

Rats

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Please note that this is an early-stage draft, and that the style is something of an experiment. It ignores, I hope somewhat playfully, some of the conventions of academic writing, but I recognize that this could make it frustrating to read the first few sections (“Where’s the thesis?” you say as you scratch your head...). I ask for your indulgence, and I hope that the paper can, in the end, deliver on its (and my) promise.

One

One discourse: that's what I want to investigate today, or tonight, or whenever it is that you're sitting down to read this. I am interested, broadly speaking, in how animals and humans are networked together in epistemological communities, and how these animals and humans jointly produce and mobilize knowledge. I want to talk about the discourse of rats, more precisely, by which I mean how humans talk about rats; rats, for all their intelligence and sociability, do not "have" discourse in any relevant sense. But is there just one discourse of rats? No, of course there are more. There are many rats, multitudes of rats even, and many discourses around these rats, though there are (curiously, or obviously?) fewer discourses of rats than there are rats themselves. So the discourse I want to investigate, the one discourse among the many rat-discourses, is the discourse concerning rats that work as valued contributors in the medical research community. I learned of this discourse by listening to what Charles River Laboratories (a company that provides rats for researchers, and the largest animal breeder for research in the world) has to say. Animals are very important to Charles River (henceforth CRL), not just in the financial sense but also in the sense that their well-being matters. CRL, through its "Humane Care Initiative," makes every effort to see that that the "Research Animal Models" (the technical name for the animals, mainly rodents) that it sells to laboratories worldwide are well cared for.¹ This care is prompted by a sense that "they are living, feeling creatures and it's the right thing to do" and also because "their health may impact the quality of biomedical research...lives depend on it."² While a skeptic might be inclined to focus on the latter statement and criticize its implicit utilitarian calculus (rat health is important because it is a means to an end – human health – and not an end in itself), we cannot ignore the former statement grounding the ethical treatment of animals in the very terms used by Peter Singer – sentience – and that CRL also discusses this as a matter of "right" rather than merely a matter of beneficence. Put another way: this discourse forcefully argues that treating rats well is not simply something nice to do, because we feel like it, but is something that is a matter of justice (and therefore obligation).³

CRL literature goes beyond just the rights-framework, however. "Humane care" is a "moral imperative" that goes farther than federal regulations in seeking to create a holistic "culture of caring" that sees research animals not just as objects of instrumental significance, but as heroic figures worthy of our dedication and gratitude.⁴ Michelle B., who works at CRL, describes her care for animals there as a "calling" where she can serve as the animals' "voice" to advocate for the "enrichment" and "comfort" of the

¹ <http://www.criver.com/en-US/AboutUs/HumaneCareInitiative/Pages/home.aspx>

² CRL poster "every animal, every day." (n.d.)
http://www.criver.com/SiteCollectionImages/HCI%20Posters/Poster%20PDFs/cr_o_every_animal.pdf

³ John Rawls, the noted defender of a deontological theory of justice, refused to take this step vis a vis animals, claiming that animals could be the objects of good will, but not the subjects of justice (and therefore were not owed anything as a matter of "right"). See John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971, p. 512.

⁴ CRL poster "Who Cares?" (n.d.).
http://www.criver.com/SiteCollectionImages/HCI%20Posters/Poster%20PDFs/cr_o_whocares_poster.pdf

research animals at CRL.⁵ Ryan B., another worker at CRL, calls his animals “unsung heroes...that do not seek fame or fortune,” and whose sacrifices go unnoticed by the general public. Ryan is profoundly grateful to these animals (many of whom are rats, the rest mice or guinea pigs and a few dogs and primates), and avers that CRL is fully cognizant of their heroism and cares for them every day in conscious tribute to their dessert.⁶ This heroism may go unremarked in many circles, but CRL tries to bring it to the foreground in a number of ways. One particularly remarkable way is through a memorial ritual: at an industry tradeshow passers-by are invited to come up to a large, blank wall, and asked to write a note of thanks to the animals at CRL. Many people write what might be considered platitudes, but others inscribe deeply personal notes of thanks, relating the life of a loved one that was saved or preserved due to an advance in medical treatment via animal research.⁷ The final effect is something like “The Wall” (the Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial) – a public dedication of thanks in memory of the sacrifices of the departed – though with the obvious difference that the research animals being thanked are neither named nor even identified as individuals. I suppose it is more like the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

CRL has a number of ways of presenting this perspective to the public, including an interactive website called “Journey of the Mouse” (not a rat, but close enough for my purposes) that takes prospective researchers through the life of a research animal from its origins at CRL until it leaves their laboratory and makes its way to the buyer’s destination.⁸ CRL also foregrounds their efforts to implement the “3 R’s” of animal research (Replacement, Reduction, Refinement) by highlighting several projects where they are pioneering alternatives to animal-based research,⁹ and in addition CRL sponsors educational websites for young children through kids4research.org. But in the children’s website is where I notice something a bit off. The kids4research site says that “Animal rights groups grossly exaggerate the number of animals used in research. They claim the majority of research animals are primates and stolen pets.”¹⁰ It is certainly possible that someone, somewhere has made such a claim, but organizations like People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), one of the most prominent animal rights groups in the United States, make no claim that even resembles this. PETA certainly criticizes CRL for using 5,000 primates and 1,300 dogs as test subjects, but it is quite clear that “tens of thousands” more mice and rats are bred and tested by CRL.¹¹ Why CRL decided to include this specious claim as the opening for its section on “Rules & Laws” of animal research is not clear, but this fabrication, though minor, is disturbing.

⁵ CRL poster “My Impact” (n.d.).

http://www.criver.com/SiteCollectionImages/HCI%20Posters/Poster%20PDFs/my_impact.pdf

⁶ CRL poster “What Humane Care Means to Me” (n.d.).

http://www.criver.com/SiteCollectionImages/HCI%20Posters/Poster%20PDFs/what_humane_care_means.pdf

⁷ See CRL website: criver.com.

⁸ <http://www.journeyofthemouse.com/>

⁹ <http://www.criver.com/en-US/promo/Pages/3RsInAction.aspx>

¹⁰ http://www.kids4research.org/kids/rules_laws.asp

¹¹ <http://www.peta.org/mediacenter/news-releases/-Animals--in-Mourning-to-Confront-Charles-River-Labs-Shareholders.aspx>

I begin to wonder if there is more at issue as I move to reading the literature provided by the Canadian Council on Animal Care (or CCAC; were I in the US I would look to the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee, or IACUC).¹² CCAC provides the larger institutional framework within which animal researchers in Canada function, though researchers are not technically required to obey CCAC's suggestions, and CCAC has only quasi-regulatory powers and little in the way of punitive sanctions. Canada also has nothing equivalent to the US Animal Welfare Act of 1966 (even though rats and mice are specifically excluded from the AWA's ambit), and animal cruelty regulations specify only that animals may not be subject to "unnecessary" harm.¹³ This gives researchers broad leeway in Canada (and of course it leaves the production of animals for human consumption largely unrestricted), as CCAC discusses quite openly on its website.

CCAC selects a number of research "posters" to disseminate widely to the public, several of which are authored by Shannon Duffus, a researcher employed directly by CCAC. Ms. Duffus¹⁴ writes on animal research that is specifically done without pain relief (that is: research whose explicit purpose requires that the animals receive a surgical procedure or toxicological intervention without any kind of anesthetic), and she is also concerned with the public's perception of such research. She notes that most members of the general public are decidedly opposed to this kind of research (upwards of 70%), and this holds true regardless of whether the pain inflicted on the animal model is short-term or chronic. She also finds that support for this kind of research is directly correlated with a person's connection to the practice of animal research, so that the longer one's experience in working on animals (not necessarily inducing pain intentionally – simply any research) the more likely one is to support pain-inducing research. She is troubled, on her poster, by the public's lack of support for such research, and ponders ways that it may be made more palatable. She also describes in detail the reasons she was given by those who oppose such research, and much of their justification can be said to stem from extending the very same ethical principles as CRL claims to respect in its Humane Care Initiative (though clearly 70% of the populace is not, narrowly speaking, in support of "animal rights").¹⁵ One opponent of "chronic" testing (pain caused to the animal for a long period of time with no analgesic or narcotic relief) said:

It just doesn't seem right to intentionally cause these animals to experience sustained chronic pain, even if it might possible benefit the welfare of many people and other animals if successful. We should hold ourselves to a higher moral standard and work to find a less harmful way to test the drug. This might involve testing it on existing chronic pain sufferers (animal or human) – undoubtedly a more time-consuming approach, but well worth the effort if it helps us avoid causing pain to 150 sentient beings in the process.¹⁶

¹² <http://www.ccac.ca/en/about>; <http://www.iacuc.org/>

¹³ See Maneesha Deckha's "Property on the Borderline: A Comparative Analysis of the Legal Status of Animals in Canada and the United States," *Cardozo Journal of International and Comparative Law* 20, 313-365.

¹⁴ She has an MSc but not a PhD.

¹⁵ http://www.ccac.ca/Documents/Publications/Posters/2012-Duffus-14th_world_congress_on_pain.pdf

¹⁶ Shannon Duffus, Gilly Griffin, and Dan Weary, "Public Views on Pain Research Explored Through a Web-Based Forum," CCAC Poster, (n.d.).

I find myself in more agreement with these sentiments than those expressed by the employees of CRL, or, for that matter, the official pronouncements on the CCAC and IACUC websites on the necessity of animal testing. While I have no definitive argument to refute CRL, I am not convinced by the sufficiency of their claims to honor the “heroes” that are sacrificed by the hundreds of thousands every year. I assume that the medical breakthroughs they attribute to animal testing are credible, as I have no evidence to the contrary,¹⁷ but I cannot accept that the terms “hero,” “care,” and “welfare” have the meanings that CRL, CCAC, and IACUC ascribe to them. There has to be a better way to show honor than this.

One Two

“If they eat with us, we feel good.” --Karni Mata Temple caretaker

Two discourses. I was mistaken earlier when I said that there is only one discourse that I want to investigate. I do not like the discourse of the Charles Rivers of the world. I want something very different from this second discourse – I want a language that does not enable me to euphemize the mass killing of nonhumans, whether beagles or dogs or rats, under the label of “humane care.” Is it strange that I think I’ll find what I’m looking for in the place that is as nearly the opposite of Wilmington, MA (where Charles River Labs is headquartered)? If there is an antipode to CRL’s rat-warrens, I think it has to be someplace where rats are genuinely honored, and as it happens I stumbled quite accidentally across news of such a place a few years ago.

In the town of Deshnoke (near Bikaner), in Rajasthan in northwestern India, stands the temple dedicated to Karni Mata, a fourteenth century Charani (something like a bard-prophetess) who was also an avatar (in the technical sense) of the goddess Durga. Karni Mata (or Karniji) was apparently a quite remarkable woman, by all accounts, who became known as a healer and spiritual leader of great power. She led her family to Deshnoke, which was a barely settled oasis in the arid borderlands of Jodhpur, and established a shrine which became a crucial force in Rajasthani political struggles beginning in the early fifteenth century (and lasting until the 20th century). Karni Mata’s good will (and that of her descendants who administer the temple after her passing) was an essential requirement for the Rathor leaders who sought to bring order to the wild hinterlands of the Thar desert, and she was even reputed to have killed a local lord who challenged her ability to prophesy the time of his death (which also fulfilled her prophesy, of course).

The admixture of gender, spirituality, and politics is fascinating, but is not my primary concern with the temple in Deshnoke. Karni Mata’s temple is more famously known as the “Rat Temple,” which is how I serendipitously heard of it, and it garners considerable attention from tourists of all stripes who come to gawk at (and sometimes worship) the 15,000-20,000 rats who live inside the temple.¹⁸ The rats’ relation to Karni

¹⁷ I presume that no one would cause harm, at considerable expense, for no discernible reason. What kind of person would do such a thing?

¹⁸ See the National Geographic version of a visit to the temple, and the YouTube search page for “rat temple” for a survey of the many different kinds of videos produced by professional and amateur film-makers:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2OOs1l8Fajc&list=PL32128E83F122580E>;

Mata and her shrine is rooted in another example of the prophetess's indomitable will: upon her son's (some say it was her stepson or a kinsman's son) death she asked Yama, god of death, to restore him to life. Yama initially refused, but she prevailed upon him to reincarnate her son as a rat, which would also become the fate of all of her descendants upon their deaths. These 20,00 rats are all thought to be the reincarnations of Karni Mata's family, then, and are tended by the living relatives of the goddess who feed them (milk, bread, laddu) and otherwise keep them safe from harm. Killing a temple rat is a grave offense, and visitors to the temple are required to take off their shoes before they may enter the temple grounds.

As you can see by watching any of the videos to which I have posted links (in the footnotes below), while many who come to the temple do so with a mixture of fascination, horror, and disgust, those who tend the rats do so out of piety rather than to cater to tourists. The rats are their ancestors (but they also call them their children, in an inversion whose justification I do not have a complete explanation of), but they also bear the power to grant special blessings. Believers are taught that simply eating the same food that the rats eat has curative powers, and also that catching sight of a white rat at the temple (there are one or two among the throng, it seems) shows that the goddess favors you. While I do not necessarily believe any of this is true,¹⁹ I find no trace of the hypocrisy of CRL as I watch the interviews with Jetudin (sp?) and his wife as they prepare the rats' meals, or when his wife says, "If they eat with us, we feel good." I believe that they believe these rats have special capacities, that they are the reincarnations of those who in past lives lived as humans, and that caring for these rats is a sacred duty. They also believe that by observing and performing these duties they will be more likely to be rewarded in their own next (reincarnated) life, though I am not sure that this element of self-interest in salvation undercuts the fundamental attractiveness to me of their ethical imperative.

Yet there is something troubling to me here as well in this discourse, so remote from Charles River, so otherwise attuned to the sensibility I want to call my own.²⁰ They honor the rats of the temple, yes. They serve almost selflessly, giving themselves over to bodily entwinement with the rats in ways that no one else in the world can imagine. And yet. And yet I wonder if Deshnoke is far enough from Wilmington. In both cases, it is not clear to me that the uniqueness of the rats in front of them is much on their minds. In Wilmington the rats are soldiers, conscripted in a war they did not start and which they cannot win, and they serve in this army only as stand-ins for the humans who run the tests.²¹ In Deshnoke the rats are valued because they are the human offspring of Karni

http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=rat+temple&oq=rat+temple&gs_l=youtube.3...0.0_0.4528122.0.0.0.0.0.0.0...0.0...1ac..11.youtube

¹⁹ Though perhaps I should not be so skeptical – I have as much firsthand evidence of animal testing's effectiveness as I do the claims of these mystics.

²⁰ In the final version of this essay I will also discuss another element of disturbance in this discourse: for many Indians this temple is seen as an embarrassment, as another sign of the "backwardness" of a social system that neglects human welfare in favor of antiquated religious practices. For these "progressive" Indians there is something perverse (and orientalist) about my attraction to the Rat Temple.

²¹ This was not always the case – Adolf Meyer's original rat subjects were used to show the differences between various kinds of mammalian life rather than as the normalized standard

Mata – were they not specifically related to her they would have no special value. In both cases, in Massachusetts and Rajasthan, the rats aren't really animals at all. Their rat-ness is lost in a web of analogies that binds them tightly with their human observers (indeed, who else but humans have been crafting these discourses?), but which also robs them of any distinctness as creatures worthy of respect. In both the lab and the temple the rat is not a rat, though in the one case this leads to a somewhat freer existence than the other. Still: is this the best we can do?

One Two Three

There is a third discourse I want to investigate. Perhaps you have seen this discourse already on the horizon. I see it now, though when I started this project I honestly did not see it. Do you believe me when I say that? I would hope that you do, though I cannot expect that you take it on faith. But now I finally see that this third discourse, my own discourse of rats, needs my explicit attention.

I see that what I have been doing here is something uncomfortably close to what I have seen at Charles River and Karni Mata, though I did not see this previously. In both Wilmington and Deshnoke, the tenders of rats have claimed that rats can, in some significant sense, save us. The rats of CRL save Bernard, for example, from the ravages of Alzheimer's,²² while those at Karni Mata save the pious from suffering (both in this life and subsequent lives). But what have I been asking of the rats of my own discourse, those culled from the archives of a laboratory company and sets of tourist videos? Have I not also enlisted these rats, now my rats, in a kind of salvific quest? What do I want from my rats? I suppose I am not entirely sure, perhaps because I want many things from them, or perhaps because I simply don't know what I want from them. But I *do* want them in an army (of sorts), a revolutionary discursive army that can begin to overturn the cyclopean structures of global biocapital. I, like the descendants of Karni Mata and the researchers at CRL, want my rats to save my culture, my civilization, from the things we do in the name of salvation. I want them to save me.

Is this a problem? Is soteriology the problem? Or, better said, is this a problem of salvation? Should we (in all three discourses) wonder why we need rats to save us, variously, from the ravages of the medical body, from the pangs of death, from the horrors of the scientific imagination? Is it that we silence rats? That we fail to hear their cries, in labs and in sewers, and in alleys? Or is the problem something closer to Foucault's observations on the Victorian discourse of sexuality? Do we not, far from silencing rats, instead make them speak in a cacophonous glossolalia? So many rat discourses, so many ways to make them save us, from the laboratory partners/Christs, to the "pests" of the sewer, to the saviors of Karni Mata, to the ambiguous status of rats in this essay in front of you. Is it our silencing that is the problem, or is it the forced incitement to speak (and save), to keep speaking to us when the rats know neither the language of the question nor the reason for their enlistment?

I am entangled in this web as surely as Charles River, though I do not own or profit from rats in any very direct sense. But I wonder if Jacques Derrida's musings on

analog for humans. See Cheryl Logan's "The Legacy of Adolf Meyer's Comparative Approach: Worcester Rats and the Strange Birth of the Animal Model," *Integrative Physiological & Behavioral Science* October-December 2005 (40:4), 169-181.

²²http://www.criver.com/SiteCollectionImages/HCI%20Posters/Poster%20PDFs/cr_o_bernard_poster.pdf

eating animals and Donna Haraway's reflections on killing animals are an appropriate response, are "enough" when it comes to our relations with rats. Haraway is provoked by Derrida's claim that simply becoming vegetarian is not a sufficient response to the human/animal conundrum, since we must all eat in some way, like it or not. Derrida's response is to say that perhaps the best we can hope for is "eating well," since we cannot simply step outside of "carnophallogocentrism" (a structuralist statement if there ever was one).²³ Haraway says that while we may long to live in purity, without killing, "there is no way to eat and not to kill, no way to eat and not to become with other mortal beings to whom we are accountable, no way to pretend innocence and transcendence or a final peace...killing well is an obligation akin to eating well."²⁴ Her tentative recommendations on "killing well" with respect to laboratory rats (she accepts their deaths as useful, though does not justify this on any ontological ground that separates human from animal) include "a trainer to enhance the lives of subjects...good human child care...lab people having to pass a positive-methods training proficiency test and biobehavioral ecology test for the species they work with in order to keep their jobs or obtain approval for their research."²⁵ While Haraway's cautions against the fetishization of purity (and ethical puritanism, either by "human exceptionalists" or their animal rights opponents) are well-taken, it strikes me that her willingness to break down boundaries between animal and human is vitiated by a yet-unspoken puritanism. Why, if the borders are so porous, if the separation between us and them is so ungrounded (and she explicitly says that we are not separated by a bright line that separates "them" as "killable" versus "us" as not-killable), does she not ever contemplate replacing the rats in the laboratory with humans (at least on occasion)? Would that not be truer to her stated mission of enacting "shared suffering"?

As with CRL, I do not have a definitive argument to refute or defeat Haraway. It is, rather, that I remain haunted by questions that I can barely formulate, let alone begin to adequately answer. Is Karni Mata's temple a sign of the way forward, or is it simply the obverse of our scapegoating of the rat – the one place in the world where their sacrifice is not permitted – that shows, elicits, provokes, via the horror and fascination felt by the gawkers and believers alike, the need to sacrifice the other rats, the Charles River rats? There is something about the practices of those who tend the rats in Deshnoke, like Jetudin and his wife, that I find deeply attractive, even compelling. Their act of breaking bread with the rats shatters, in the most gentle way possible, the taboos around eating in the proximity of "the dirty" one, the one who must be excluded in order to keep "us" safe. The fact that no instances of plague have been recorded in the six hundred year history of the temple do not seem to allay these fears, since even animal rights advocates whom I know admit to feeling "squeamish" while watching the videos of the temple rats. But Jetudin's wife says, "If they eat with us, we feel good," and Davidon (sp?) makes sure that he eats only after the rats have taken the first bites of the meal. Is it simplistic that I want to see in these small acts the harbingers of a revolution?

²³ Jacques Derrida (with Jean-Luc Nancy), "'Eating Well,' or the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida," in *Who Comes After the Subject*, edited by Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy, Routledge, New York, NY (1991), pp. 96-119.

²⁴ Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN (2008), pp. 295-296.

²⁵ Haraway (2008), pp. 89-90.

They are quite literally impossible practices, from the standpoint of the United States or Canada, because the sharing of food with rats in a public establishment (not to mention the mandatory shedding of shoes, allowing visitors to walk through rat feces and urine) violates numerous health codes. Almost anything is licit so long as it can be framed through the term of “health,” and no amount of liberal toleration will brook the mixing of the alimentary and the rodent. So opening such a temple in the North American context would indeed be a small, but revolutionary step, since it would actually require some substantial alterations in both legal and political institutions in order to exist at all.

Does the Karni Mata temple serve as the exception that proves the rule, or is it the Saturnalia where rat and human roles are reversed (but this time in truth, rather than the hypocritical propaganda of the Charles Rivers of the world)? But can Saturnalia ever be a harbinger of revolution? Can I invoke Karni Mata as an act of radical remembrance, as a sign that shows us that traditions long-since thought obsolete have a stubborn purchase in the 21st century? Can a 14th century bard-poet –prophetess like Karni Mata, who resisted the god of Death by challenging conventions of human/animal relations (and who also held sovereign political power to account in the process), still have some exemplary status?

I also wonder about my own attraction to Karni Mata, and whether it partakes of a certain orientalism. There are examples of taboo-breaking love for rats in my own immediate context (in America and Canada), as the numerous “pet” rat videos on youtube.com attest, but it was not until nearing the end of this draft that it occurred to me to look at these videos. They are touching and endearing (and often awkward and perhaps cringe-worthy, at least the “rat trick” genre of videos), and I see many of the same quotidian-cum-revolutionary concatenations of proximity, affect, the shared feast, and taboo-violation that I find in Deshnoke.²⁶ There are important differences as well, of course, since the pet rats are not alleged to be objects of religious veneration, nor are they thought to be the literal reincarnations of deceased relatives. Yet for all the importance of the secular/sacred divide, the similarities are multiple and profound, since among temple-tenders as well as pet-owners there is a shared discourse of human-rat kinship that claims the rats as children (*kabas*, at Deshnoke), with no scare quotes needed. I want to say that my fascination with the Karni Mata rats has intellectual roots that do not truck in the exotic and Othering, that stems from the explosive potential that serving sacred rats portends, but I cannot say that my longing to travel mentally to dusty Deshnoke is a temptation without an underside.

But what is remarkable, regardless of the questions surrounding my relation to Karni Mata, is the way that publicity (by which I mean the condition of being-in-public) there functions in conjunction with affect, corporeality, and authority, in order to secure the temple’s rats an enduring presence in a world that is often inhospitable to their existence. The temple stands open, out in public, and invites the curious of all sorts to enter and experience these rats, the children of the goddess. This publicity grants equality to the pious and impious onlooker alike, but on the condition that all must de-shoe themselves to enter the temple grounds: you must bare your soles in order to bear your soul, so to speak. But by taking off your shoes you becomes enmeshed in the gummy, corporeal, fecal reality of life with rats, and so to experience the rats even as a

²⁶ See, for example: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AMwwOEH5A7s> ; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zP6Kh6N8a7k>

gawker you must also confront the visceral feeling of disgust at walking through rat waste, as the feces and urine actually become, through their adhesion, a part of your body. Karni Mata changes bodies, creating new surfaces (probably unwanted sticky surfaces, to be sure), as the price for admitting the eyes of the tourist: “look, you may,” the temple says, “but you cannot look without also feeling, without also allowing us to become a part of *you*. You have encroached on our space, and for that we are grateful...but we also will now encroach on you.” Perhaps I am overlaying too much on the simple practice of taking off one’s shoes (you have to do this as a visitor at my home as well, and I claim no such radical practice for my domicile), but I am tempted to hope that there is a something transferable about the way that publicity can link with “forced” inter-corporeality to create new dispositions of animal-human kinship, even filiation. And for this to occur, in spite of reservations about Karni Mata as exception-proving-rule, the temple must stand out as a something of a circus sideshow (in order to attract the transgressive desires of the uninitiated).

Perhaps the common talk of children-rats is the key to finding a better means of sifting through the various salvific discourses of the rat. In Deshnoke and North American homes alike rats are kin, and while the rats of Charles River may be claimed to be heroes or saviors, they aren’t children and no one shares their meals. These child-rats invite a kind of a queer kinship, a miscegenation between lines that are normally not crossed, lines that usually only come together at points of frictional contact rather than parallel lines of affinity.²⁷

I come back in the end to Donna Haraway and her distinction between satisfaction and indigestion, and her contention that the problem is that indigestion – the recognition that others with whom we must share this earth will disagree with us over fundamental matters of living and killing – always risks ruining our common meals.²⁸ To live together with other human and nonhumans is to learn to manage indigestion around killing, rather than trying to find a transcendent state in which all are satisfied. This is a wise formulation, I would concede, but I am troubled by what I will tentatively call a failure of the utopian imagination. We may be giving up on satisfaction, on the common meal with our kin (however we queerly define that), too quickly, perhaps because we linger too longingly over our indigestion. We like to pick at our food, but this habit of dining is perhaps the ethical habit to challenge.

PS. There are a number of additions needed to “flesh out” sections of this essay, and I welcome comments both at this level (e.g. the “Second Discourse” requires more detail), as well as remarks or criticism at the more theoretical level (e.g. this is a stylistic nightmare; why not just write a more conventional piece that foregrounds its thesis? etc.)

²⁷ I also wonder about the separation of heroes from kin, and why it is so easy to elevate a hero but then soon after scapegoat them. Giorgio Agamben’s *Homo Sacer* is one reflection on the connection between the savior and the scapegoat; Rene Girard’s *Violence and the Sacred* is another. Perhaps we really *do* need to get rid of our fetish for heroes, not just for our own sake but for theirs as well: “No more heroes – only children!”

²⁸ See “Parting Bites: Nourishing Indigestion,” in *When Species Meet*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN (2008), pp. 285-301.