance into these three dimensions, Butler opens up the intersubjectivity between biology and culture. Identification, performance, and biology are all indispensable factors in the evaluation of the gender fluidity that occurs within drag performances. Rossellini’s films prompt us to consider the Butlerian complexities of hegemony in terms of species performance rather than drag performance. If humanity is considered to be the species of authority in the same manner that masculinity dominates non-male genders in patriarchal social structures, and if nonhumanity is the feminized Other, a drag performance within Rossellini’s nonhuman embodiment is evident in the films. In order to understand how Butler’s theory applies to Rossellini, her three aspects of corporeality need to be altered as such: anatomical species, gender identities of the involved species, and species performance. The dissonance creates tension between the performing species and the species being performed, primarily through a conflict between the gender identities of the performed species potentially and the gender identities of the performing species. Thus in this variant of drag, Rossellini bears the burden of speaking for the Other (species) and, as the films show, subverting certain assumptions made within the dichotomy between human and nonhuman.

With posthumanity comes the melding or blurring of bodies, evident in Rossellini’s depiction of nonhumanity through her own humanity. The nonhuman narration Rossellini brings to life is in itself a fundamental body-as-text separate from Rossellini’s own human feminine body-as-text. Feminist philosopher Gail Weiss argues that:
To account for the moral imperatives that can and do issue from texts, we must recognize not only that the body is discursively constructed, and thus that the body cannot be separated from discourses about it, but also that texts are themselves embodied, which means that they have their own materiality, which is precisely what defines them (and differentiates them from one another) as texts. (26)

Weiss sees the body as a complicit medium within the exchange of discourse and expression, allowing the body to garner some form of substance as a receptacle for delivering messages. In *Green Porno* films, the messages vary depending on the nonhuman being represented, but ultimately inscribe Rossellini’s body with multiple texts beyond verbal communication for each nonhuman body represented. Marshall McLuhan famously argues that medium is the message, that: “the personal and social consequences of any medium — that is, of any extension of ourselves — result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology” (100), and this applies in multifaceted ways to the *Green Porno* webseries: Rossellini’s feminine body functions as a figurative microcosm of nonhuman existence and is a message of marginalization. However, her body also represents a marginalization of the female population by not falling into traditional Western expectations of beauty or sexuality yet still blatantly representing sex and reflecting a common primal instinct among persons of infinite species. As a body marginalized due to age but established as a pre-existing figure of beauty and
reverence, Rossellini’s body-message is one that shares identifications of alterity with the nonhumans she personifies. She relates to the casting off of the nonhuman by being a human removed from media hegemony. This relativity bears significance on the portrayal of the nonhuman and the reception of the performance by the viewer in a number of ways.

Michael Allen Fox and Lesley McLean argue that “humans must develop a new image of what nonhuman animals are like, and correspondingly develop new ideas on how humans ought to relate to them … a different standard of relevance has to be adopted” (146), indicating a need for a recalibration of our terms of relation: rather than understanding nonhumans in the basic categories of sex or genus, humans could potentially learn from witnessing the experiences of these beings without regard for the politics of human terms of identity. Rossellini offers a familiarly human body sharing accurate scientific data through a nonhuman representation that makes the moral and experiential foundation between human regard for humans and nonhumans closer to level. In using her body as the medium for education, Rossellini blurs these categories and depicts the absence of such identifications and the complications they create, offering the viewer an artistic representation of personhood without humanocentric ideology. Furthermore, she brings forth the sophisticated mental life of the nonhuman and overlays a fictitious nonhuman voice atop her human body, functioning as a cinematic vessel and reminder to humans that, as Fox and MacLean point out: “for moral existence to be meaningful it must be translated into spatial terms and played out in the real world” (147).
FEMININITY

For this project I explore femininity as the convergence of human female-centric attributes as they appear in nonhumanity. I primarily rely on the differentiation between sex and gender: to be female is not equivocal to being a feminine. Some cases will draw out the differences in femaleness, or the biological characteristics of being a female, when compared to femininity: the sensational characteristics of being a woman. Rossellini’s representations of femininity in the webseries are elastic: some moments strengthen the female through nonhuman actions and other moments reveal hegemonic problems in nonhuman cultures mirroring the issues within humanity. In this section I consider elements of femininity in the Green Porno webseries in two central ways. First, humans should examine the treatment and representation of femininity outside of the boundaries of Western human identity and expectations. What aspects of femininity are evident in the way a nonhuman functions? Does our framework of femininity fit around the lifestyle of the nonhuman being represented? What becomes evident about our definitions of femininity when humans observe them being reinforced or broken in nonhuman behaviors? Second, humans are obligated to consider what complications and influences arise from these depictions of femininity (and in the subsequent sections of this chapter masculinity, queerness, death-fearing alterity, etc.) communicated to humans through the performance of the nonhuman through Rossellini’s feminine body.
Since bodies fall under the hegemonic dominance of men, there are a multitude of ways that women and nonhumans share aspects of marginalization. Femininity and nonhumanity are historically documented as weaknesses and inferiorities, separating patriarchal bodies from the remainder of living persons who inevitably become oppressed by patriarchal bodies in positions of dominance. Postmodern feminist theorists have drawn out these comparisons for decades, tracing correlations between marginalized human and nonhuman bodies back several centuries. Scholtmeijer hones in on the discrimination of women when she argues: “The injustices suffered by women — and the suppression, silencing, and violence — are arguably an extension of the more easily identified abuse of animals. The Otherness of women from an androcentric perspective finds a correlate in the more radical otherness of the animal from the anthropocentric perspective” (232). This concept has appeared in many texts addressing femininity and animality, particularly from publications by Josephine Donovan and Carol J. Adams, who arguably paved the way for associations between derogatory animalistic names assigned to women and their connotations in Western culture. In cases of Otherness sourced in gender or species, humanness and maleness take precedence over all others. Scholtmeijer states that “anthropocentrism springs from the same ideology of dominance that elevates the interests of men over the interests of women and sustains those who possess power in practice in the position that allows them to determine that power means oppression” (232-33), which not only widens the troublesome gap between human men and all other bodies, but pinpoints the particularity of
Rossellini’s performances in the films. As a woman representing a nonhuman of any variety, Rossellini is giving a voice to those bodies experiencing alternative forms of Otherness through the relation of that Otherness to her own: the aging former model is abandoned by those seeking hegemonic ideals of beauty and turns to writing and directing a webseries commenting on the portrayal of marginalized women and eventually other marginalized bodies.

Scholtmeijer establishes an understanding that Otherness does not have to equate to weakness, and that there is an inner sense of empowerment within Otherness. “Who would not wish to detach herself (or himself) from a culture that rests upon violence toward all those beings designated ‘other’? The political thrust of my argument here comes not from denial of the status of Other for women and animals, but the denial that ‘otherness’ presupposes weakness (233). In Rossellini’s nonhuman representations Otherness is presented as strength, be it over another creature of that species, gender, or a survival strength over human tradition. Detachment, however, is not Rossellini’s method: instead, she immerses herself in the performance of the androcentric or anthropocentric Other to turn the presupposed weakness onto the appropriate oppressing species and genders. This is evident in the films “Duck” and “Snake,” where Rossellini addresses contemporary gender concerns existing in the human world and the methods nonhuman females use to handle them.

The female duck faces many instances of forced sexual activity, so she must learn to control her fertility. She may not be able to avoid sex, but she is
able to avoid bearing ducklings from any sexual partner forcing himself upon her. Featured in the *Seduce Me* series, “Duck” is narrated as follows:

> Ugh, they all want to mate with me with their corkscrew penises.
> Ouch! Forced copulation! Get away! But I evolve vaginal complexity to keep control. One of them is raping me; I don’t care. My vaginal structure is a twisted tunnel: a labyrinth. [Rossellini giggles.] I can block the phallus. I can discombobulate the phallus. Haha! I can trick the phallus! But the duck I like... [he] will father my babies. A little to the right, a little to the left, there! (“Duck” 2010)

Rossellini’s “Duck” brings forth the evolutionary advantage the female duck gains over the male in an effort to survive and maintain a choice over which duck fathers her offspring. While most human women lack chambered vaginas and yet arguably have more control over who becomes their sexual partner, the duck offers an interesting biological rendition of a woman’s choice: though the duck’s choice does not pertain to copulation, it monitors reproduction and ultimately the female’s choice to procreate. Rape is addressed in “Duck” quite uncomfortably: there is a level of acceptance in Rossellini’s acknowledgement that one of the male ducks is forcing himself onto her so long as the biological structure of her vagina prevents the outcome of rape to be ducklings. Rossellini presents the female duck as resistant to unsolicited intercourse, but ultimately bearing the advantage solely because the offense will not result in motherhood — an unsettling message to present to human viewers who exist in Western societies where any unwarranted body contact is a criminal violation. However as
intriguing the vaginal structure of the duck might be, “Duck” emphasizes one situation where humanity is more closely aligned with intellectual superiority: a female of any species shouldn’t have to ‘discombobulate’ an undesired phallus in her vagina.

Complications surrounding human values also appear in “Snake,” a film from *Seduce Me*. “Snake” logs the mating ritual of the common garter snake: a creature physically equipped to preserve fertilization post-coitus. Rossellini opens this film as her human self, staring at a chastity belt. After her opening remarks: “A chastity belt? What am I, a garter snake?” the camera cuts to Rossellini as serpent, continuing the narration:

To seduce each other, garter snakes entwine in a spaghetti-like embrace, lining up their genitals. She has a cloaca; he has two penises. After ejaculating, he blocks up her genitals to prevent other males from mating with her. Lots of males use plugs like chastity belts: bats, rats, squirrels. Consequently, they all evolve penises to try to dislodge the plugs left by previous lovers. They all want to be the one and only, forcing females to be faithful.

[Rossellini chuckles.] (“Snake” 2010)

Here, Rossellini anthropomorphizes the snake not to dilute the identity of the nonhuman, but to belabor human values and the notion of “faithful” relations between sexual partners. Nonhuman males desire to secure that their offspring will be born, yet Rossellini implies that loyalty and faithfulness — emotional codes inscribed into human ethics — exist between the nonhumans engaging in
sexual intercourse, when the imperative for the male snake is reproduction rather than emotional connection. These two films are excellent examples of Rossellini’s politicization of nonhumans. Specifically, “Duck” and “Snake” offer indirect commentary on women’s biological and bodily rights that are often addressed in Western human political debates in varying levels of detail or accuracy. Without actually imposing words or images onto the viewer, these films provoke similarities between human and nonhuman for the viewer through the suggestion of human values in nonhuman bodies, thus instigating an intellectual stimulation pertinent to the viewer’s human life alongside the scientific experiential narration of the nonhuman’s antics. By delicately using language such as ‘lovers,’ ‘embrace,’ and adding human dialogue to the narrations, and through the comedic timing of a facial expression of incredulity or a particular style of laughter, Rossellini positions herself in a place of authority, directing the viewer’s attention to what elements of both nonhuman and human relations (and in the case of human relations, the political elements of those relations) are laughable, questionable, absurd when compared to the capabilities of the nonhuman. If, phenomenologically, humans are to trust Rossellini’s exposed face in these films, then I see viewers being left in a personal space in which to contemplate, in the case of the duck or garter snake, a woman’s right to choose to have sexual intercourse, to be a mother, or the complications of forcing monogamy upon sexual bodies, be they considered superior or more civilized than nonhumans. Scholtmeijer’s argument, though she is analyzing classic literary works rather than film, applies to Rossellini’s implicit political project:
“anthropomorphism may appear unavoidable in literary uses of animals, yet [certain] writers...politicize projections of human qualities onto animals at least as far as questioning those projections” (241). The political implications encoded into human values surrounding sexuality, conception, and parenthood stand out when performed anthropomorphically through the bodies of nonhumans that have found alternative methods to sustain populations and secure fertility rather than upholding moral projections.

In an essentialist film stepping outside of the typical narrative format of other *Green Porno* works, “Why Vagina” instead focuses on the important sexual differences and survival instincts gained by females of many species. The emphasis in “Why Vagina” is not to juxtapose males with females, men with women, or even penises with vaginas: Rossellini offers the viewer the basic biological importance of the female belonging to any species and her momentous complexities.

Eggs are precious; sperm are cheap. Sperm come by the millions, but not eggs. I might have four hundred eggs. If I were a female, any female, I would want to protect my precious eggs. I would want to hide them in a hole and I would want that hole to be in a place hard to reach... unless I want you to reach me. Penises: different penises all trying to get as close as possible to my eggs. But I would have a tunnel, and it would be a labyrinth. It will be intricate, it will be unique, it will be species-specific so that I'm not screwed by a bear. Penis; species-specific: each one unique to their
respective vaginas. A cozy fit like a hand in a glove; that’s why I want my vagina. (“Why Vagina” 2008)

Particularity is the essential stipulation in this film. The vagina of any particular being adapts to the biological demands of the male counterpart’s penis, which also undergoes evolutionary changes, while methodically preserving the limited quantity of eggs one produces in a lifetime. The sexual organs — whether they are harboring a finite supply of cells or wielding greater quantities — are successful in their differences and matched both by biology and social environments in which copulation occurs. “Why Vagina,” albeit an unconventional installment of Rossellini’s series, presents a baseline for the rest of the films to follow, as these elaborate on the social environments of each nonhuman. These environments, however similar or different from human rituals, unfurl many layers of marginalized identifications that give humans a distinct outlook on humanity and nonhumanity. With this preparatory film establishing the importance of the female body, the following vignettes — and their varying revelations of femininity — showcase the entangling nature of sexes, genders, and species.

The preciousness of eggs mentioned in “Why Vagina” is not a trait exclusive to femininity or femaleness, as some sea creatures reveal. The Seduce Me film “Seahorse” is distinctly politicized through Rossellini’s presentation of the mating of pipefish as well as the composition and props used for the film. Rossellini opens “Seahorse” as a human inquisitively looking into the pants of a man, proclaiming: “‘There’s nothing in there!’” before cutting to the stage of sea life. Rossellini superimposes the romance of seahorse mating: “‘She wants to
dance! She wants to be seduced,” as paper seahorses dance and intertwine their tails in time with classical music. They then undergo their mating ritual: the female seahorse (a prop) funnels eggs into Rossellini’s pouch as she declares, as a male seahorse, “I am pregnant!” Then the pipefish, a close relative of the seahorse, appears on set. With the intention of approaching a female pipefish, the male opens his pouch and dumps his eggs onto the floor, with Rossellini-as-pregnant-male-seahorse witnessing the occasion. Chicken eggs are used to represent the seahorse eggs here, and are dramatically dropped out of the seahorse’s pouch onto the green ‘ocean’ floor to their death. The shot cuts to the pile of broken eggs. The closing shot frames Rossellini-as-seahorse again, stating: “He aborts his eggs to make room for a new pregnancy. Post-copulatory selection: first he screws, then he chooses” (“Seahorse” 2010).

This film features the familiar concepts of romance, gender performance, and abortion but arranges them so that the human viewer is presented with a biological scarcity: choice. The parental roles of the seahorse family are reversed: the male has the burden of bearing the offspring, leaving the female with little responsibility. After presenting the rituals of the seahorse and establishing them as romantic creatures seduced by touch and other physical contact it seems as if the seahorse’s lifestyle is familiar to humans, despite the male being the individual carrying the eggs until they hatch. “Seahorse” seems like a film about gender roles at first; one might be quick to cite Judith Butler on gender performativity, treating the seahorse as an uncomplicated example of biological sex and gender identity being independent from one another, but then
Rossellini introduces the male pipefish who effortlessly aborts his eggs to mate with a female nearby (Butler 179). The post-copulatory selection seahorses have the capacity to make is seemingly superficial in its presentation until the viewer acknowledges that it is the male who makes this choice — a choice that human men and women have been policing for decades. This particular nonhuman subject presents the human with an example of a male seemingly feminized by his body, yet ultimately a body permitted to make its own decision to carry or abort his offspring. While the similarities between human and seahorse end there, Rossellini opens an opportunity for the viewer to consider the patriarchal social and political structures that regulate the human female body when there are impregnated male bodies in nature whose bodies are not governed by others of the dominant sex within their species. The feminine human body and its social and biological limitations are juxtaposed to the male seahorse’s social and biological liberties, revealing the inner complications with human culture and the limitations placed on human bodies that are of an unequal gender and cannot carry out the purging of offspring with such simplicity as the seahorse.

I conclude this section with one of the shortest films in the inaugural Green Porno series, in which Rossellini offers a depiction of the asexual starfish as a peculiar alternative to the complications arising from the sexual interactions between the sexes and across many species. “Starfish” is simple and quaint, with Rossellini stating: “If I were a starfish, I could reproduce sexually or asexually. I can grow new starfish by fragmenting my body, make as many starfish as I wish. To mate, you don’t have to have a penis” (“Starfish” 2008). Starfish have
sexualities that appear uncomplicated from a human perspective and devoid of imbalances of power relating to sex or gender. A starfish bases when to mate and how to carry out the task on instinct. Starfish behavior parallels human mating in that the process is not about choosing to be asexual or sexual, like human often mistake queer bodies as choosing not to be heterosexual, but instead is rooted in instinct or intuition. Compared to the labyrinthine intricacies of human mating, Rossellini’s starfish seems comfortably liberated from the burdens of intellectual mammalian life; rather than fragmenting bodies, humans find themselves fragmenting their identities into an infinite number of groups — cis, straight, queer, heterosexual, homosexual, asexual, bisexual, trans, to name a few — with the intention of gathering and pairing into partnerships that may result in mating. Starfish are not only free from needing a penis, but they’re free from engaging in cultural dramatics that the process of human mating connotes. Starfish avoid femininity, masculinity, and any other identities to fit into or become ostracized from, and thus the topic of marginalization is, to a humanocentric analysis of starfish sexuality, moot.

Films in the Green Porno webseries do not strictly attribute femininity to females or inferior sexes within a nonhuman ecosystem. The feminine bodies represented here display a broad range of liberties attributed to the female body that would otherwise be restricted if the body were human. Scholtmeijer observes that: “Otherness in the abstract bridges feminist and animal causes. … It is not ‘otherness’ embraced by reason that challenges dominant culture, but all of the ‘others’ who live alongside the culture that denies them” (257), fortifying my
argument that while humans are unable to directly compare human bodies to nonhuman ones, our human reasoning is confronted with the nonhuman cultures and unfettered bodies viewers observe Rossellini embodying. Humans can rationally distance ourselves from nonhumans, but nonhuman practices remain pertinent to the provocation of our supposed position atop the animal hierarchy and of our participation in patriarchal leadership systems that complicate and restrict our lives and bodies.

MASCULINITY

Already extending beyond the parameters of human masculinity with “Seahorse,” the *Green Porno* webseries uncovers some humorous similarities and detrimental differences between human and nonhuman males and each species’ masculinities. As with femininity, I base this section on the differentiation of being sexually male and identifying as a man. I will evaluate masculinity in this chapter as the human characteristics typically attributed to bodies identifying as men and the instances in which these characteristics appear in nonhumans. Rossellini’s depictions of the nonhuman male reveal and problematize matters of maleness as well as matters of the socially-constructed objectification of bodies and power structures. Both masculinity and femininity are cross-referenced between nonhuman males and nonhuman females, complicating the representation of these bodies by a human female: this is the hefty task Rossellini undertakes when creating these films. The nonhuman male is often revealed to be stubborn, and an individual with rather silly, sex-oriented rationale.
The whale, for example, will patiently wait for a female to run out of breath in order to mate with her. In “Whale,” a Green Porno film, Rossellini wears a jocular padded whale suit with an enormous penis attachment swaying in front of her. Pensively, she reports:

A penis has disadvantages in water because it produces drag, and a dangling organ is in danger of being snagged. If I was a whale, a right whale, I would tuck it inside my body. When needed, I can have an erection six feet long and have sex with a female. Oh, she’s turning upside down — with her vagina up in the air, unreachable — so she can see us males fight and see who’s the strongest. Well, we’ll just wait; sooner or later she’ll have to turn to put her blowhole above the water to breathe. And I, the strongest male, will mate with her! (“Whale” 2008)

In a classic battle-of-the-phalluses, the right whale uses showmanship and aggression to win the opportunity to mate with a female. The patience that the male right whales have to wait out the female’s lung capacity offers the viewer a humorous insight into the logic of this aquatic mammal: copulation of suffocation. As the upturned whale waits, Rossellini and several constructed whale props are shown to be swimming around below the female, erections out, waiting for their opportunity to mate. Again Rossellini’s human face is exposed and expressive of the female whale’s willfulness.

Another nonhuman with an impressive libido, the praying mantis, may not be willing to wait patiently for sex like a whale, but pays the ultimate price for his
urges. “Praying Mantis,” one of the very first Green Porno films, showcases Rossellini embodying the male mantis approaching the much larger female, a stage prop, to mate with:

If I were a mantis, I would hold my forelegs like this, and for it I am known as the praying mantis. I can turn my head almost 360 degrees without moving any other parts of my body. I can change color to camouflage myself and hide in nature. My mate is a cannibal: she has eaten many husbands already. But that doesn’t scare me; my sexual drive is the strongest. I would approach her carefully. I would mount her. I would penetrate her. She would turn her head, she would snatch my head off. She would eat me, but I’d keep copulating. Nothing stops me! Sex! (“Praying Mantis” 2008)

Without seeming nearly as politicized as some of the later films in the webseries, “Praying Mantis” offers interesting details about the roles of the sexes in the life of a mantis. The mantis is equipped to hide from other species, camouflaging itself in an effort to avoid becoming food for other nonhumans, yet does not fear the cannibalistic sexual partner that will undoubtedly end his life after (or during) sex. That male mantises reveal themselves to a sexual partner and die for having done so suggests the dire urge for the mantis to reproduce. Susanne Kappeler suggests that in certain species the creation of greater generations outweighs the concerns of the individual:

Affirming the life of the collective entity means to affirm the instrumentalization of individuals as reproducers, sacrificing their
lives … in the interest of the collective entity’s survival.

Reproduction becomes an interest on the meta-level of the collective, a positive expectation of individual members’ reproductive activity. Reproductive choice thus ceases to be the right of individuals, their choice against reproduction becoming a threat to the species’ survival. (348)

While Rossellini’s comedic efforts lie in the costuming of her headless mantis body still thrusting away at her lover-turned-predator, the performance itself represents the choice of the individual male mantis as somewhat oblique: his urge to have sex sustains the species even as it ends his life. Typically the concept of self-sacrifice is attributed to a maternal body, yet in the case of the mantis the male’s death facilitates reproduction. Although this sacrifice does not appear to be soul-searching or introspective in the fashion humans tend to envision, the male mantis offers a rudimentary example of essential species preservation in the nonhuman world, and is made Other by his sacrificial urge.

The male bee has a similar demise to the mantis, with more substantial results.

Rossellini’s narration in “Bee” begins with the story of the female bees, both queen and workers, before depicting the lazy males:

If I were a male bee, I wouldn’t have a father and I would be called a drone [by humans]. I would have many brothers, and we would do nothing: just wait to have sex. “A female! Ready to mate! Sex!” The brothers will fight. “I’m the strongest!” I would fly after her; I
would mate her in flight. It’s our nuptial flight. But pulling out from her, my penis will break off. It will get stuck in her vagina like a cork in a bottle, but it will prevent other males from mating with her. She will be queen; she will start a new colony with my babies, but I will die without my penis. I will bleed to death. (“Bee” 2008)

Rossellini’s performance of the penis-free drone bleeding out onto the ground offers the human viewer an insight into what humans would consider to be the ruthlessness of existing as a nonhuman male, particularly in the insect world. In an interesting shift from the human world of misogyny and corrupt patriarchal social systems, males of the insect world become feminized: used for their reproductive organs and discarded in what “Praying Mantis” and “Bee” show to be rather violent ways. As for the performance of nonhuman masculinity by Rossellini, my reinterpretation of Butler’s drag performance into species performance proves to be notable in that Rossellini’s embodiments each yield the following unique performances: when representing the whale, Rossellini’s penis is the central image. Anatomically, the right whale’s penis is large, clumsy, and Rossellini must perform the adaptations of the whale (tucking the penis into the body) with poise in order to woo the female into accepting his courtship when she rolls over to breathe; virility lies within a certain degree of finesse. The praying mantis, however, is performed as a sex-centered, sly fool who is willing to die for one quick round of intercourse. Rossellini’s embodiment of the mantis, green bodysuit and paper insect limbs, thrusting away at the prop of the female mantis, offers the viewer a masculinity reminiscent of adolescence. Lastly, the tragic
drone loses his member — the ultimate fear within human masculinity — to fulfill his role in maintaining the bee population. Despite the depiction as humorous of male rivalry among drones as they approach a female bee, the film shows their masculinity ultimately as a fight to give up their penis and die: a masculinity that, from a human perspective, emasculates for the sake of the society.

In identifying as three differing identities of the nonhuman male, each of Rossellini’s embodiments affirms that, like the differentiation between femininity and femaleness, masculinity and maleness have a wide spectrum of relativity and, regardless of species, there is no fixed expectation of masculinity in nonhuman worlds as there is in human existence. Rossellini is able to portray these masculinities with her human female body in a technique that uses the foreignness of the nonhuman to draw out the Otherness of the human: human masculinity does not fit into the embodiments of the nonhuman male.

GENDER FLUIDITY AND QUEERNESS

Several instances in the Green Porno webseries present a case for the gender fluidity evident in nonhuman mating habits, offering the viewer a sample of personhood without the complications of the rigid gender expectations broadcast upon humans by political or religious sects. In these films, Rossellini’s face is especially important for expressing the cunning and clever intuition of the nonhuman’s tactics when compared to the limitations of certain Western human ideologies. In tandem with the existing gender analysis used in this chapter, this section will probe the intricacies of queering the nonhuman.
In the *Seduce Me* film “Deer,” Rossellini claims that deer engage in aggressive sexual behavior when battling for female mates, but that does not stop them from mating homosexually as well.

Females watch males fight in sports arenas named leks. Me!
Choose me please! … Champ, pick me! I don’t want to be the last one chosen. … Aw, even the bachelors get to have sex. Same-sex sex.

[Pan to depiction of homosexual deer copulation.]
… Where’s the runner up? Where’s the silver medalist? He’ll do.
Let’s mate! (“Deer” 2010).

For deer, homosexual acts do not faze the females or prevent them from mating with the males. The arousal garnered from lekking allows all the deer some form of sexual gratification without concern for the sex of their partners or their methods. In an environment where females choose sexual partners from the population of all males, regardless of their sexual habits, aggressive deer rituals present an unbiased style of aggression that humans are unfamiliar with. Deer, lacking sexual politics or sexual identities, carry out their libidinal hankerings with immediacy as a priority. Rossellini’s face offers the viewer the coy observation of a human witnessing nonhuman masculinity resulting in sexual contact, a source of contention (and for some, fantasy) about the homosocial camaraderie between human athletes and the threat of crossing the line into homosexuality. Although there are traces of heightened sexual flexibility that would generally suggest the deer exist in an environment superior to humans, aligning these practices with
those of humans reveals flaws in the foundation of this suggestion. Rossellini’s representation fails to address the problem with rewarding sexually aggressive behavior, instead deducing that a looseness in male sexuality yields collective happiness. The sexual liberties of the male deer do not prevent female deer from mating, therefore the behavior is accepted. The female deer, however, are still subject to aggressive behavior and are sometimes chosen as mates after smaller male deer are chosen as mates, revealing the nonhuman hegemony evident in the life of deer.

Rossellini and the creators of the webseries have fun drawing out the many versions of sexual freedom for their human viewership with a number of nonhuman beings. In “Dolphin,” a Seduce Me film, the sea mammals are presented as passionate yet eager to satiate their libidinal urges in any way that results in sexual gratification. Most importantly, Rossellini represents the dolphin not as a sexual deviant or hypersexualized being, but a spirited creature keen on pleasing himself or herself in whatever method necessary. Solitary, partnered, hetero- or homosexual, regardless of orifice: the dolphin’s mating habits are playful and efficient:

[Man’s finger stuck in Rossellini’s ear.]

ROSSELLINI as herself: Is he seducing me?”

[Man’s finger inserted into Rossellini’s nose.]

ROSSELLINI as herself: Anything goes! What am I, a dolphin?

Dolphins engage in many affectionate and sexual activities.

Leaping, chasing, playing, splashing. They disappear and reappear
and dive in the depth of the sea. Stoking, caressing, nuzzling each other until they’re ready to mate. Heterosexual couples mate in the missionary position.

[cut to single dolphin on the reef] All alone, masturbating.

ROSSELLINI as herself: What’s this buzz? It’s a genital buzz! It stimulates genitals with sound waves!

[Camera pans to various dolphin props depicting sex.]

Oral Sex! Fin sex: two females! Oh, a male. Two males! Blowhole sex! Anything goes! (“Dolphin” 2010).

For dolphins, gender appears to be a nearly nonexistent concept where sexualities are explored based on surroundings and impulse. Dolphins of either sex can mate in any number of ways, and stimulate themselves when the desire presents itself. Rossellini’s performance, or lack thereof in “Dolphin,” speaks to greater gender troubles than any performance could. This is one of only two films in the Green Porno webseries that does not feature Rossellini corporeally as nonhuman. I see this absence of embodiment as a crucial commentary on the inability for a human to perform such a nebulous gender space, one where Rossellini’s body would intimately hinder the implied message of the film by being a gendered body. Instead, puppetry stands out as the shining instrument of expression in “Dolphin,” where actors in bodysuits hide behind paper cutouts of ocean waves and operate paper and foam dolphin puppets engaging in various forms of sexual stimulation. Rossellini appears as herself, swimming among the

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10 With the exception of “Why Vagina,” the aforementioned narrative film where Rossellini explains biologies and variations of femaleness.
dolphins wearing a swimming cap, sometimes observing, sometimes experiencing the various methods of dolphin arousal. By distancing herself from the nonhuman, Rossellini’s fabricated representation of the dolphin maintains the trend in performativity without sacrificing elements that, in this case, a human body would not be able to sufficiently represent and still evoke the space between humanity and nonhumanity for the viewer. The absence of Butlerian dissonance in “Dolphin” is perhaps the loudest statement of all: where a dolphin’s sexuality can be summed up by Rossellini with the concluding declaration “Anything goes!,” Rossellini’s choice to steer clear of corporeal human-animal narratives emphasizes the existing problematic constraints on human gender identification and the incongruous bonding of sexes and genders occurring in many human societies.

Alternative masculinities appear in many forms within the world outside of humans. In the webseries, with the intention of drawing out a consistent progressive attitude, gender is revealed through several nonhuman beings as not so much a performance as a fluid spectrum. “Cuttle Fish” is remarkably effective in solidifying this argument because a large percentage of male cuttle fish carry out their sexual advances under the guise of drag. Rossellini states: “Big, strong, male cuttle fish protect their harem and seduce their females. While mating with one of them, a young male looking like a female sneaks in the harem. Thirty percent of the babies are fathered by the sneaking males. Shh!” (“Cuttle Fish” 2010). The successful path to progeny for cuttle fish is through imitations that would be deemed feminine in a human state. When thinking about the magnitude
of drag performance, Butler notes: “As much as drag creates a unified picture of ‘woman,’ …it also reveals the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalized as a unity through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence” (175). Here, Butler’s theory exacerbates the complexity of the limitations cast upon humans: where humans exist within the three dimensions of signification as Butler defines (anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance), nonhumans such as the cuttle fish are unaffected by gender identity because the sustainability of the species is partially dependent upon certain male cuttle fish performing femininity as a means to procreate with his male body. The anatomy of the performing male cuttle fish is not strictly monitored in the manner that human identification is, therefore the aforementioned dissonance is lessened by nonhumanity. While I am not suggesting that the correlation to human society is one-to-one (although it would be interesting to observe some heterosexual human men pretend to be women in an effort to infiltrate a night club filled with men dressed as men to seduce and mate with women), the existence of a nonhuman ‘drag’ performance for procreation is fascinating and crucial to evaluating situations of gender when considering the boundaries that have been set up around human identities.

Within each of the films in this section Rossellini addresses masculinity and femininity as they are enacted in nonhuman lives in order to extract problematic notions surrounding sexuality and gender in our own human social systems. That which is considered normal for deer, dolphins, or cuttle fish would be considered abnormal or deviant in human society, and although some of
these particular means of seduction are outside of human capacity, the experiences offer us opportunities to imagine alternative yet comparably liberal experiences available to humans. Butler asks: “To what extent is ‘identity’ a normative ideal rather than a descriptive feature of experience? And how do the regularity practices that govern gender also govern culturally intelligible notions of identity?” (23). Rossellini’s roles in these films can be used as a site from which to begin answering these questions within the realm of rationality. If the deer is not expected to strictly mate with the opposed sex, the dolphin is free to engage in various types of penetrative sex, and a significant percentage of cuttlefish feign the opposite sex to mate, why are human sexualities and genders governed by small groups of wealthy, powerful, predominantly male humans? What is truly being policed, and under what grounds? To assist in answering some of these questions, I turn to a particularly perceptive film.

This webseries handles gender in a largely introspective manner, offering the viewer depictions of situations humans may not fully comprehend. Humans are culturally embedded into societies that uphold ideologies that prescribe gender identities based on sex, or rooted in faith. With those concepts unequivocal in the nonhuman world, Rossellini takes the opportunity to politicize nonhuman behaviors next to human behaviors and draw out the weaknesses of our human applications to nonhuman life in the film “Noah’s Ark.” A film from the second season of *Seduce Me*, “Noah’s Ark” is perhaps the most poignant of all the films approaching topics of gender. The script for “Noah’s Ark” is as follows:
ROSSELLINI as herself: How did Noah do it? How did he manage to organize all animals into couples? [pop-up book of the Holy Bible opens to paper ark and foliage] As it is written in the Bible, Noah guided the animals into his ark in order for them to reproduce and repopulate the earth after the flood. One male and one female: couples.

[Thunder strikes; Rossellini’s arm, featuring dark hair drawn on with a marker, descends from a paper cloud to point at a single earthworm boarding the ark]

ROSSELLINI as Noah: You! Why are you alone?

ROSSELLINI as earthworm: I’m an earthworm! I am a hermaphrodite. I am both male and female: to reproduce, I can mate with another hermaphrodite or I can segment my body and clone myself.

ROSSELLINI as herself: What did Noah do with hermaphrodite animals? What did he do with transexual animals?

[Thunder strikes again, Rossellini’s omnipotent arm descends pointing at two limpet boarding the ark]

ROSSELLINI as Noah: You! What’s that pile?

ROSSELLINI as limpet: We are crepidulo fornicada. We are all male. To fornicate, we form a pile. Then one of us, the bottom, turns female.
ROSSELLINI as herself: Animals that change sex eventually become male and female, but in the transition, what are they?

[Thunder strikes, Rossellini’s arm holds out a magnifying glass to several aphids boarding the ark.]

ROSSELLINI as Noah: You! Too many.

ROSSELLINI as aphid: But we are aphids! We are all females. We are a parthenogenic species and we give birth, virgin births, to our daughters.

[Rossellini’s god-like arm pulls back the tails of giraffes to verify that they are one male and one female, then waves for them to board the ark.] [Thunder claps, Rossellini points to two amphibians boarding the ark.] ROSSELLINI as Noah: You! Two females! I said one male, one female. Where is he?

ROSSELLINI as lizard: We are whiptail lizards; our species doesn’t need males anymore. We simulate sex among us girls to start up our hormones and then we have daughters! No sons, only daughters.


In performing this array of sexual identities, Rossellini challenges the heteronormativity occurring in the Biblical story of Noah’s ark. With so many of
the nonhuman species existing today functioning outside of heterosexual pairing, the story of Noah becomes scientifically improbable. Rather than politicize the words coming out of her human mouth in “Noah’s Ark,” Rossellini strategically writes the responses of the nonhumans to Noah as coy and politically scintillating. Every nonhuman stopped by Noah offers a subversive argument for their respective species’ divergence from humanocentric heteronormativity. The earthworm is both male and female, blurring gender and sex boundaries. The limpet transitions from male to female when reaching the position of ‘the bottom,’ or the bottom of the sex pile, arguably casting a nod to homosexual male slang where the man being penetrated during anal sex is dubbed the “bottom.” The aphid births new aphids without copulation or contact with another aphid: a true, divine, virgin arthropod. Yet the whiptail lizard, a heterosexual casualty of evolution, must engage in female-on-female foreplay to become aroused and then reproduce more females.

Each of these nonhumans makes a politically charged statement that would (and most likely does) agitate sizable populations of humans who resist acknowledging the existence of sexual differences: differences from reproductive heterosexuality. Each nonhuman featured in this film is made Other by Rossellini’s Noah, the dark, hairy armed authority figure resistant to deviations from the supposed heterosexual norm he (and God) seek to preserve in the original story. There is something to be said for Rossellini’s depiction, too, of heterosexual human Noah. The character of Noah manifests a certain reinforcement of patriarchal supremacy that the rest of the representations in the
Green Porno webseries resist. Even in her performance of the human male, Rossellini crafts the character of Noah with fastidious details in order for his presentation (or, rather, the presentation of his masculine arm) to typify a man of Biblical importance and his purported preservation of the animal kingdom. The parody of an authoritative, Biblical man in “Noah’s Ark” manifests in the form of a deep voice, excessive body hair and relentless skepticism for anything outside of himself — a tip of the hat to ethnocentrism as well.

Rossellini evades direct criticism of patriarchy, religion, or gender phobias while still drawing these topics to the attention of the viewer. For the nonhumans boarding the ark, what Noah perceives to be unruly is simply biology, something that the Bible does not seem to take into account. Switching from human to various nonhumans, Rossellini’s species drag performance in “Noah’s Ark” delivers a few valuable insights. Rossellini embodies several of the living beings using only one part of her body. Noah is symbolized by a hairy forearm and deep voice, while the rest of the species use only her head and some surrounding costuming. In “Noah’s Ark,” Rossellini performs more with less: she can switch from one species with a particular body type and sexual demarcation to another, quickly and smoothly, so that the viewer is not distracted by her costumed human body. Where other films showcase her corporeal transformation, this film uses physical simplicity to counteract the complicated dialogue and numerous changes in characters. Since the performance only uses body parts and costume effects, the performative dissonance is located between the discrepancies of body parts: a hairy arm represents a human male and represents a wholesome
masculinity that oppresses the marginalized bodies of the nonhumans boarding the ark. With a marker and a peculiar tone of voice, Rossellini is able to perform the masculine Noah and personify patriarchal oppression of the Other in a Butlerian staging that emphasizes and problematizes the masculine in the story of Noah’s Ark. The conclusion of the film, featuring Rossellini as herself, poses the simple, non-accusatory question: “How could it all be heterosexual?” leaving viewers with the opportunity to draw their own conclusions with the biological data Rossellini has shared. Through unspoken suggestion, Rossellini articulates the obstacles humans and nonhumans face within humanity and nonhumanity: hegemony, patriarchy, and marginalization.

FEARING DEATH

Alterity in the webseries occasionally diverges from other films: a couple of films represent mature or weakened bodies using Rossellini’s representative nonhumanity to offer insight into these underrepresented identifications and their application to human social spheres. Young writes: “Kristeva believes that the abject is connected with death, the disintegration of the subject. The aversion and nervousness that old people and disabled people evoke, a sense of their being ugly, arises from the cultural connection of these groups with death” (210). This portion of the chapter considers groups of bodies associated with death as they appear in the Green Porno webseries.

Mature bodies are vital to procreation in the life of salmon: they do not lay eggs until they return to their birthplace, mate, and lay eggs. Additionally, salmon
supply their bodies as nutrients to eventually sustain their offspring, their deaths proving to be a pivotal in the sustaining of their lineage. In “Salmon,” a Seduce Me film, Rossellini draws the viewers not only to the raw sexuality of mature salmon, but the self-sacrificing instincts used to preserve the upcoming population. “Salmon” is scripted as follows:

[Man’s arm reaches out, trembling, to caress the face of a sniffling, tired Rossellini in exaggerated old age makeup.]

ROSSELLINI as herself: Is he seducing me? What am I, a salmon?

After spending their life in the ocean, elderly salmon go back to the river where they were born. They reproduce when they are old, as the last act in their life.

ROSSELLINI as salmon: Whoa, this is a good place for my nest!

[wearing a crafted paper salmon body as a hat, Rossellini uses her tail fin to dig a hole into the bottom of the river for her eggs.]

ROSSELLINI as salmon: A male! look at the way he quivers, he vibrates. he is irresistible! Oh here, here are my eggs. Spray them with your sperm!

ROSSELLINI narrating: Soon after mating, the salmon die. The decaying flesh is eaten by crabs, worms, larvae: the decomposers. When the baby salmon would hatch, they would eat the decomposers that are eating their parents’ bodies. The cycle of life and death, life and death, life and death… [closing shot of
Rossellini off-center in original human old age makeup, but with a decomposing face.] (“Salmon” 2010)

In Western human society, older adults have typically been cast outside of the able-bodied identification. Margaret Morganroth Gullette remarks: “In a consumerist hypersexualized environment where bare-midriffed fifteen-year-olds are the pedophilic standard of desirability, becoming older is coded as a set of deficiencies. … Geriatric sex, or more politely, sex later in life, is invisible or treated as jocular” (125). While Gullette addresses sexuality later in life as an actual occurrence, other theorists have concluded that aging bodies accumulate perceptions of asexuality, removing them from the concept of desire altogether. “Salmon” resists the “imposition of asexuality” (Shuttleworth 63) on aging bodies, instead performing mature salmon of both sexes as desirable figures. Rossellini presents the viewer with a jarring example of maturity where not only are the feared bodies virile but also the corporeal sustenance for the offspring. The quivering male salmon is, to the female salmon, alluring and erotic, unlike the typical human disposition toward shaky, unsteady aging men and women.

Additionally, Rossellini’s salmon is shown to have the strength and diligence to build a nest in the riverbed for her eggs, again highlighting the able-bodiedness of maturity. These images are then juxtaposed with the closing shot of Rossellini as a decomposing human, grotesque and abject. Compared to the vitality of the salmon, the human Rossellini embodies at the end of “Salmon” assimilates to this physical disintegration of subjectivity: digital effects are used to fade Rossellini’s appearance until she is no longer visible. Rossellini is quite
literally ceasing to exist, aligning with common oppressive and abject aversions to older humans. In the next chapter I will probe another film in which Rossellini embodies a cadaver and initiate a larger appraisal of the trend of abjection in the series. By presenting the viewer with this exaggerated visual of the human aging process and juxtaposing it with the salmon, Rossellini alters the implicit memory of the viewer. Anne Davis Basting writes in *Forget Memory: Creating Better Lives for People with Dementia* that “popular culture belongs to the world of implicit memory. You can’t recall it consciously, but it still influences you. …From the fodder of popular culture, we can form stereotypes of older people, [and] apply those to others and to ourselves” (25). “Salmon” depicts the mature as aging *yet able* bodies. The absurdity of Rossellini’s rotting human face at the end of the film humorously rejects the typical image of the older humans because they typically do not rot on the streets or in their homes, but often possess cognitively and sexually capable bodies, like the salmon. Through reinforcing the status of the mature salmon, Rossellini offers a complex depiction of maturity that connotes bodily empowerment through decrepitude.

Weakened bodies are also represented as bodies to be feared in the webseries. “Piping Plover,” a *Mammas* film, details the tendency for this fowl to perform weakness to protect her vulnerable children from predators:

ROSSELLINI as piping plover: I fooled the fox. I pretended to be wounded and unable to fly away to attract the predator away from my eggs.
ROSSELLINI as herself: If I were as talented at acting as the piping plover, I would be a Sara Bernhart, an Ingrid Bergman. ("Piping Plover" 2013)

For the piping plover, feigning weakness is a method for survival. Rossellini, feathered and winged, cradles her wing and fails wildly as she runs away from her nest, convincing the fox that she would be an easier hunt than her naïve offspring. In this portrayal of drag the wounded body, a systematic mimicry by the prey as a means to protect her young, is desirable as easy prey for the predator and thereby is extremely valuable. Tobin Siebers remarks that some forms of disability masquerade take shape as benefitting and reinforcing compulsory able-bodiedness among humans, and "Piping Plover" seems to emphasize a prevalence of this tendency in nonhuman worlds as well (3). Siebers cites Joan Riviere’s renowned 1929 essay “Womanliness as a Masquerade,” suggesting that while many disabled bodies will in fact try to pass as a member of the dominant, able-bodied community in the same regard that Riviere documents a woman performing womanliness in an effort to mask her fears and feelings of inequality and inferiority from men, rare moments occur when members of dominant groups attempt to pass as members of marginalized groups (4-6). By taking on the identity of a weaker plover, the mother is able to distract a predator from the arguably weaker chicks. This drag performance carries many layers of complication: it reinforces weakness as an inferiority, stigmatizes weaker bodies as disposable bodies, and most importantly, breaks away from Rossellini’s trend of drawing humanity and nonhumanity closer together. This happens by using
nonhuman weakness to distance so-called ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ from one another and reinforces clichés about sacrificial motherhood that the many of the films discussed earlier in this chapter seem to challenge. Whereas drag queens may be considered the “stigma of the gay world [and] … a source of dishonor” for making visible the stigma of homosexuality (Newton 3), this form of nonhuman drag draws attention to the reality that weak prey are easy prey, and likely to die out. By pretending to be a weakened bird, the performing bird must instinctively know that to be weak is to be eaten by a predator. Although the majority of the Green Porno films focus on shrinking the liminal or abject space between humanity and nonhumanity, “Piping Plover” is markedly unsuccessful in maintaining this argument. Humanists who would agonize making human and nonhuman lives parallel (and would resist the entirety of this project) could easily use this film as a location to support an argument that, regardless of commonalities within natures of living bodies, humans bear a certain civility that would prevent them from using drag as a means to reinforce oppression and weakness in a marginalized group and celebrate able-bodiedness. I would argue that history contains evidence to the contrary, but that as Uexküll argues: where we perceive ourselves to garner ‘culture’ is where humans differentiate themselves from nonhumans who exist based on instinct. Despite this film displaying instincts that problematize the gendered responsibilities of reproduction, Rossellini performs the maternal instincts of the piping plover that successfully preserve her offspring, thus fulfilling a maternal role anticipated by humanity.
Rossellini’s final comment in “Piping Plover” casually compares the piping plover to humanity not by comparing the bird to, for example, a man who dressed in drag to avoid being drafted to war and facing death on the frontline, but instead to iconic actresses. In this move, Rossellini draws parallels between what Siebers warns as “the disadvantage [of disability drag being] that disability appears as a facade overlaying able-bodiedness” (18) and the superficial performance of one human enacting the role of a fictional character. Problematics aside, Rossellini manages to return to an interesting point: however trivial or life-saving, acting serves purposes in humanity and nonhumanity alike.

The examples of death-fearing alterity found in the *Green Porno* webseries are tricky. Stereotypes about mature and weakened bodies are reinforced and some of the humanocentric maternal tropes criticized in other films are casually enforced when they appear in situations where mature or wounded bodies are present. These films emphasize the ongoing dilemma surrounding the treatment and consideration of mature and weak bodies in both human and nonhuman life through their unsuccessful use of familiar justifications of weaker bodies remaining at the bottom of whatever social hierarchy exists in a given ecosystem. The bodies of the salmon and piping plovers are shown to have value in their capabilities and purposes that facilitate the prolonging of the species, but fail to do so in a manner that encourages the viewers of these films to evaluate their own perceptions of death stigma in their lives.
If, as Katherine Hayles notoriously argues, the posthuman is “an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction” (3), then I see Rossellini as being an epicenter of posthuman intellect. I say this because in the *Green Porno* films Rossellini bears the agency of a liberal human and expresses that agency through embodying the very real agency of the nonhuman person, blurring the boundaries of subjectivity in an uncomfortable way that, rather than in the case of the furry subculture or role-playing sexual activity, which only blur the lines of copulation between species for sexual gratification, slips into a liminal space between human and nonhuman cognitions, emphasizing the essences that are shared and the sociocultural solutions offered to one by the other through the politicization of the nonhuman body. Rossellini’s roles throughout the films are at the forefront of posthuman art: dual embodiment of the human and nonhuman Other takes precedence over disembodiment of the abject female body or the abject nonhuman body. Dichotomizing maleness and femaleness takes a backseat to the spaces of relativity in which Rossellini’s bodies generate what Hayles dubs “the noise of difference” (196), but what I see as a slippage of non-abject bodies into a larger liminal space where posthuman bodies of all species and origins are able to be represented by Rossellini’s one body for the purpose of criticizing hierarchal hegemony.

Artistic representations of femininity, masculinity, and hermaphroditism in nonhuman species comment on internalized tropes and systemic attitudes
toward behaviors that fall outside of patriarchy. As the method of communication and criticism, embodiment is central for merging apolitical events of a nonhuman being’s life to the politicized human society of the viewer. Hayles describes embodiment with great significance in writing that:

Embodiment is akin to articulation in that it is inherently performative, subject to individual enactments, and therefore always to some extent improvisational. Whereas the body can disappear into information with scarcely a murmur or protest, embodiment cannot, for it is tied to the circumstances of the occasion and the person. As soon as embodiment is acknowledged, the abstractions of the Panopticon disintegrate into the particularities of specific people embedded in specific contexts.

(197-98, my italics)

Circumstances remain the focal point here: the circumstances of the nonhuman being Rossellini embodies in a particular film are undoubtedly different from those of the viewer, but the performance targets the human circumstances familiar to the viewer. Because of this dualism, Rossellini is able to embody nonhumans in a particularly politicized fashion yet escape the social parameters of being a “political” personality. The disintegrating Panopticon in the Green Porno webseries is located in the moment the viewer realizes that Rossellini is speaking about humans and their social antics simultaneously with her lighthearted narration of her nonhuman body performance. When the viewer is no longer watching Rossellini perform the rituals of the nonhuman Other and
acknowledges that Rossellini, in her human and nonhuman states, is watching and critiquing human conduct, Rossellini's embodiment reaches its posthuman peak: the counteraction rooted in human self-criticism through the representation of nonhuman lives does something quite intuitive that I identify as *counterabjection*, and is the topic of the final chapter of this project.

But what makes the animal abject? Nonhuman species differ in their identities and human fixation on identification becomes threatened when humans are unable to pinpoint what differentiates the humanocentric *us* from *them*. A species that cannibalizes, changes sex, shares sexual organs, copulates constantly, does not restrict itself to gender roles, interchanges sexual roles, has violent sex, or sacrifices itself in unfamiliar ways becomes the gray area between the subject and object, where Kristeva locates the abject body. The familiarity of life battles the unfamiliarity of the lifestyle and suddenly the male seahorse bearing children becomes Other despite the steady increase in stay-at-home fathers in Western families (Telegraph 23 Jan 2013). At what point does the intellect humans tout as leverage for their status at the top of the animal kingdom swing around to bite them on the ass? Rossellini's most recent films approach this alleged shift aggressively.
Chapter 4: Redirecting Abjection

KRISTEVA AND IDEAS OF ABJECTION

Embodying something other than human proves to be a delicate, and, as evident in videos like “Triumph of a Heart,” often unsuccessful, endeavor. As thinking, theorizing organisms, humans struggle to think about what exists outside of humanity; posthumanity studies begins to consider this space (and its importance to our cultural evolution) and indoctrinate it into media consciousness. Considering the lifestyles of nonhumans easily becomes an evaluation of differences as peculiar, bizarre, or Other. The earthworm’s hermaphroditic mating, male seahorses birthing and aborting offspring, the female duck’s chambered vagina, and male insects sacrificing vital organs for the opportunity to copulate are just a few instances of divergences from what humans have comfortably been taught to believe is natural. The discomfort created from these feelings (and their expression as such) can lead to the ultimate marginalization of these bodies, casting them out of subjectivity — but not completely into objectivity — and into the abject. The theoretical trajectory of abjection studies was crucially changed by Julia Kristeva and her psychoanalytic and semiotic approach to understanding abjection in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Kristeva immediately identifies the abject by what it is not: “neither subject nor object” (1) (*PH*), thrusting abjection into a liminal space and distancing it from the semiotic dichotomy humans are systemically comfortable with.
Abjection, in all its venues, envelops life and death. From the birthing process to the objecthood of a corpse, Kristeva defines the abject as that which disturbs subjects and, simply, that “abjection is above all ambiguity” (PH 9). She explains: “it is thus not the lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (PH 4). Kristeva also argues that the self is inherently abject: the self is often attracted to “something on the outside” that threatens identity and casts the self into abject (PH 5). Furthermore, abjection is a preconditioned characteristic of narcissism: abjection occurs when the self is seen in a reflective object, identification is made with the object reflecting the self, and is broken when the self becomes repressed (PH 13). Kristeva explores countless cultural and literary examples where she locates moments of abject bodies or figures existing with and disturbing other subjects in both active and passive ways, but I will highlight moments of abjection applicable to this project.

The path by which ideas and individuals become abject in the eyes of their oppressors is often peculiar: for example, that the mother is the ultimate abject being has significant connotations within a patriarchal social system fearing transformations and biological metamorphosis. Another example of abjection is homosexuality. On this perceived group of abject bodies, Iris Marion Young writes that: “Homophobia is one of the deepest-held fears of difference precisely because the border between gay and straight is constructed as the most permeable; anyone at all can become gay, especially me, so the only way to
defend my identity is to turn away with irrational disgust” (209). Susceptibility and
proximity are central elements for abjection: in an attempt to protect one’s identity
(or, as I will argue in this chapter, one’s anthropocentric position in culture)
familiarization between oneself and the threatening body must be avoided. Young
writes that “the abject must not touch me for fear that it will ooze through,
obliterating the border between inside and outside, which is necessary for my life,
but which arises in the process of expulsion” (207). Because the abject teeters
on a surface of feared familiarity, it resists being subject or object, occupying
space beside the subject but outside of subjectivity. By avoiding the threatening
body, subjects believe that they can successfully avoid contact and maintain their
fragile subjectivity. *Green Porno* films use instances of social abjection to force
viewers to consider their own existences within abject spaces and their
subsequent comparability to nonhumans.

Steve Baker writes in *The Postmodern Animal* that “the abject leads not to
the place where meaning collapses but to the place it is fixed, and the animal —
even the real animal — figures as no more than its meaning” (91). This suggests
that the animal, in all its abjection, is reaffirmed as a meaning-making object in
the world of human subjects, used for our intellectual search for meanings and
signification. Baker continues, stating that “the reality of the world and even our
own reality is slipping out of our grasp … We cannot express our anxieties in
signs — they seem too insubstantial — so the whole burden of aggressivity is
borne by the body … It is in this context that artists use the body -- or something
close to the body; as a sign” (92). The use of the body (both human and
nonhuman) is essential to the execution of the *Green Porno* films because they offer aggressive signs of abjection(s) and liminality(-ies) that humans choose not to see within their daily lives, but that Rossellini’s body and its uses bring to the surface of humanity. These ideas align with Haraway’s, justifying the importance of the nonhuman body as a display of intellect and relativity to human subjectivity. Haraway writes:

The animals are material-semiotic actors in the apparatus of bodily production. They are not “pre-discursive bodies” just waiting to validate or invalidate some discursive practice, nor are they blank screens waiting for people’s cultural projections. … From the point of view of the biologist’s purposes, the animals resist, enable, disrupt, engage, constrain, and display. They act and signify, and like all action and signification, theirs yield no unique, univocal, unconstructed “facts” waiting to be collected. The animals in behavioral biology are not transparent; they are dense. Like words, machines, equations, institutions, generic writing conventions, people, and landscapes, the animals have specific kinds of solidity in the apparatus of bodily production. (*Primate Visions* 310-11)

Haraway claims that animals have existing significations and intentions encoded into their existence rather than being foreign bodies awaiting appropriation or anthropomorphization by humans. Haraway warns us against reductionist intellect for fear that the discourse humans project upon them may be insignificant compared to the vast opportunities for translation and decoding the
secrets of the nonhuman. Taking heed of this warning, the nonhuman can be used as a means of conveying injustices or social problems, projecting criticism upon the human and human inclinations by offering the nonhuman as a fixed entity so long as the nonhuman’s behavior is accurately represented.

Rossellini may successfully be using nonhuman representations to critique humans, but what makes her nonhuman representations abject? At the very least, Rossellini’s identity consistently harbors that “one quality of the object — that of being opposed to I” (PH 1); by this I suggest that for the duration of the nonhuman representation in a *Green Porno* film Rossellini, whether verbally identifying herself as hypothetically or literally nonhuman, occupies a space that is momentarily strange to the human viewer. Corporeal ambiguity is the danger with abjection: “it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it — on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger” (PH 9). I argue in this chapter that films from the *Green Porno* webseries use abjection to direct attention to cultural ambiguity through this corporeal ambiguity: although the viewer knows that he/she is not the nonhuman being performed by Rossellini, the viewer acknowledges the physical and mental similarities bordering human subjectivity, but remaining outside of human subjectivity. The danger of *Green Porno* is that the oppressed nonhumans have incorporated solutions to various social problems that humans, the self-proclaimed highest beings, are still battling and furthermore, that in the films I am about to discuss, the ominous maternal body is the source of these solutions that shake the foundation of humanity and patriarchy. Anxiety arises at the possibility that the nonhuman is not only more
astute, but that the ultimate abject body — and the primary body of inequality — is the bearer of such revelations.

Rossellini’s body is opposed to the subjectivity of the viewer, at least until the end of each film — when subjectivity is, as I will argue, violently reclaimed by Rossellini, spinning the viewer into abjection. Imogen Tyler states that “the abject is a force which both disrupts social order and (in doing so) operates as a necessary psychological … illusion” (79), referring to Kristeva’s own description of the abject as “sett[ling] the subject within a socially justified illusion … a security blanket” (PH 137). The abject conceals a demented comfort that it remains outside of us. This comfort is precisely what Rossellini robs the viewer of, and it is where I locate counterabjection: the security blanket is withdrawn so that the viewer can face the close proximity he or she has to the social problems Rossellini is depicting through the embodiment of the nonhuman. This chapter considers the nonhuman abject bodies being represented by Rossellini in the *Green Porno* webseries. It asks why they are cast into the abject, and examines methods by which Rossellini turns the spectacle onto the abjection that lies within numerous instances of Western human politics, attitudes, and contingencies for sustaining perceptions of acceptance, passing, or suspension of the status quo. Using these final films as evidence, I argue that Rossellini successfully uses the nonhuman to present the human as abject for any number of reasons, each specific to the film at hand.
Rooted in each of the films discussed in this chapter, I see evidence of Rossellini attempting to shift the fissure\textsuperscript{11} of liminality that lies between humans and nonhumans. This shift brings forth a result that is twofold. What I am identifying as counterabjection occurs when Rossellini’s representations of humans and nonhumans in these films ultimately force this threatening, liminal space closer to humanity rather than nonhumanity and remind her viewers that humans and nonhumans are in actuality not drastically different from one another. Kristeva warns that “[t]he abject confronts us … with those fragile states where man strays on the territory of animal (\textit{PH} 12). Rossellini’s films dance on the proverbial tightrope between human and nonhuman, revealing in very visceral ways that humans and nonhumans may share the same territory Kristeva sees as being policed by the threat of abjection. While Rossellini has repeatedly stated that her intention with the film series is for the viewer to walk away saying “Oh, I never knew that,” (NPR interview 6 Oct 2013) there is undoubtedly a trace of familiarity surrounding the scientific data she performs in the films. These facts are presented within the incredulous tone of knowledge previously learned: humans always knew, in some form or another, that nonhuman beings functioned with relative similarity to humans, thus becoming a parallax of anthropocentric intellect. Humanity is not without its own origins of animality, and humans know this. If this is the case, why are humans and nonhumans dichotomized so rigidly? As I have cited in earlier chapters, theorists

\textsuperscript{11} While spaces of liminality are unquantifiable, I find describing liminal spaces as \textit{fissures} oddly appropriate for denoting such a small, jagged space between two comfortable identifiable areas of identification.
have argued for nonhuman subjectivity, personhood, and even Rossellini can embody any number of nonhumans and adequately (robustly, even) present their intellect(s). Why do nonhuman bodies remain in spaces of abjection when their similarities in instinct and capacity rival humans? I feel that the implementation of counterabjection in Rossellini’s films creates a markedly subduing perception in the viewer.

ROSSELLINI’S ABJECT BODIES

One of Rossellini’s first films\textsuperscript{12} in the initial \textit{Green Porno} installment prepares the tone for potential films to come: in “Fly,” Rossellini stars as both the house fly and the severed human head in which the fly’s maggots grow. “Fly” is narrated as follows:

If I were a fly, a common one — \textit{a musca domestica} — you would try to swat me! You can't catch me! My eyes see movement two hundred times better than human eyes. That newspaper coming at me looks really slow. Uh oh, time to fly off: I flex my muscles, I am so strong I can flap my wings two hundred times per second. I can land on the ceiling upside down because I have little hooks on my paws like Velcro. With my paws, I can also taste. I have a \textit{proboscis} to suck up my food, but first I have to spit on it to dissolve it into a

\textsuperscript{12} For this chapter, unlike previous chapters organized by subsections or topics of importance, I find chronologically ordering the films I will be discussing to be the most helpful in showing the arc of abjection and use of liminal spaces as they have developed over the years of the production of the series.
liquid. [Rossellini spits on spaghetti and sucks with mechanical proboscis.]

[Audible sensation chimes, Rossellini stands at attention.] A female! I have sex several times a day: any opportunity, any female. [Rossellini mounts giant female fly prop.]

Our babies grow up in cadavers [Rossellini, narrating, posing as a severed human head], and they are called maggots. (“Fly” 2008)

While not an overtly politicized film in the way the more recent films clearly are, “Fly” introduces an artistic use of the abject that becomes a recurring element in later films. When the fly’s saliva is spat upon the pasta, it foams like a threatening, inorganic chemical, yet Rossellini eagerly mimes slurping up the liquefied food through her drawstring-operated proboscis. Bodily fluids that are shared with humans, like saliva and blood, are depicted as powerful, even toxic materials meant to initiate visceral sensations in the viewer. There is a sense of filth associated with saliva being spat onto the food rather than remaining contained in the organism’s mouth, as in normative human food ingestion. Additionally, spitting is generally an act bearing connotations of disrespect and marginalization: to be spat upon is to be defiled, yet such defilement is simply part of the process of existing as a fly. Kristeva notes that “abjection assumes specific shapes and different codings according to the various ‘symbolic systems,’” with one of the variants being defilement (PH 68). In an attempt to universalize the sensation of that-which-is-abject, Kristeva notes that “defilement is the trans-linguistic spoor of the most archaic boundaries of the self’s clean and
proper body” (*PH* 73), reifying this obsession with the distancing of one’s self from the unclean body; yet, for the fly, the action which makes him unclean is also a part of his system for survival. If the fly cannot eat, mating and procreation cannot occur. Furthermore, food is yet another site at which Kristeva identifies the abject. The way in which organisms nourish themselves often becomes problematic in the process of digestion. Between the untouched resources found within nature and the return of that resource into the earth as fertilization, food nutrients occupy liminal space in our bodies and become abject: as an oral object, food becomes abject between human and nonhuman as well as physically transforming into the abject excrement (*PH* 75). The fly maintains his abject identity through his consumption, digestion, copulation, and the subsequent harvesting of maggots into excrement or decaying flesh. The entirety of Rossellini’s representation of the fly capitulates to the abjection that is the fly’s existence.

Procreation brings me to the location of counterabjection in the film: Rossellini’s severed head narrating the final moments of the film, surrounded in stage blood, guts, and rot and staring down in dismay as maggots emerge from her cheek flesh. This display of death becomes jarring for the viewer because the object of filth becomes the narrating subject of the film, articulating the importance of death to support the lives of the new maggots. Kristeva writes that “a decaying body, lifeless, completely turned into dejection, blurred between the inanimate and the inorganic, a transitional swarming, inseparable linings of a human nature whose life is undistinguishable from the symbolic — the corpse
represents fundamental pollution” (PH 109). Rossellini complicates these ideas a few ways: first, she brazenly occupies the lifeless corpse, animating it for the purpose of disturbing the expectations of the viewer into viewing death as an organic process that symbolizes something greater than dejection. Secondly, despite Rossellini’s severed head being staged as pollutant filth surrounded by other props of decay and rot, the life — her life— with which she animates the corpse presents the viewer with evidence that what humans understand to be waste or pollution actually has purpose. In the film, the purpose of the corpse is to narrate, discomfort and entertain. In life, the corpse still has purpose in its abject identity as the incubator for life. A reminder of our own expiry, Rossellini’s embodiment of the rotting corpse suggests that our humanity is just as susceptible to expiry as the house flies humans instinctively feel the need to swat away.

The abject mother\textsuperscript{13} is especially present in the films of Mammas, the most recent and most politically elusive series, but the nonhuman mother figure is used to comment on numerous different origins of abjection. The abject is simultaneously revolting and mesmerizing; the viewer is attracted to the act of being repulsed by it. Kristeva locates the abject as a struggle to separate the infant from the maternal body, which is both threatening and nourishing, and this

\textsuperscript{13} I must warn against the misconception that the maternal body is automatically bound to abjection. While many of the paths I explore in this chapter use the maternal body as a site from which to explore the abject and how I see Rossellini twisting the abject onto her audience, I am not suggesting with such simplicity that to be a maternal figure is to be abject. Instead, I use Rossellini’s performances of nonhuman bodies — some of which are mothers — to trace the social abjection evident in Western human ideologies and how Rossellini’s representations link nonhumanity to these human abjections.
separation is a “violent, clumsy breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as secure as it is shifting” (PH 13). The subject yearns for the Other while being disgusted by it, yet fears the disintegration from that which is filthy but familiar.

The mother, in all her abjection, is supposed to be an intrinsically self-sacrificing body. At the very least, Rossellini explores this conception using the spider *Diaea ergandros*'s life as an example. In “Spider,” Rossellini tells a story of matriphagy, or the consumption of the mother:

ROSSELLINI as spider: I have to gain weight to nourish my babies, my spiderlings. …If I don’t let them eat me, they would eat each other. We spiders are cannibals. [Rossellini winces and yelps in pain as spiders eat her]

ROSSELLINI as spider: To help them, I turn my body into mush.

ROSSELLINI as herself: Of course being a mother requires some sacrifices, but isn’t this the essence of femininity? The essence of femininity is to give ourselves; altruism is in our nature. What’s greater than self-sacrifice? It’s what makes a woman a woman… isn’t it? [Rossellini gives an unsettling grimace] (“Spider” 2013)

While Rossellini’s spider liquifies herself to provide for her children, her narration as human is relevant in its questioning of a woman’s duty. Surrounded by four child-size mannequins, Rossellini poses as a mother as she ponders the essential functions of woman. Her facial expression at the end of “Spider” suggests that not only is she uncomfortable with this expectation of maternal
figures to be innately altruistic, but that it is not, in fact, what makes a woman a woman. Counterabjection arises in this moment: despite some species sacrificing their bodies for their children, femininity, maternity, and womanliness are not intrinsically bound to the female sex. I see this tension bringing forth a social commentary on the expectations of domesticity and the 1950s-esque American Dream depictions of stay-at-home mothers giving up careers to raise children. Biology, Rossellini appears to insinuate, is not bound to social hierarchy.

Rossellini makes reference to Darwin’s speculation that females are intrinsically self-sacrificing because it is necessary for the conservation of a species (Erskine 100), suggesting that all female bodies are inherently prepared to put themselves last. While in some cases, like the Diaea ergandros who engages in matriphagy to prevent the spiderlings from cannibalizing one another despite the male spiderlings’ expendability when compared to their female siblings, this may appear to be true, but there are several maternal bodies explored in Mammas that instill doubt in Rossellini, leading her to suggest that “anything goes” (“Maternal Instinct” 2013). The following films will uncover more instances where supposedly maternal instincts appear to correlate to human culture in less-than-altruistic ways.

Social abjection, or the discomfort located within everyday circumstances, also plays a role in the film series. “Cuckoo”, a Mammas film, features an interesting assessment of distributions of wealth and economic hierarchies that have been created through Western culture dependent upon success-oriented businessmen and women. An expert in survival, the cuckoo relies on the habits
of other birds to support her infants. Rossellini uses the cuckoo as an opportunity to depict the contemporary prioritization of work and wealth over upbringing, beginning her film as a frustrated mother holding a small child. Rossellini begins: “Damn babysitter! If I were a cuckoo, I would lay my egg into another bird’s nest: a nest of a smaller species... my baby will hatch before the other chicks. My baby will push the other eggs out of the nest. My baby knows how to imitate the voice of the chicks it just killed” (“Cuckoo” 2013). From infancy, the cuckoo learns to imitate other birds as a means to thrive above other birds. The cuckoo’s instinct to take advantage begins at infancy and matures with adulthood, Rossellini reveals: “If I were a cuckoo I would often be pregnant. I wouldn’t waste energy raising my children. Someone else can do that” (“Cuckoo 2013). The cuckoo’s homicidal tendencies leave a path of destruction from birth to reproduction — tendencies that, if translated into a contemporary nuclear human family, would reveal an absence of connectivity, community, and networking. The cuckoo doesn’t worry about daycare, babysitting, or anything other than laying her eggs and placing them in nests where the chicks can thrive through the demise of the chicks of another species. Maternity and motherhood are two identities divorced from one another for the cuckoo.

As the film concludes, a human nanny is seen pushing a stroller and leading a toddler along behind Rossellini, who is centered in the frame. Here, Rossellini draws together the parallels of late twentieth and early twenty-first century household trends of upper class Western families being composed of two professional adults relying on nannies and daycare facilities to provide the
caretaking young children require. Coyly, the baby cuckoo puppet in the film screams “Mommy!” repeatedly, furthering the anthropomorphic comparisons between the manipulative cuckoo and contemporary nuclear human family.

When speaking as a human, Rossellini has a haughty and elite demeanor: a woman not to be bothered by bringing up her children. This might not be particularly abject to the viewer at first, but when placed parallel to the cuckoo, to whom Rossellini is comparing such human activity, the elite subjectivity becomes something the viewer desires to distance himself or herself from; although such haughtiness is a familiar (and perhaps common) occurrence in certain classes and types of people, Rossellini instills a sensation of judgment and disgust in the viewer, forcing him or her to consider contemporary child-raising practices and how they affect the lives of the children of the caretakers. Kristeva notes that the abject is “edged” with sublimation, where one is uncomfortable but able to “keep it under control” (PH 11). Sublimation proves useful in considering “Cuckoo” and the ways Rossellini connects the brutality of the nonhuman with the social concerns of the human. Obviously the offspring of those with the means to hire nannies do not murder human children, but “Cuckoo” keeps the question of child caretaking under control and challenges the principles of these lifestyles and how Western social class breakdowns affect the lives of upcoming generations.

Where *Mammas* uses one bird to comment on human propensities, it draws on another to analyze the human tendency to police bodies through politics and legalities. In the *Mammas* film “Dunnock,” Rossellini offers a
nonhuman economy where sexually potent males are a commodity to be shared among the female population. In “Dunnock,” Rossellini broadcasts:

If I were a *Prunella modularis*, I’d sit on my eggs. My chicks might have different fathers; I might take two or three fathers to provide for my family. He has another wife too! If I were a *Prunella modularis*, I would have several husbands. One husband, one wife: monogamy. It’s for the very wealthy. One man, several wives, several children! Bad idea! Polyandry; that’s the best. (“Dunnock” 2013)

The dunnock engages in polyandry with the intention of providing its offspring with the largest selection of goods; if a female dunnock can have multiple different males providing for her collection of babies, the nest will be cared for better than if just one male provides for the nest. Contrarily, if a single male must provide for multiple families, none of the nests will have enough food or care and will subsequently suffer. Polyandry offers the greatest outcome for the common dunnock.

Counterabjection is located in Rossellini’s scathing statement about monogamy: while appraisals of wealth would be vague at best when examining the life of a dunnock, human wealth is continually measured. The average income for individuals in Canada for 2013 was listed as $38,400, with the top 1% of the population’s average being ten times more at $381,300 (Scoffield). Imagine, then, if the average household income of $76,000 was not composed of one or two incomes but of multiple incomes: an income per participant in the
polygamous arrangement (Scoffield). If an ideological dunnock-esque style of polyandry were applied to human families, children would reap the benefits of multiple breadwinners providing for a family of children with various fathers and one mother, assuming that the fathers were successful enough to comfortably provide for all their children’s households. This suggests that while monogamy is “for the very wealthy,” polyandry distributes the wealth to children more evenly and could eliminate the severe economic imbalance within human governmental systems that seek to preserve wealth and marginalize the majority of the working classes. “Dunnock” forces its viewer to consider the disproportion of wealth that has been created by human political institutions and his or her participation in the cyclical inequalities humans find themselves in. The dunnock, as Rossellini presents, appears to have unraveled and improved upon such tendencies.

Rossellini’s film on the hamster, *Mesocricetus auratus*, is arguably the most politically charged film and likely the most well known film from the *Mammas* series. Rossellini begins “Hamster” behind bars, shouting:

> ROSSELLINI as human: I am not a monster! Yes, I killed my baby... and ate him. It was my tenth child, I was exhausted! If I had been [a] [h]amster, it would have been considered natural. If I were [a] [h]amster, it’s *me* who decides how many babies I can raise.

[Rossellini gives birth to a litter of hamster pups.]

> ROSSELLINI as hamster: … Eight babies! That’s Plenty. Nine? Ten?! Ten babies? How am I going to feed them all? This one is cute: he has long legs. It will run fast. This one has big ears. It will
hear miles away. This is one is so small and skinny. What will be of it? [Rossellini eats small marzipan hamster pup]

ROSSELLINI as hamster: It’s a good morsel to recoup some vitamins and protein that I lost during childbirth! It will give me strength to take care of the other babies.

[Rossellini counts nine babies, eating one more.]

ROSSELLINI as hamster: Eight is enough.

ROSSELLINI as human: If I were [a] [h]amster, I would not be in prison. I would have not been considered a monster, but a good administrator of my strengths, abilities, and resources. (“Hamster” 2013)

The monstrous maternal body is a central image here: in addition to being a life creating vessel of abject bodily fluids and functions, Rossellini’s hamster consumes two weaker hamster pups. The consumption of newborn babies seems to be something out of a medieval fantasy text, yet is a frequent occurrence in this mammalian life cycle. Justified as replenishment after lost nutrients, the hamster must use her instincts to evaluate the number of offspring she can reasonably care for and which newborns are the least likely to thrive on their own. Rossellini’s repeated use of the term monster is notable: when speaking of the maternal and the monstrous, Rosi Braidotti writes that “the monstrous or deviant is a figure of abjection in so far as it trespasses and transgresses the barriers between recognizable norms or definitions” (81-2). These are descriptive characteristics that are also applied to the maternal body
that grows, stretches, expels, and shrinks to create new life — something the male body cannot experience. The maternal body, Kristeva states, is “motherhood’s impossible syllogism” (“Motherhood” 237), meaning that as abjection lacks a subject or object then the maternal subject is something that cannot exist. But, as Rossellini shows in “Hamster,” the post-childbirth maternal body bears the subjectivity to choose which newborn lives she will nurture and which will nourish her, thus complicating the subjectivity of abjection.

I offer this delineation to subvert the idea that as an abject figure, the maternal body is conforming to patriarchal or misogynistic expressions of femininity. As a site of abjection, the hamster offers a uniquely visceral illustration of female subjectivity that borders on an important discourse within human society: abortion. Rossellini turns the abject sensation used in “Hamster” upon the viewer by concluding that her jailed character is a “good administrator of my strengths, abilities, and resources.” Cannibalism and infanticide aside, Rossellini tips her hat toward human women’s pro-choice agendas through the positioning of the nonhuman maternal body as one bearing subjectivity and carnal omnipotence; to know where and when one can appropriately and sufficiently be a mother might, as “Hamster” suggests, be the best judgment a woman has the opportunity to make.

Throughout each of these nonhuman-fueled scenarios, Rossellini’s use of subversion is central to the distribution of the various messages and abjections. Several topics are being undermined or challenged, from political stances to very literal correlations between how a nonhuman can behave and what it signifies
and how humans must behave within regulations and expectations of civilized social environments. Rossellini never suggests that humans return to carnal states, overthrow governments, or become murderous survivors, yet astutely reminds us that nonhumans in all their assumed simplicity appear to have their lives stabilized in comparison to humans. Butler anticipates that:

If subversion is possible, it will be a subversion from within the terms of the law, through the possibilities that emerge when the law turns against itself and spawns unexpected permutations of itself. The culturally constructed body will then be liberated, neither to its ‘natural’ past, nor to its original pleasures, but to an open future of cultural possibilities. (119)

In Butler’s ideological depiction of subversion, the body will be released from cultural constraints and become a sensory device above a representative or marker of social hierarchy. I view this configuration as offering a form of originary purity that currently only exists in nonhuman ecosystems since humans are born into cultural constructions that must be learned, accepted, resisted or altered. Our authoritative parameters must first become more egalitarian and less hierarchical (or the opposite may occur and trigger some form of mass resistance), but these circumstances would offer something approaching parallel existence of humans and nonhumans. *Mammas* begins to envision microcosmic instances where such a subversion can be imagined.

Rather than casting out the nonhuman, Rossellini has sensitively reclaimed the abject nonhuman and repurposed the nonhuman as a fixture by
which humans can and should evaluate their own lives. Unlike the methods of repurposing the nonhuman discussed earlier in this project — anthropomorphism simply overlaying human identifiers on nonhuman bodies — Rossellini has used the nonhumans featured in her webseries to showcase the nonhuman in all its nonhuman glory. Through challenging abject identification Rossellini highlights a closeness between nonhumanity and the supposed ‘uprightness’ of humanity and then uses this unstable space to turn abjection upon the human. From decomposing flesh to the dissection of the notion of maternal instinct, Rossellini begins to pull the human out of intellectual superiority and closer to mammalian physicality. This is an early step in envisioning a human Uexküllian bubble that steers clear of shaming or casting out bodies that are not domesticated in the ways that humanity deems necessary for civilization.
Chapter 5: Moving Humanity Forward

Considering the current state of nonhumanity as appraised by humans, the creativity and outspoken ideas communicated by Rossellini in the webseries are groundbreaking and hopefully only the beginning of a movement toward a new, more respectful anthropomorphism. Rather than imbalanced depictions of substandard bodies and casualties of stupidity or lack of intellect, Rossellini shares nonhuman logic in a way that is accessible to humans without catering to the human ego. The human might laugh at the parallels drawn between humans and nonhumans, or feel uncomfortable while watching a film from the webseries, but as a result should acknowledge the similarities among so many different bodies.

Rossellini’s films show that the axes of human and nonhuman lives collide in ways that human language cannot properly heed. Despite the efforts of Derrida and others to address nonhuman bodies, beings, or persons as participants in an ongoing schema of existence, human language consistently dichotomizes those with traditional, self-establishing and self-measuring cognitive skills (humans) from those who exist beyond the parameters of communication and so-called civility that the upright society can freely interpret and deem acceptable (nonhumans). The Green Porno webseries repeatedly reveals situations where Rossellini uses nonhuman behaviors in what I see as an attempt to undo the dichotomization that places humans superior to the rest of life on earth. The human viewer of any number of films from Green Porno,
Seduce Me, or Mammals hopefully depart feeling less superior than before viewing the film(s) or feeling downright abject in his or her participation in certain Western practices. Young asserts that: “The process by which an oppressed group comes to delineate and articulate the social conditions of its oppression and to politicize culture by confronting the cultural imperialism that has denigrated or silenced their specific group experience, is a necessary and crucial step in confronting and reducing oppression” (212). As a body familiar with alternate forms of oppression, Rossellini acts as the articulator of both human and nonhuman oppression and occupies the space where the two traditionally dichotomized groups have the opportunity to merge or be seen as congruent. The nonhuman is too easily robbed of individuality, identity, or any established relevance by its very sign in our human language system, and it is my hope to one day witness a widespread humility of humans toward nonhuman persons. The reversal of abject identification in the Green Porno webseries begins this process.

Humans identify as subjects and persons, but are animals too. Humans are still figuring out how to coexist in civilizations and societies, sharing our various preferred methods and practices of sexuality, parenting, and general existence without disrupting one another to the point of chaos. In times of imperfection humans often look to history to trace evidence of past successes and failures, abandoning or dismissing the opportunity to look to nonhumans as sources of cultural assessment. In the previously mentioned interview with Joseph Schneider, Donna Haraway warns that “the animal is every bit as much a
humanist abstraction, a universal, an empty, a misplaced concreteness issue, but it’s worse than that. It’s stripped of all particularity and reality and most of all, from my view, stripped of relationality” (qtd. in Schneider 140). This project has aimed to dissuade its readers from falling into the comfortable trap of discounting the subjectivity or personhood of the nonhumans humans are continually learning from. While nonhuman conduct may not always directly correlate to our needs, their ecosystems have been placid and stable compared to the complications within human sophistication. Isabella Rossellini’s innovative films use these truths to humble us into hopefully recalibrating our human lives, oversaturated with technology, aggression, and the unsolicited policing of bodies and identities. Introspection with reference to nonhumanity might reveal a more reasonable human existence. Until that ideal evolves into something tangible, humans have Green Porno, Seduce Me, and Mammas films as a reminder to avoid the temptation of reductive thinking regarding nonhumans, to correct humans when they become particularly anthropomorphic, and perhaps most importantly to look at nonhuman bodies and human bodies with a mischievous grin.

CODA

Rossellini has recently contributed to Planet Green’s documentary “Animals Distract Me,” where her nonhuman performances are set aside (apart from one brief skit) and her focus is relocated to her experience as a dog trainer and farm owner (Genzlinger 1). Rossellini’s career remains invested in nonhuman culture, to the point of criticizing human microcultures. Rossellini
argued in an interview for Junkee that Hollywood has no culture: “I don’t know what you mean by Hollywood! There’s not an identity. I know it is written in the press — “Hollywood” — but it isn’t solidly an institution, you know? … I guess what you mean by Hollywood is that perpetual image of women being beautiful, and if you have been a model, people expect that to go on” (Fonesca). Rossellini continues to separate bodily commodification and culture in her own life as it is a recurrent and complicated motif in her performances of the nonhuman.

With writing assistance from French screenwriter Jean-Claude Carriére, Rossellini has adapted the films into the Green Porno: Live on Stage performance. In the seventy-minute stage performance, counterabjection is notably absent. Instead, Rossellini relies on her sense of humor, stories of her celebrity lineage, and prop comedy to communicate the elaborate brilliance of nonhumanity. Rossellini maintains centralized use of her body in the performance, however: shedding costumes layer by layer, Rossellini transitions from matronly garb into male drag and finally into the famed furry suit, headband ears and wire whiskers from "Hamster." Rossellini alternates between screening films from the webseries and discussing her ideology for the making of the films and transmission of the film’s message(s), often pausing for a cheeky joke or sentimental story about the nonhumans she raises (and does not eat) on her farm in rural New York (Rossellini). The future of Green Porno may be less alienating but no less provocative. The desire to enforce communication of a respectful anthropomorphism is still quite evident in the stage performance. As
Rossellini continues to study, write, and age, the *Green Porno* project will likely continue to evolve around her passions and aptitudes.
Works Cited


