Sanctuaries as Refusal

A Marcusean Analysis

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Over the past decade, a lively discussion about the political promise of sanctuaries has been underway. Animal studies scholars such as Sue Donaldson, Will Kymlicka, Eva Meijer, Charlotte Blattner, and Pablo Castelló, among others, have begun to explore the opportunities sanctuaries offer for constructing multispecies communities in which animals' autonomy and agency are actively cultivated. This article joins this discussion but departs from the existing approaches in two ways: first, by suggesting that sanctuaries do not need to be overtly politicized or consciously organized as multispecies communities to be politically relevant, and second, by grounding its analyses in Freudo-Marxist thought instead of liberal political theory. Specifically, it argues that all animal sanctuaries, provided they are rights-based and vegan, are powerful forms of political refusal, as defined by Herbert Marcuse, Freudo-Marxist, critical theorist, and leading figure of the New Left in the 1960s and 70s.

Keywords:
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INTRODUCTION

Animal sanctuaries are diverse institutions and are subject to many limitations. They vary greatly depending on the kinds of animals they house, the resources they have at their disposal, the physical environment in which they are situated, and the vision of their founders. (Abrell 2017; Abrell 2021). They are often forced to participate in problematic practices, such as sterilization and ear-tagging, and must inevitably restrict animals' freedom with fences, gates, and other spatial barriers (Abrell, 2021; Abrell, 2017; Emmerman, 2014; Jones, 2014; Gruen, 2011). Some sanctuaries are much better equipped than others to provide the necessary care, let alone the conditions for individual and communal flourishing, for their nonhuman animal residents. Unfortunately, some so-called sanctuaries are nothing but thinly disguised zoos or other exploitative institutions chasing after profits literally on the backs of other animals (as in the case, for example, of elephant 'sanctuaries' in Thailand, which offer rides to tourists). For the purposes of this discussion, then, 'sanctuaries' refers only and exclusively to *nonprofit facilities that reject all forms of animal exploitation and advocate veganism* (even if they have to make compromises for obligate carnivores in their care).

Despite their intrinsic limitations, sanctuaries hold tremendous political promise. In addition to offering "multispecies safe spaces," animal sanctuaries can be "generative and transformative" and foster new ways of thinking about and living with other animals (Rosenfeld, 2023, p. 168). Like "sanctuary cities" for humans, animal sanctuaries constitute "an act of solidarity" with their members and "an act of protest" against harmful policies and practices against vulnerable communities (Mourão Permoser & Bauböck, 2023, p. 3550).

Sanctuaries' most immediate function is to rescue, rehabilitate, and provide refuge for animals who have been abused and exploited by humans. Typically, they also aim to educate the public about animal exploitation and, especially in the case of sanctuaries for formerly farmed animals, to encourage veganism. Political philosophers Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka, two thinkers who helped usher in the political turn, were among the first animal studies scholars to explore the potential of sanctuaries to engage in meaningful political praxis *beyond* rescue and advocacy. In their seminal article on the topic, "Farmed Animal Sanctuaries: The Heart of the Movement? A Socio-Political Perspective" (2015), they compare sanctuaries which focus on rescue and advocacy, and which tend to adopt a paternalistic model of care, with politically conscious sanctuaries, such as VINE Sanctuary in Springfield, Vermont, that define themselves as multispecies communities, focus on fostering animal agency and autonomy, and reject paternalism outright.

As Blattner et al. (2020) have argued, sanctuaries such as VINE serve as "sites of political contestation

and possibility" where multispecies community-building can occur (p. 1; see also Scotton, 2017). By not requiring animals to be separated by species, for example, and by providing the opportunity for some animals to live as independently from humans (and other animals as possible should they so desire), VINE allows animals to form their own friendships and alliances and to develop as individuals (Donaldson & Kymlicka, 2015, pp. 57–58). Eva Meijer (2021) reinforces the idea that politically engaged sanctuaries like VINE undermine hierarchical ways of thinking and acting (p. 38), while Pablo Castelló (2024), who conducted eight weeks of multispecies ethnographic research at VINE, contends that VINE "captures some of the distributed political dynamic" that is constitutive of the "fabric of zoodemocracy" (p. 4).

I agree that politicized sanctuaries like VINE that recognize and seek to enable animals' agency are exemplary and (ought to) provide a model for sanctuaries moving forward. However, I *also* think that *all* sanctuaries are *de facto* "sites of political contestation and possibility." Even ostensibly apolitical sanctuaries are, as I see it, engaged in a powerful political act: refusal. I would go so far as to suggest that sanctuaries are "revolutionary even if their consciousness is not" (Marcuse, 1991, p. 256). Sanctuaries are by definition "animated by that same subversive impulse" as other forms of refusal: "liberation" inasmuch as they seek to liberate animals from the animal industrial complex and to liberate humans from our attachment to violent power. Although they can by no means solve the "animal crisis" (Crary & Gruen, 2022) or end the "war against animals" (Wadiwel, 2015), sanctuaries are doing crucial work in the interest of bringing both to a close. By their very nature, sanctuaries are in creative and productive tension with the irrational ideology of human supremacism and the ever-intensifying practices of institutionalized cruelty it has enabled. They show us that it is possible to create a "space, both physical and mental, for building a realm of freedom which is not that of the present" and in which it is possible to seek "liberation also from the liberties of exploitative order" (Marcuse, 1991, p. viii), liberties which include and often revolve around and depend on hurting animals.

Overall, sanctuaries participate in the tradition of Great Refusal as defined by Herbert Marcuse. Like the political refusals of the 60s and 70s in Marcuse's time, sanctuaries can be seen as "protest against that which is" (1964; 1991, p. 63). The 'is' (hereafter Is) as object of protest refers to the dominant social, political, and economic paradigm and the behavior it prescribes, while the 'ought' (hereafter Ought) not mentioned in the above phrase, but implied), is the alternative social, political, and economic order we can collectively imagine and work towards building (Marcuse, 1991, pp. 209–210; 1974, p. xxii). As sites of healing, nurturing, friendship, and community with and among other animals, sanctuaries enact, if only symbolically, a "total rupture" (Marcuse, [1968] 2015, p. 24), or at least significant "points of rupture" (Pachirat, 2018, p. 716), with the established society. They seek to carve out new ways of living and being with animals no longer defined by an ethos of domination or the logic of capital, but by an ethos of care and the logic of liberation. Like earlier instances of refusal, animal sanctuaries "outline the limits of the established societies, of their power of containment" (Marcuse, 1969, p. viii).

A note of clarification is in order before proceeding. In this article, I deliberately consider sanctuaries in the *abstract*, even if I point to specific examples, especially of sanctuaries for formerly farmed animals because it is with those that I have had the most contact, throughout for illustrative purposes. Overall, it is the "symbolic power" of sanctuaries that I am preoccupied with, as well as the "qualitative differences" sanctuaries make in other animals' lives (Abrell, 2021, p. 8). Abrell (2021) observes that a sanctuary is both "a specific bounded place or state of being" and "an ideological/ethical mode of being" (ibid.). While both dimensions of a sanctuary are equally important, I am concerned primarily with the latter, that is, with how the sanctuary as an ideological/ethical mode of being establishes an entirely new way of being-with animals outside and against the prevailing logic of domination and violence.

I. "THE PROTEST AGAINST THAT WHICH IS"

By existing at all, and irrespective of their degree of politicization, sanctuaries participate in the Great Refusal, which, as we saw above, Marcuse defined in the simplest terms as "the protest against that which is" (1991, p. 63). According to Marcuse, "advanced industrial society" (i.e., late capitalist society of the mid-20th century) is governed by "technological rationality," a violent instrumentalizing logic which reduces living beings to calculations, and the "repressive desublimation" (falsely liberated or distorted expression) of "instinctual energy" in the service of capital (p. 72). Technological rationality dramatically undermines the capacity for "negative" or critical thought and produces in its stead

"one-dimensional thought," or thought that reflects and reproduces the status quo. This enables people to, for example, continue consuming vast amounts of animal flesh and excretions, despite widespread knowledge of the egregious cruelty and vast environmental harms associated with their production.

Although humans are the primary focus of his work, Marcuse sees the domination of nature and animals as integral to the development of the (alienated) individual and of (repressive) civilization as a whole. Echoing his Frankfurt School colleagues, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (2002), Marcuse (1974) states plainly that "nature" is the greatest victim of the "scientific rationality of Western civilization" (p. 110). As is evinced by this quote, Marcuse typically and regrettably refers to nature in abstract and homogenizing terms, but he sometimes distinguished between "nature" and "animals." For example, Marcuse remarks that, "In attacking, splitting, changing, pulverizing things and animals (and periodically also men), man extends his dominion over the world and advances to ever richer stages of civilization" 1974, p. 52). This alleged richness comes at a great cost, he insists, not only to nature and animals but to civilization itself, which has become for so many a kind of Hell. In no uncertain terms, Marcuse notes that "Part of th[e] Hell" humans have created on earth is the ill-treatment of animals—the work of a human society whose rationality is still the irrational" (1991, p. 237). Sanctuaries offer an escape route, both literal and figurative, from this Hell. They provide a safe space for animals to live, and a safe space in which to imagine and begin to develop new, more peaceable forms of co-existence across species.

For Marcuse, the "liberation which must precede the construction of a free society [is] one which necessitates an historical break with the past and the present" (Marcuse, 1969, p. viii). Sanctuaries are perhaps among the most conspicuous of historical breaks with the past and present insofar as they are arguably the only places on earth and in the history of our civilization in which creating the conditions for other animals' flourishing *for its own sake* is the primary goal. Unless I am mistaken, it is historically unprecedented for human beings to devote their lives, if not individually then collectively and at an institutional level, to enabling other animals' physical, psychological, and emotional well-being *without* an ulterior motive or some form of instrumentalization or exploitation fueling these efforts.

Sanctuaries, like other forms of refusal, "are negations of that which negates us" (Garland, 2017, p. 55). Human supremacism negates us by denying our continuity with other animals and directing our energies to violent domination of animals instead of peaceable cooperation with them. Sanctuaries, where humans and other animals often develop bonds of friendship, where animals' lives are valued in and of themselves, negate this negation, and in so doing create the conditions for new forms of affirmation, another essential element of refusal. "Refusal and resistance," Christian Garland (2017) reminds us, "should not be mistaken as simply passive withdrawal or retreat" but necessarily involves "active forms of a radically different mode of being and mode of doing" (p. 55). Putting it another way, despite being a "negative" response to something, a critique and rejection of something, refusal is ultimately *con*structive, not *de*structive. Its aim is to disrupt the existing state of affairs (the Is) in order to bring to fruition its potentialities (the Ought) for a more authentic experience of freedom, beauty, justice, and happiness, more authentic because no longer beholden to repressive and oppressive ideological and structural forces (Marcuse, 1991, pp. 209–210; 1974, p. xxii). Sanctuaries are an integral part of this constructive project, except in their case the human is decentered to make way for other animals. Sanctuaries provide an example of what it means to redefine humans' freedom as co-constitutive with animals' freedom, something Marcuse already gestured towards in his consistent call for the joint liberation of "nature" and "man" (see, for example, 1974, pp. 189–190).

Sanctuaries are nothing if not life-affirming. They are full of "active forms of a radically different mode of being and doing." Eating lunch with a cow is "radically different" than eating a cow for lunch. Cuddling and caressing a hen is radically different than hanging her on a moving assembly line and dropping her body in acid. Being with animals as companions and community members is radically different than being with them as their overlords, masters, and executioners. As spaces where animality in all its dimensions, where vulnerability, embodiment, desire, emotionality, intelligence, sociability, perception, consciousness, love, curiosity, and so on, are celebrated rather than ridiculed and exploited, sanctuaries radically reconfigure human-animal relations along historically unprecedented lines.

II. FROM THE PERFORMANCE PRINCIPLE TO (A NEW KIND OF) PLEASURE PRINCIPLE

Without necessarily phrasing or conceptualizing it in these terms, another aspect of the Great Refusal in which sanctuaries participate is the refusal to subscribe

to the dictates of the "performance principle." The performance principle demands calculable output from the worker at increasingly accelerated rates, seeks to extract as much labor power from the worker at as little cost as possible, and expects the worker to work tirelessly "for an apparatus which they do not control" (Marcuse, 1974, p. 45). Everyone is expected to *adjust* to the competitive and antagonistic logic of the performance principle (p. 44), no matter how degrading, unpleasant, or even violent the work they are expected to undertake. Living a meaningful life in capitalist society requires living a life defined by competitive performance, irrespective of the cost to self and others. In the words of Andrew Feenberg (2017), "The system not only prevails in the reified organization of society but is lived by the individuals as the necessary form of their own experience" (pp. 229–230).

The slaughterhouse is arguably the worse manifestation of the performance principle. Minorities tend to be overrepresented in slaughterhouses and are subject to incredibly dangerous work with high rates of injury (Schlosser, 2012; Fitzgerald, 2010). Workers must wake up every day and go to a place where they will be tasked with murdering and mutilating one animal after the other, witness animals crying out in agony and terror, at times no doubt looking the workers straight in the eyes as the blood spurts out of their severed arteries. Like the animals they are tasked with killing, the workers are treated as disposable, are subjected to surveillance and other disturbing forms of control (Pachirat, 2011). The terrible betrayal of the vulnerable creatures they must kill is also a betrayal of the workers who are often deeply traumatized by the gruesome tasks they are expected to carry out. It is no surprise that slaughterhouse workers often suffer from alcoholism, drug abuse, depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues (Slade & Allyne, 2021).

Sanctuaries are not immune to the symptoms of the performance principle. They might impose grueling work schedules on the staff and volunteers, for example. But it is fair to say that they are not otherwise beholden to the logic of performance. The fact that humans are *laboring for* animals presents both a real and symbolic challenge to the performance principle as such. There is no "reason" according to the logic of instrumental and technological rationality for humans to devote their lives to caring for other animals. Marcuse (1969) pointed out that advanced industrial society had the means to very quickly and easily eliminate scarcity and poverty (p. 4), to render obsolete "aggressive performances of 'earning a living,'" to create the conditions whereby the "'non-necessary' becomes a vital need" (p. 5).

In the current economic and social framework, there is nothing more "non-necessary" than a sanctuary, which, at least in principle, exists to protect animals from harm and enable other animals to live as good a life as possible. By neither instrumentalizing nor profiting from animals in their charge, sanctuaries serve no "rational" purpose in the established (i.e., capitalist) society per se. Indeed, they are wholly "irrational" inasmuch as they reject the profit model entirely and instead direct labor and resources to supporting the lives of animals who serve no instrumental purpose. Creating the conditions for animals to be themselves, to do the things that are important to them and that they enjoy doing when it is otherwise so easy and so "advantageous" to exploit them is, is a subversive and revolutionary act, revolutionary because it ushers in a radical empathy and humility that human beings have been conditioned for millennia to quash. Sanctuaries also disrupt the performance principle by refusing to adhere to its strictures, at least when it comes to the animal residents. By valuing lives which otherwise are valued only in crude economic terms and are disposable, sanctuaries pull the proverbial rug out from under the performance principle. Work on a sanctuary is not done to generate profit, but to reproduce healthy, flourishing life. Period. Thus, sanctuaries introduce a new reality principle based on being-with and letting-be ("letting-be" not in the sense of disengagement, but rather in the sense of enabling other animals to be who they are).

In place of the performance principle, a new reality principle based on a nonexploitative reciprocal pleasure principle begins to unfold. In sanctuaries, "the life instincts themselves strive for the unification and enhancement of life," and libidinal energies are no longer diverted towards the repressive desublimation of the pleasure principle, but rather in its nonrepressive development in the form of mutually reinforcing and nonexploitative forms of pleasure-seeking (Marcuse, 1969, p. 91). The mutual exchange of pleasure can and often does occur as humans are engaged in labor. Feeding animals often involves sitting with them, holding them, and even nursing them, depending on their age and needs. Ensuring animals are safe and warm for the night, for example, securing them inside a barn or house, providing them with blankets and hay and whatever else might be needed for them to sleep comfortably, are all forms of care-as-labor or labor-as-care and therefore provide pleasure and satisfaction to all parties involved.

For humans, the experience of mutual pleasure may sometimes be undermined by the labor required and the degree of contact they might have with animals. However, pleasure can take many forms and does not necessarily involve instant gratification. Pleasure can be had simply in knowing that by doing any given task, one has contributed to the well-being of any number of animals and to the survival of a sanctuary as a whole.

Certainly, for nonhuman animals, there is much pleasure to be had on a sanctuary: basking in the sun, playing ball, swimming, snuggling, eating, grazing, resting, running, jumping, exploring, getting into mischief, making new friends, learning new things, the list goes on. For some animals who are too injured and/or traumatized to actively participate in these and other activities, pleasure is perhaps harder to obtain, and this is heartbreaking to behold. But of course, tremendous effort is made to provide the most wounded animals with as much solace as possible. In sanctuaries, animals are not required to produce eggs or milk or meat, or to give rides to humans, or to perform tricks and other feats, to harm each other for human entertainment, to go to war, to perform any number of horrible tasks humans have traditionally assigned to them. Overall, sanctuaries are unlike any other institution on earth in which animals are housed in that their objective is to maximize animals' experience of pleasure for no other reason other than that pleasure (that does not involve harming others) is a good in and of itself to which other animals are as entitled as humans.

Examples of the new reality (/pleasure) principle in action at sanctuaries abound. For example, at a sanctuary in Catalunya, Spain, Fundación Santuario Gaia,[1] where I volunteered for three weeks in July 2018, I remember Javi and Patricia, two pigs who lived side by side. Patricia was disabled, so a private barn and pool were especially made for her. Javi was able-bodied and resided in a small kingdom of mud and shrubs nearby. Javi occupied himself by digging mud pools to bathe in, foraging, and playing, while Patricia loved receiving visitors, enjoyed basking in the sunshine and lounging in her pool. Nothing major happened. No one expected anything of anyone. The only thing we humans looked out for was that Javi and Patricia were safe and comfortable. And this is the same for all animals on sanctuaries. They are not expected to reproduce, they are not expected to work, they are not expected to serve any purpose. If, as Garland (2017) puts it, "to simply exist, *to be*, is not recognized by capital," animals in sanctuaries pose a direct threat to capital (p. 56). They are unseen by capital, "useless" to it, but therein lies their power. It is precisely the *un*remarkability of Javi and Patricia being themselves, and by extension other animals on sanctuaries, being who they are, that is remarkable and politically potent.

One might even argue that sanctuaries enact a form of refusal that is integral to what Ted Siegel (2023) calls "*the post-work political imaginary*" (p. 51, italics in original). A tremendous amount of labor is required to maintain sanctuaries, but self- and other-reproducing labor, the labor of care in a context of resistance and refusal, is qualitatively different than labor which is undertaken under compulsion and in service of the capitalist economy. The latter "operates as an independent power to which individuals must submit if they want to live . . . becomes more alien the more specialized the division of labor becomes" and requires that people "do not live their own lives but perform pre-established functions" (Marcuse, 1974, p. 45). By contrast, sanctuary labor is, for all intents and purposes, *un*alienated. Most people choose to work in or volunteer at sanctuaries in the first place out of a deep commitment to animal liberation and therefore regard the work, no matter how unpleasant at times, as meaningful, rewarding, and even fulfilling. This is especially true when people are able to spend time with and form relationships with other animals.[2]

III. THE 'BIOLOGICAL' BASIS OF FREEDOM

In their repudiation of the violent logic of production, in their celebration of being-with and letting-be, sanctuaries take us a step closer to creating the conditions for freedom as Marcuse (1969) understood it. For Marcuse,

> Freedom would become the environment of an organism which is no longer capable of adapting to the competitive performances required for well-being under domination, no longer capable of tolerating the aggressiveness, brutality, and ugliness of the established way of life. (pp. 4–5)

Sanctuaries enable the cultivation of freedom thus characterized not only by rejecting competitive performance and the barbarism intrinsic to it, but also by cultivating a new way of being, a new way of being *human*, in which the subordination of other more vulnerable beings to our will is no longer a desire, an impulse, or even a *possibility*—no longer something we are *capable* of at the level of "instinct," which is here defined not as an inborn tendency, but a culturally determined one.

While the animal industrial complex is clearly the product of the coalescence of a variety of cultural, social, political, and economic forces, these forces and the institutions they have engendered have undoubtedly, Marcuse (1969) observes, "shaped the very instincts and needs of men," which is why "no economic and political changes will bring this historical continuum to a stop unless they are carried through by men who are physiologically and psychologically able to experience things, and each other, outside the context of violence and exploitation" (p. 25). In other words, to effect lasting historical transformation, institutional and system change, though essential, is not sufficient in and of itself. Even if we were to topple capitalism tomorrow, animal exploitation would very likely continue unabated if we have not yet at least put the proverbial wheels in motion for a much deeper transformation at the level of need and desire, so that the impulse to *harm* (whether to satisfy a violent urge or to confer some kind of advantage upon oneself) has been replaced by the impulse to *help*. This shift is part of a much larger process, of course, of shattering the existing hierarchy of beings in which some are designated worthy of harm and others of help.

A Levinasian asymmetrical ethics is relevant here, where the vulnerability of the being who stands before you in need is precisely that which commands you not to kill or harm it but to come to its aid (Levinas, 1985, p. 86.). Its fragility, which would otherwise invite abuse, is precisely what demands care. Sanctuaries are living examples of this Levinasian ethics in practice. And stories of people such as Howard Lyman (2001), who at one point ran a massive steer operation only to renounce this practice and join the cause for animal liberation, demonstrate that this shift can and does take place on an individual level. The aim, of course, is for this tendency to become widespread across humanity as a whole.

Ultimately, sanctuaries can help usher in what Marcuse (1969) understood to be the most important aspect of the Great Refusal: "a change in the 'infrastructure of man,'" which is to say the transformation of the human being at the level of "instinct" and of "basic needs," from someone who knowingly participates in systematized barbarism, to someone who is no longer *capable* of it (pp. 4-5). Our "instincts" (read: learned tendencies) and our "basic needs" (read: learned desires) have been shaped in accordance with the dictates of a zoocidal social order which on one hand systemically exterminates animals as subjects and on the other forcibly reproduces them ad infinitum as objects for research and consumption.

Although they are inevitably bound up with the system of violence, sanctuaries seek to carve out a space (both literally and figuratively) where new "instincts" and needs grounded in attentive concern, solicitude, curiosity, wonder, respect, and love are consciously cultivated. In consumer society, "consumption becomes meaningful in excess of satisfying basic needs" and eventually "it turns into a sign of distinction and an end in itself" (McGuigan, 2009, p. 86). In a space where animals are not regarded as consumable products, a "qualitative change" in human-animal relations is underway. As Marcuse (1969) explains, "This qualitative change must occur in the needs, in the infrastructure of man (itself a dimension of the infrastructure of society)" (p. 4). By "biological transformation" Marcuse means, "the process and the dimension in which inclinations, behavior patterns, and aspirations become vital needs which if not satisfied, would cause dysfunction of the organism" (p. 10). The biological transformation of the subject involves the replacement of *false* needs which have been "introjected" into the subject, with *true* needs for sensual, aesthetic, and intellectual fulfillment (p. 11).

The biological development of the subject also involves the nonrepressive *de*sublimation (truly liberated and healthy expression) of erotic instincts and the nonrepressive *sub*limation of the aggressive instinct into creative and aesthetic activity. When the aggressive instincts are tempered by Eros with which they have merged, the subject is redirected away from violence and destruction to play and aesthetic production. In transforming itself thus, the subject not only avoids harming others, but also itself (p. 4). A central component of this biological transformation of the organism is the transformation of the subject from a flesh-eater to a plant-eater. By consuming the corpses of tortured creatures, we only perpetuate the brutality that is constitutive of the exterminationist system. By actively cultivating relations between humans and other animals that are governed by tenderness and affection, by vociferously disavowing oppression, by mobilizing human bodies and human technology—both of which have been fine-tuned over the millennia to inflict the most egregious cruelty on other animals with the most remarkable precision—to advance the happiness of other animals rather than cut them down, literally and figuratively, by fostering an attitude of permanent solicitude on one hand, and barring the way for the compulsion to harm on the other, sanctuaries are helping to engender this qualitative shift in the way of being in our human animal infrastructure.

The "new men" who emerge out of the biological transformation Marcuse (1969) calls for, would in fact be physically and psychically *incapable* of violence, for they will "have different gestures, follow different impulses," and they will "have developed an instinctual barrier against cruelty, brutality, and ugliness" (p. 21). Thus, Marcuse calls for the creation of an "aesthetic ethos," which shuns (ethical) ugliness and instead embraces (ethical) beauty and freedom, both in art and all activities relating to the senses, and a new sensibility" which abjures "exploitation in all its forms (p. 24; p. 28). The new sensibility is sensuous, playful, calm, and beautiful (p. 25). Sanctuaries teach human beings how to renounce techniques of cruelty and replace them with techniques of care. By helping humans to reorient their psycho-social-corporeal lives towards the flourishing of others, rather than to their easy instrumentalization and commodification, sanctuaries initiate the qualitative shift that over time will have "taken root in the very nature, the 'biology' of the individual" (p. 5) and plant the seeds for a new *vegan* sensibility.

Sanctuaries facilitate this change in the infrastructure of human beings by creating radically new sensory and perceptual environments for humans and other animals, another essential ingredient of historical transformation. The ultimate goal of refusal is to construct a newly "eroticized" society, which is to say, a society which fosters the healthy expression of Eros and its constituent elements of creativity, sensuality, joy, play, and nonrepressive pleasure. In Garland's (2017) words: "The reassertion of Eros is the libidinous and Dionysian force of life against death…" and sanctuaries are nothing if not environments where the life force is stoked and the forces of death and destruction squashed (p. 62). Sanctuaries initiate what Marcuse (1969) considered to be a necessary "break with the familiar, the routine ways of seeing, hearing, and feeling, understanding things so that the organism may become receptive to the potential forms of a nonaggressive, nonexploitative world" (p. 6). In place of the deafening cacophony of cries that ring through, say an egg-production facility, a sound which has become so normalized and reified that we no longer *hear* it for what it is, the sound of despair, individual animal voices are not only heard in their infinite uniqueness and variety but are actively *listened* to.

In the sensuousness of sanctuary life, distinct personalities emerge and deep connections among and across species are forged. The feel of another animal's fur or feathers on one's fingers or face is a source of delight, a source of connection and intimacy. Feelings of love and affection are generated through consensual caresses, nudges, cuddles, and other forms of touch that characterize life on a sanctuary. The experience is of mutual satisfaction, pleasure, respect, and enchantment. It is fair to say that life, although imperfect, is, in the context of a sanctuary, *beautiful*.

IV. SANCTUARIES AS FOUNDATIONS FOR THE 'NEW SENSORIUM' AND THE 'AESTHETIC ETHOS'

The biological shift would mean that the subject becomes naturally (i.e. physically, instinctually, psychically) repelled by "aggressiveness" (which is in this case refers to violence), "brutality" and "ugliness (Marcuse, 1969, p. 4). Marcuse's conception of beauty is not superficial and is not concerned with cosmetic prettiness. Beauty is not only the "harmonious union of sensuousness, imagination, and reason" but it also has an "objective (ontological) character, as the Form in which man and nature come into their own: fulfillment" (Marcuse, 1969, p. 27). Beauty, in other words, is the *reconciliation* of the human and the nonhuman. And, as this suggests, beauty on this reading, is inherently ethical. As Marcuse writes, "beauty has the power to check aggression; it forbids and immobilizes the aggressor" (p. 27). If we regard nonhuman animals through this lens, we are disarmed and lose all impetus to harm or kill them—even the ever-maligned rat, pig, and chicken. These and all other creatures are beautiful in their fulfillment *as* rats, chickens, and pigs, as embodied subjects, as individuals, and our mutual affection with them, is from a Marcusean perspective at least, also beautiful.

In his pamphlet "On Vegetarianism" (1901), the anarchist geographer and vegetarian Elisée Reclus also points to the ugliness of violence against animals:

> It is on account of the ugliness of it that we also abhor vivisection and all dangerous experiments, except when they are practised by the man of science on his own person. It is the ugliness of the deed which fills us with disgust when we see a naturalist pinning live butterflies into his box, or destroying an ant-hill in order to count the ants. We turn with dislike from the engineer who robs Nature of her beauty by imprisoning a cascade in conduit-pipes, and from the Californian woodsman who cuts down a tree, four thousand years old and three hundred feet high, to show its rings at fairs and exhibitions. Ugliness in persons, in deeds, in life, in surrounding Nature — this is our worst

> foe. Let us become beautiful ourselves, and let our life be beautiful! (p. 5)

And like Marcuse, Reclus calls for the beautification of the world by promoting animals' wellbeing and life. Though Reclus does not object to having animals work, he certainly objects to their being killed and eaten:

> We aspire to the time when we shall not have to walk swiftly to shorten that hideous minute of passing the haunts of butchery with their rivulets of blood and rows of sharp hooks, whereon carcasses are hung up by blood-stained men, armed with horrible knives. We want some day to live in a city where we shall no longer see butchers' shops full of dead bodies side by side with drapers' or jewellers', and facing a druggist's, or hard by a window filled with choice fruits, or with beautiful books, engravings or statuettes, and works of art. We want an environment pleasant to the eye and in harmony with beauty. (p. 7)

As Reclus makes clear, there is a direct relationship between violence and ugliness on one hand, and between goodness and beauty on the other. It is not coincidental that when witnessing an act of violence, particularly against a defenseless being, the average person will most likely avert their eyes. This is not for no reason. A calf suckling from his mother in a grassy field is a glorious thing to behold; a calf lying motionless and terrified in a tiny, feces-covered veal stall is not. A duck waddling on the grass and swimming with her young in a pond is a lovely, uplifting sight; a duck having a tube jammed down their throat to be force-fed is not. A lamb cuddling with her mother and playing with her siblings is as pleasing to the eye as to the heart; a lamb strung up by her legs with her throat cut, spurting out blood, and dying a slow and agonizing death is not. We tend to flinch and turn away in the face of horror because such sights are, ethically and aesthetically speaking, aberrations. We might become desensitized over time, but no one, apart from a sadist, can say it is enjoyable to watch animals being tortured or killed.

In our advanced state of moral dissolution, we often confuse the ugly for the beautiful (both ethically and aesthetically) or at least fail to see ugliness for what it is. Violence, including of the most heinous variety, has been and continues to be aestheticized by artists of all stripes. Yet, for all the celebration and aestheticization of violence in our culture, it is not for no reason that a concerted effort is made to disguise the brutality we commit against animals, to gloss over the horror, to beautify what might otherwise repel. Indeed, the more we liquidate animals and destroy the natural world, the more expansive the animal industrial complex becomes, the more desperate we seem to be to "escape" urban bleakness to what is left of "nature," the splendor of which soothes and consoles, if only temporarily. Misguided as this tendency might be, it shows us that what is good for other animals (to be able to be who they are, to live in peace) is also good for us, that on some fundamental level we *want* and *need* other animals (and the rest of the nonhuman world) to flourish, not because other animals are "nice to look at" in some superficial sense, but because their exquisiteness reflects the ethical righteousness of letting them be who they are.

In their commitment to creating the conditions for other animals to develop as individuals and in community, sanctuaries are instrumental to bringing about "a revolution in perception which will," Marcuse (1969) tells us, "accompany the material and intellectual reconstruction of society" (p. 37). Marcuse also suggests that the biological transformation would also foster the "solidarity" between individuals which repressive civilization has destroyed (p. 10). We might add that if the biological transformation included the shift to veganism, this solidarity would also be cultivated between humans and other animals—a solidarity which is integral to the larger liberatory project. To be clear, Marcuse did not advocate for vegetarianism (veganism had not entered the popular lexicon yet), and in fact claimed that "In the face of the suffering inflicted by man on man, it seems terribly 'premature' to campaign for universal vegetarianism or synthetic foodstuffs" (Marcuse, 1972, p. 68). Contradicting his own argument about the inextricable link between the domination of nature, animals, and humans outlined above, he insisted that, "as the world is, priority must be on *human* solidarity among human beings" (ibid.)

Importantly, though, Marcuse almost immediately goes on to qualify these claims when he writes, "And yet, no free society is imaginable which does not, under its 'regulative idea of reason,' make the concerted effort to reduce consistently the suffering which man imposes on the animal world" (ibid.). In other words, a truly free and rational society would at least try to mitigate human behavior to reduce the suffering we inflict on them. He is advocating for welfare here and not liberation, but by its own logic, a liberated and rational society would eventually require a shift to the abolition of violence

against animals for profit and human gain and would necessitate veganism.

For his part, Reclus was unambiguous about the need for vegetarianism. In another moving passage, he explains that once the sense of kinship between beings is recognized, violence loses its appeal:

> The important point is the recognition of the bond of affection and goodwill that links man to the so-called lower animals, and the extension to these our brothers of the sentiment which has already put a stop to cannibalism among men. … The arguments that were opposed to that monstrous habit are precisely those we vegetarians employ now. The horse and the cow, the rabbit and the cat, the deer and the hare, the pheasant and the lark, please us better as friends than as meat. We wish to preserve them either as respected fellow workers, or simply as companions in the joy of life and friendship. (pp. 5–6)

Reclus's powerful call to vegetarianism is based on the notion that a natural kinship exists between humans and other animals. We may not agree with him that animals should work or insist that if they do, it is done so on their terms, but we can certainly agree with him that it is not only in their interest but also in ours "to preserve them ... as companions in the joy of life and friendship." We already cultivate these friendships with our companion animals, but we tend to leave out those animals who are not assigned to the category of "companion" or "pet." Sanctuaries enable us to experience the kinship and develop the friendships Reclus describes with a much wider range of animals (Scotton, 2017). Not everyone will renounce killing or eating animals upon visiting a sanctuary, but a cognitive and moral shift is already underway when they begin to relate to other beings as companions, friends, and fellow animals, as opposed to objects of consumption.

Because sanctuaries are governed by an aesthetic ethos, oppression, violence, and aggression are not only prohibited, but in fact become logical impossibilities: the "aesthetic morality … insists on freedom as a biological necessity: being physically incapable of tolerating any repression other than that required for the protection and amelioration of life" (Marcuse, 1969, p. 28). Freedom is biological and is beautiful: "The aesthetic universe is the *Lebenswelt* on which the needs and faculties of freedom depend for their liberation" (p. 31). If we follow Marcuse, it is not sufficient to reform social institutions so that they better protect animals against harm. An entirely new lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*)—where the sounds and sights of aggression and violence are permanently absent, and the sounds and sights of care and peace are permanently present—must be created. Freedom "can emerge only in the collective *practice of creating an environment*: level by level, step by step – in the material and intellectual production, an environment in which the nonaggressive, erotic, receptive facilities of man, in harmony with the consciousness of freedom, strive for the pacification of man and nature" (Marcuse, 1969, p. 31). And this is exactly what sanctuaries are doing or at least trying to do. Although of course imperfect in their attempt, sanctuaries offer new possibilities for ways of being-with other animals.

CONCLUSION

Sanctuaries do not need to be politically active or engaged in any other way to be sites of political transformation. By simply existing and doing the work they do, no matter how imperfectly, they are already engaged in radical political praxis. As spaces of care, healing, and friendship among and between humans and other animals, as places in which other animals are valued in and of themselves, animal sanctuaries are powerful forms of refusal. By prioritizing animals' wellbeing and flourishing without ulterior (instrumentalist) motives, sanctuaries are already constructing human and nonhuman animal relationships along totally different lines than we have seen before in the history of our civilization. In their repudiation of the most fundamental assumptions of our civilization, that other animals exist for human use, they are perhaps the greatest of great refusals.

NOTES

[1] https://fundacionsantuariogaia.org

[2] It is of course important not to romanticize sanctuary labor. As noted, in some cases, workers and volunteers are expected to adhere to highly demanding work schedules and, in other cases, to perform dangerous tasks without proper training. Often, workers and volunteers have little time for rest or engagement with each other or other animals beyond what their duties require.

Furthermore, sanctuaries are hazardous places, especially for newcomers who have little or no experience working and living with nonhuman animals, working outdoors in inclement weather, carrying heavy loads, using power tools, operating machinery, and so on. Some sanctuaries, including some at which I have volunteered, promulgate a problematic mentality of sacrifice and suffering. It can sometimes seem that as though the human workers and

volunteers are expected to exculpate themselves for the sins of our species by putting aside their needs entirely in the service of the animals in our charge. This is an unnecessary and unhealthy attitude that can have severe consequences on everyone, human and nonhuman, at the sanctuary. If sanctuary workers are overworked and exhausted, they are much more likely to make mistakes and cause harm or injury to themselves or others.

It should also be noted that the "sacrifice ethos" applies especially to women who appear to make up the bulk of the labor force on sanctuaries. As a minority who have historically been expected to be selfless, to provide emotional labor and other care services usually quietly and in the background and with little recognition, women are especially vulnerable to exploitation, and this is as true on sanctuaries as in the society at large. Feminized labor is at once devalued and actively exploited in the neoliberal capitalist economy and women are vulnerable to a variety of forms of abuse. In patriarchal society women are generally expected to quietly comply to orders and commands, to proceed without complaint, to prove themselves equal to their male counterparts by "going the extra mile," and to assume the bulk of emotional labor.

Another concern is that outside the sanctuary environment, women who work in sanctuaries might be subjected to "a perceived double denigration" in which they are belittled as "*women* looking after *animals*" (Taylor et al., 2023, p. 222). That is, they may face prejudice for being women and for being women working with animals, another historically marginalized group with which women have been associated as a mark of *their* inferiority. On the other hand, the fact that the sanctuary movement is populated mainly by women suggests that women are playing a major role in shaping how the movement unfolds. If women's sanctuary care work is conceptualized as a challenge to the patriarchal system of violence and aggression, the "explicit focus on relations of care has revolutionary potential" (p. 222). In other words, the "feminine" nature of the movement is itself a form of refusal that bears further exploration.

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