The World of Wolves: Lessons about the Sacredness of the Surround, Belonging, the Silent Dialogue of Interdependence and Death, and Speciocide

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This essay details wolves sense of their surround in terms of how wolves perceptual acuities, motor abilities, daily habits, overriding concerns, network of intimate social bonds, and relationship to prey give them a unique sense of space, time, belonging with other wolves, memorial sense, imaginative capacities, dominant emotions (of affection, play, loyalty, hunger, etc.), communicative avenues, partnership with other creatures, and key role in ecological thriving. Wolves are seen to live within a vast sense of aroundness and closeness to aspects of their surround (compared to humans), a highly charged intimacy and cooperation with other wolves, and a caring and non-aggressive attitude that goes beyond the pack, despite their loyalty and defense of territory. The cultural myths and history that absurdly demonize the wolf are explored in their self-righteous attempts to exterminate wolves, which I call "speciocide" and probe for projections of human viciousness. The supposed rapaciousness of wolves is re-examined by expanding Barry Lopez's sense of the silent dialogue of death with other creatures to be reconsidered as a kind of respect, assertion of vitality, recognition of mortality, and cooperation.

I. Entering the World of Wolves

A wolf might cock its ears to hearken to the far distant sound of another pack of wolves, gathered for a few minutes of howling together into the winds beneath the gathering black sky of early night in their moments of joining side by side before dispersing for a night of hunting. The wolf might even hear them from across several valleys and forest stands.[1] The distant singing—and it can be rightly called song in its haunting, dynamic flow of differing notes—might

1. Robert H. Busch, *The Wolf Almanac: A Celebration of Wolves and Their World, New and Revised* (Guilford: The Lyons Press, 2007), 15–16. It is noted that wolves hear at

Environmental Philosophy 5 (2), 69–91.

communicate the presence of the caribou coming down from the north[2] or perhaps be expression of glee in adding to the echoing power of playing into the minor chord dissonances among the voices, the sound that singing wolves prefer to that of a harmonized blending.[3] The wolf as it listens to the other pack may also smell the far distant creatures, particularly if they are downwind. Researchers have estimated that wolves' sense of smell is "up to a hundred times more sensitive than that of man"[4] and some ethologists have claimed wolves are "ten thousand times more sensitive than humans to certain odors."[5] Perhaps the wolf smells at this moment a cow moose with its calves taking a drink a mile and a half away, as wolves have been observed to do from airplanes, catching the scent, stopping short, pointing stiffly upward, touching noses and wagging tails (Mech, 15). Although wolves have vision comparable to humans, their peripheral vision and ability to detect motion is more acute, and their night vision is far superior, given that they have a ninety-five per cent ratio of retinal rods to cones (Busch, 35–36). Their sense of the "around world" (the scope of things and events to which they are related), even at night, would move towards distant horizons of detecting motion, smells, and sounds. If we begin to conceive of them through the unity of perceptual body and surround suggested by the work of Merleau-Ponty on human perception and its overlaps with animality (and according to other phenomenological perspectives and even Buddhist and Taoist perspectives), this "greater body" would extend in its reverberations over a vast area.

Indeed, what seems most common to humans and animals is that our bodies are ways into the world, enmeshed with others of our species and other species, and that embodiment means to be interwoven with a surround, whether human or animal. As Merleau-Ponty compellingly articulated the body as "lived body," as a portion of the fabric of the world, but one that is torn away from seamlessness with it, it is inseparably a part and yet is at a distance. Perceiving is not a sensing across a chasm, but is rather a "certain possession of

least sixteen times better than humans and can hear as far as six miles away in the forest and ten miles on the open tundra.

2. Farley Mowat, *Never Cry Wolf: The Amazing True Story of Life Among Artic Wolves* (New York; Little, Brown and Company, 1963), 130–2. The Inuit friend of Mowat, Ootek, a shaman in training, claimed he could tell the wolves were communicating the movement, direction, and location of the caribou, and he and his cousin went to hunt the caribou at that spot and found them there.

3. Busch, 58–59. He cites reports of Lois Crisler in *Artic Wild*, who wrote "wolves avoid unison singing; they like chords," and Brandenberg in *White Wolf: Living with an Artic Legend*, who wrote that "when two packmates hit the same note, they change pitch until discord is reestablished."

4. L. David Mech, *The Wolf: The Ecology and Behavior of an Endangered Species* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1970), 15.

5. Marc Bekoff, *Minding Animals: Awareness, Emotions, and Heart* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 23.

the world by my body, a certain gearing of my body to the world."[6] We have the world and the world has us as embodied beings, or in his later language, as perceivers, we are of the "flesh of the world" [*la chair du monde*] with humans and surround "interlaced" [*entrelacs*].[7] When Merleau-Ponty worked out how humans were primordially of the same stuff of the world that allows for both touching and being touched, for seeing and being seen, as an emergence from within a matrix of sentience, he realized that in becoming enfolded with the unfolding of this perceptual thickness, humans were also enfolded within themselves and within the world of other humans, objects, and creatures of the natural world. He posed this question as a wondering assertion:

> Why would not the synergy exist among different organisms, if it is possible within each? Their landscapes interweave, their actions and passions fit together exactly: this is possible as soon as we no longer make belongingness to one same 'consciousness' the primordial definition of sensibility, and as soon as we rather understand it as the return of the visible upon itself, a carnal adherence of the sentient to the sensed and of the sensed to the sentient. (*Visible*, 142)

If the human sense of ourselves comes back to us from perceptual vectors emerging from the world, instead of emanating from a central source called "consciousness," then there can be a folding over and enfolding among species of animals, including the human and animal.

An analogous kind of being immersed in the surround and yet having a certain distance from it can be seen in the idea of the animal's *Umwelt* first articulated by Jakob von Uexküll, the founder of ethology. For Uexküll, the organism was not separable from its "around world," its environs. Von Uexküll's idea of the *Umwelt* as interpreted by Merleau-Ponty (which differs from Heidegger's[8]) allows us to see that, in animals with more developed nervous systems, there is a behavioral grasp of the world, "an opening" to the surround.[9] Merleau-Ponty means that the animal is not seamlessly immersed in the surround, driven by its forces, but that the developed system of apprehension gives it a

6. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), 250.

7. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968): "*Flesh of the world* . . . That means that my body is made of the same flesh as the world (it is a perceived), and moreover that this flesh of my body is shared by the world, *reflects* it, encroaches upon it and it encroaches upon the world," 248.

8. For a discussion of von Uexküll's notion of the "around world" [*Umwelt*] of animals and Merleau-Ponty's and Heidegger's differing interpretations of it, in my recent book, *Humans, Animals, Machines: Blurring Boundaries* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 28–48.

9. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Nature*, trans. Robert Vallier (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003), 167, 170–71.

"space," a "resistance," so that it is not swallowed by the environs, but rather is enmeshed—caught up in it and yet at some distance from it. In these animals such as wolves, the *Umwelt* allows a back and forth, a responsiveness and a meshing such that "the world is possessed by the animal." The animal has a keen sense of some aspects of the surround, as if they are "distilled" by the animal's sensing, which in "differentiating sensorial givens, can respond to them by fine actions" (*Nature*, 171). The smell of moose or the motion of mice have a perceptual intensity for the wolf that we cannot experience as humans. They respond to beckonings more intensely. Yet, in being open to the surround as from within an enlarged body, human and animal overlap (in what Merleau-Ponty called "interanimality"). However, the animal opens its own "field of action," with "its specific temporality and spatiality" that differs from the human (*Nature*, 173). As we are with other humans but more radically, we are open together to the surround and its ways of being registered in sensibility, yielding overlapping dimensions, and yet there are important differences in sensibility. For humans, within the depth of perception, the senses are inseparably meshed with not only emotion, memory and imagination, which have analogous dimensions in animals, but also with conceptual, linguistic, and abstract articulations, yielding a different matrix. Human and animal fields of action share some imperatives and also differ widely.

For the wolf, who hears and smells over great distances and has peripheral vision with a hair-trigger sensitivity enfolding its more central visual focus, we can only imagine being immersed in an expansiveness of emplacement and a closeness of the far that dwarfs the human sensorial register. If animal is *anchored* in what it perceives as also being a perspective *on itself* in the dynamics of perception as articulated by Merleau-Ponty, its body returns to itself from far-flung places. The banks of the river far upstream and the edge of the forest downwind an hours trot away must have the feel of being under its skin and in its nostrils and heard within the spine in a way humans might feel about the rather small expanse of the size of their yard where we might lie in a hammock or the becoming permeated by the sensed clearing in the woods in which we have stopped to rest, or maybe about the room upstairs where I hear my spouse stirring or smell cooking from the kitchen. Bachelard's "murmurings among things" would be for wolves a vast chorus stretching outward. Barry Lopez, who has observed wolves and integrated the known facts about wolves, shares with his reader an imagined trek of the wolf in the late afternoon:

> He moves along now at the edge of a clearing. The wind coming down-valley surrounds him with a river of odors, as if he were a migrating salmon. He can smell ptarmigan and deer droppings. He can smell willow and spruce and the fading sweetness of fireweed. Above, he sees a hawk circling, and farther south, lower on the horizon, a flock of sharp-tailed sparrows going east. He senses through his pads with each step the dryness of the moss beneath his feet, and the ridges of old tracks, some of his own. He hears the sound his feet make. He hears the occasional movement of deer mice and voles. Summer food.[10]

In an opening through the smell of things—logs, scat, flowers, ravens—and the resounding of the heard—mice rustling, brooks gurgling, the muted pads of other members of the pack—within its resonating body, the surround of many miles moves through the wolf as notes in a melody of its own felt sense of its unfurling life in the cool, dappled afternoon light. This formulation echoes the phrase that Merleau-Ponty finds most telling in von Uexküll's idea of the *Umwelt* when von Uexküll refers to "the unfurling of an *Umwelt* as a melody that is singing itself" (*Nature*, 173). This singing for either wolf or human takes up the songs of the surround, but the wolf hearkens with a sensitivity that stems from the acuity of its immersion in the prereflective.

This breadth of the lived surround felt as sinews of the body and as sensing, expressive filaments running through the myriad beings of the surround into which one is woven would also be traced in the wolves' kinesthetic sense. The human sense of world stems from our kinesthetic paths we inscribe around us, and so it should also be for wolves in our "*Ineinander* with animality" in which perceptual structures are a "being before reason, [in which] humanity is another corporeity" (*Nature*, 208). As Erwin Straus stated in *The Primary World of the Senses*, "Just as sight, hearing, touch, and taste are interrelated, so is sensing as bound in an *inner* connection to vital, living movement."[11] The way we move through the world structures the way the world means, and the wolf is always on the move. As David Mech states, "There are few other mammals that on a day to day basis roam as widely as the wolf." According to an old Russian proverb that Mech quotes "the wolf is kept fed by his feet" (Mech, 149). The wolf is able to trot at a rapid clip in a manner which is fairly effortless, and it can be sustained hour after hour, at a pace of five miles per hour (Busch, 71). The northern wolves who live on tundra where prey is spread out will typically roam twenty miles from the pack and then return in a night's hunting for a 40 mile daily jaunt (Mech, 150). Even in the more southern forested locales where prey is more concentrated, a wolf will typically travel fifteen to thirty miles per day (Mech, 160). It is estimated that wolves spend at least eight to ten hours per day on the move (Lopez, 25). When the entire pack is on the move in the winter, they will also typically cover twenty miles per day. As Robert Busch puts it, "the wolf is made for running" (Busch, 71). When pursuing their prey, they can run at least at twenty-five miles per

10. Barry Holstun Lopez, *Of Wolves and Men* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1978), 11.

11. Erwin Straus, *The Primary World of the Senses* (Toronto: Collier-Macmillan Co., 1963), 233, or as Merleau-Ponty put it, our bodies being "our general medium for having a world," a "motor space" is more than the place through which we move, but rather "through the study of motility is a new meaning of the word 'meaning' (*Phenomenology*, 144, 146).

hour if not more, and although the chase usually is a series of these sprints, if necessary it can be kept up for miles (Busch, 72). With these creatures who are active all day and night, except when in the summer the heat makes them less active, and are always on the move, it should not be a surprise that their home ranges—the square miles about which they typically wander—can range from a lowest size of twenty square miles in a tightly forested area to more than a thousand square mile area in the tundra region (Mech, 86). If the wolves have a sense of having inscribed upon the surround the sense of their movement, then again we find them having a sense of interconnection with a spread out spatiality.[12] The wolf has this enormous expanse for its "lived body" as incorporating its surround taken in through both the senses and its motility, a space of trotting flow, dynamism, and variegated in myriad ways.

The wolf also sleeps upon the earth. They have an underfur, besides the fur that is more apparent, that makes it possible for them to be insulated at temperatures that many animals could not endure (Mech, 17). They sleep on the snow at 40 degrees below zero without any shelter either around them or covering them, and seeming to relish the cold. The pack lies in a group spread across the landscape. The Dutchers would watch them at these temperatures "curled up in the snow with noses tucked on their tails, they slept comfortably" (Dutcher and Dutcher, 20). Even though the heat does make them more uncomfortable, they still find an open spot and lie upon the ground, spread out a few yards from each other, upon the earth (Dutcher and Dutcher, 106). This literal resting upon the open ground each night, their sinews and weight letting go into the earth, would allow them the sense of being immersed in the surround as in a rhythmic fusion with its seasons and changes.

I wanted to open this meditation with the reader gaining a sense of some specifics of the perceptual or "lived world" of wolves, with imagined sensorial brushings of that world upon the reader's body, before framing conceptually how one might be able to enter the life-world of the wolf and what that might mean. I agree with Marc Bekoff's approach in *Minding Animals* that he calls "deep ethology" and its practice: "As a deep ethologist, following the tradition of ecopsychology, I as the 'seer,' try to become the 'seen.' I try to step into animals' sensory and locomotor worlds to discover what it might be like to be

12. It is true that humans in the twenty-first century do have a lived sense of spatiality that may include cities in Europe, Asia, and South America, as part of the sense of a North American's surround, or of tropical rain forests in Costa Rica and deserts in the Middle East, since we jet about the planet. However, these lines of felt interconnection are weaker, vaguer and fit into my sense of "around space" with puzzling gaps and disjunctions, given that we haven't moved among these spaces in a directly embodied way, but were miraculously "plunked down" after encasement in a distancing machine that moves through the skies in Zenoian detachment and displacement. The paths we walk and run every day are etched in our felt sense of the surround in another, more deeply felt way.

a given individual, how they sense their surroundings, and how they behave and move about in certain situations" (Bekoff, 11). Given the Merleau-Pontian notion of reversibility, we know that part of our everyday perception is the perception from the vantage of the trees around us or the birds above us, or more relevant to this essay, a resonance to the wolves distantly fleeing about us—seeing, hearing, smelling, and otherwise sensing in a way *as if* from their perspectives, not as clearly, not nearly as forcefully as our human and cultural ways, but as echoes and reverberations within our perception. It is the tracings of these reverberations within the perceptual matrix of the world that can give us an access point to the experience of wolves. Bekoff's approach and marvelous descriptions are at odds with the ontological perspective of ethology that still thinks in objective categories, but given the ontology of Merleau-Ponty, make sense within a non-dualistic framework. I will endeavor in this essay to provide this framework in drawing upon the ethologists' and other scientists' insights into the physical capacities, the sensual realm, the affective life, the social structures, the behavior, and the history of the human involvement with wolves.

Any philosopher, psychologist, ethologist or other thinker who endeavors to articulate the experience of wolves or other animals runs into the objections of many scientists, philosophers, and others within our culture that such experience is not accessible to humans and any attempt to describe it is just a projection of human ways of experiencing onto the animal in question, so-called "anthromorphizing." In the confines of this essay, I would rather give a description of the wolves' world and not just another lengthy argument against this charge of "anthropomorphizing."[13] Instead, I would like to suggest that these objections to any possibility of describing animal experience are what Bekoff labels (taking the term from Frans de Waal) as "anthropodenial." It is one of my underlying purposes in writing this essay to have you, the reader, consider whether "anthropodenial"—as the cutting off of a palpable interconnection with other species—has not been very destructive to the lives of animals and allowed humans to unleash their "shadow side" upon them—in the Jungian

13. I am assuming in this essay that we not only have access to animal worlds through perceptual depths, but can use a sense of Bachelard's "material imagination" that is productive, moving beyond one's past experience, to poetically and sensorially sound the given facts of a situation for their reverberations that give new insights. This is in distinction to famous arguments like Thomas Nagel's essay of 1974, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" that have fueled skeptics who think only categorical reason can bridge the gap with animal's experience, an impossibility since what makes an animal's perspective unique are aspects outside of universal rational categories and who think that imagination can only be "reproductive," recombining what we have already ourselves experienced. For a lengthy discussion of these issues, see chapter six of my book, *Humans, Animals, Machines: Blurring Boundarie*, 69–82.

sense of those characteristics in us with which we refuse to identify, that we project onto others, and that then enact in supposed "response" to them.

If we are of the flesh of the world, then our interconnection with other species is part of the depth of our perception, and anthropodenial is the detaching from part of our own perceptual emplacement in the world. We might see that this detachment is a grave matter that has led to horrific violence in what I would like to call "speciocide," the massacre of various species. I have coined this term "speciocide," because genocide refers to the massacre of a family, tribe, or race (*génos*), whereas as we will see with wolves, humans have sometimes seen *an entire animal species as deserving to be annihilated.* There is no way to think about the lives of wolves, the nature of their experience, and the history of their relations with humans without considering the nature of speciocide in general and specifically in regard to wolves, since their vicious and almost complete extermination is a very important and disturbing dimension of the story of wolves and of human beings.

II. The World of Wolves as the Belonging with Other Wolves and the Natural World

To enter the wolf's world is go beyond the merely sensory feel of its surround, for like humans, each percept is lined with an affective warp to its woof, that also delimits those beings and objects in its surround that matter to it, that are part of its relational map, because they are what it cares about, fears, dreads, delights in, hungers for, seeks reassurance from; they offer comfort, provide tranquility, or are the object of hostility or even curiosity. As Mark Bekoff, who as an ethologist demands stringent evidence for such assertions, says in his book *Minding Animals* of his work with wolves, coyotes, primates, and other species of mammals: "The emotional states of many animals, especially mammals, are easily recognizable" (Bekoff, 105). Anyone can have a sense of their emotions by inferring from the shape of their face, its expressions, eye movement and size, muscle tone, posture, gait, vocalizations, gaze quality, and other gestures, Bekoff comments. This reminds us of Merleau-Ponty's statement about emotion as constitutive of being-in-the-world with the exception that Merleau-Ponty feels these emotions are not inferred but *directly perceived*:

> Since emotion is not a psychic, internal fact but rather a variation in our relations with others and the world which is expressed in our bodily attitude, we cannot say that only the signs of love or anger are given to the outside observer and that we understand others indirectly by interpreting these signs: we have to say they are directly manifest to us as behavior.[14]

If we are of the flesh of the world and emotions are relational ties among its beings, effulgent within our postures, gestures, tone of vocalizations, and so

14. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Nonsense,* trans. Hubert and Patricia Dreyfus (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 53.

forth, then within our own embodiment is a sense of others' bonds with the world, both human and animal.

The affective world of wolves has seemed apparent to scientific observers. According to the testimony of the famous naturalist, Adolf Murie, who spent long periods observing wild wolves in Alaska: "The strongest impression remaining with me after watching wolves on numerous occasions was their friendliness. The adults were friendly towards each other, and were amiable toward the pups" (Mech, 4). This assessment is echoed by David Mech, foremost authority concerning wolves, who reports that "Probably the creature's strongest personality trait is its capacity for making emotional attachments to other individuals" (Mech, 4). Indeed, Robert Busch, in explaining how vital a sense of belonging through emotional affection is to wolves' well-being, cites wolf biologist John Theberge, according to whom "their social bonding and caregiving behavior are second only to those of humans and other social primates" (Busch, 47). To fathom the world of wolves is to explore how these deep bonds are manifest and how they structure its sense of the surround. In contradistinction to those who cry "anthropomorphism" when we describe animal emotion, if we have an immediate prereflective apprehension of the sense of these gestures, then we are actively denying what we know, actively cutting off interspecies ties that reverberate with us, by raising this seemingly sober, "rational" objection—hence the justification for de Waal's term, "anthropodenial."

When we see that wolves remain in packs of usually around seven or eight wolves, and that the so-called "lone wolf" is the case in only about 15% of wolves observed, we are led to believe that being part of a pack is vital to wolves (Busch, 55). When the Dutchers suggest that wolves that are not part of a pack should rather be called "dispersers," because for some reason they have been driven out of a pack to seek a mate, for lack of food, or from some discord, have been dispersed and expend their energy to find or start another pack, and do not thrive on their own, maybe we can trust our apprehension of the wolves' affective relations.[15] It is true that as an animal that weighs about 95–100 pounds for males or 80–85 pounds for females and measures from 5–6.5 feet from nose to tail tip for males and from 4.5–6.0 feet from nose to tail tip for females, trying to take down a bull moose that weighs 1250 pounds or even a cow moose at 850 pounds or an average white-tailed deer buck of 240 pounds or a caribou of an average 300 pounds, it is a "survival strategy of sustaining each individual by performing as a team" (Mech, 11, 205, 220, 228; Dutcher and Dutcher, 58). Wolves are the top predator in many food chains and being the only animals in North America that hunt as a team makes this possible (Dutcher and Dutcher, 80). However, this practical advantage does not negate the fact that "when they reunite, their tails wagging loosely to-and-fro and individuals whine and jump about" (Bekoff, 109). They lick each others, faces,

15. Jim and Jamie Dutcher, *Living with Wolves* (Seattle: The Mountaineers Books, 2005), 60.

hug each other, nuzzle, and wag. Nor does the practical advantage explain why when an older pack member broke its jaw, others brought it regurgitated food until it was healed (Dutcher and Dutcher, 104), or why pack members brought an arthritic wolf food, waited periodically for an injured member even when in the midst of a hunt, or feed old wolves (Busch, 53). The best explanation as Mech puts it is that the pack is held together by "affectional ties" (Mech, 46); or the Dutchers put it, after living for six years in an enclosed tract of wilderness area in a tent observing a wolf pack, "Wolves develop trust in one another from lifelong bonds that reinforce a sense that they belong to a particular family and a specific pack" (Dutcher and Dutcher, 58). Wolves care about each other, trust each other, and thrive with a sense of belonging. No doubt, these are the traits we see in our dogs, who are descended from the first wolves to cohabit with humans twelve thousand years ago (Mech, 29).

A wolf belongs to an extended family group of a breeding pair, their offspring, perhaps another generation of offspring, and another wolf or two. When members are gone from the pack, especially for an extended time, other members have been observed pacing agitatedly until they return. A death is felt as a loss to all of them, as the following story told by Jamie Dutcher attests when one of the females of the pack died, having been killed by a mountain lion:

> For the six weeks following her death, the pack did not play. What had been a daily occurrence stopped altogether. When the wolves passed through the aspen grove where she had been killed, they became quiet, their tails drooped noticeably. When they howled, Jim noted that the sound had an eerie quality, very different from the normal riotous pack rallies. Jim could only come to one conclusion: the wolves were in mourning. (Dutcher and Dutcher, 104)

Mourning indicates feeling a loss, and this indicates the web of wolf feelings of closeness, concern, loyalty, and belonging.

Unlike the sometimes grim picture of wolves portrayed in traditional European tales, a significant portion of their time is the fun-filled, exciting time of play. Not only do the pups continually play with one another and with the adults who keep watch over them, but as the Dutchers put it, "Play is a crucial component of every stage of a wolf's life" (Dutcher and Dutcher, 88). During the day, the pack can be seen wrestling, chasing each other, jaw sparring, ambushing sleepy members, chewing on each other, and immersed in a medium of "snarls and nips, running and chasing, flipping and rolling" (Dutcher and Dutcher, 88). Despite the often-invoked "scientific framework" of seeing animals as driven by survival and practical exigency, the day-to-day existence of wolves differs from that vision: "Wolves love to play, shouldering one another, bumping bodies together, flopping tails over each other's backs, and leaping up and placing forepaws around others' necks" (Busch, 74). This is an activity entered by the wolves *after communicating their wish,* signaled by "dropping front legs into a crouch position, with smiling face and wagging tail," with the result that "adults stage mock fights, play chase, and leap on each other' (Busch, 74) The favorite game of ambushing unwary members seems akin to

what humans would call a joke. This leads an observer to comment that, "Play to a wolf . . . is not merely important as a training and regulatory device; it also exemplifies the sense of humor that makes it possible for there to be an identification with man and vice versa." We know how dogs seem to almost laugh when romping with each other or with humans, perhaps spinning wildly, pretending to attack, or ambushing us, and this is a trait that also must come from wolves.

Play not only binds wolves to each other, but with the surround. Another observer notes the play spirit is so irrepressible that even if no other wolf will respond because of being tired, there are always cones to throw, leaves to run after, or one's own tail to chase. The natural world is a playmate: "Any event can spark wolf play. Even falling snow can cause the pack to erupt in a spontaneous celebratory romp. They may chase each other or nip at a tail or a rump and they take turns being pursuer and pursued or they may just try to catch the snowflakes" (Dutcher and Dutcher, 88). Even with another species, ravens, wolves have been observed playing "chase,"—instigated by a raven who crept up to the sleeping wolf, sped away, marched back and forth in front of the wolf again, giving piercing, raucous taunts, was lunged at, escaped, and so on for twenty minutes, until the wolf got too tired to continue (Dutcher and Dutcher, 130–132; Busch, 68). Not only do affectional ties deepen in play among wolves, but with other species.

The moment with which this essay began is another sort of shared excitement and joy, the joining together before a night's hunt or at another time to howl together: "like a community sing, a howl . . . is a happy social occasion. Wolves love a howl. When it is started, they instantly seek contact with one another, fur to fur. Some wolves . . . will run from any distance, panting and bright-eyed, to join in, uttering, as they near, fervent little wows, jaws wide, hardly able to wait to sing" (Mech, 101).These moments both indicate the bonds among the pack and also a joyousness with the sheer being of those things around them in the surround, whether snow, plants, feathers, having a tail (to be chased), being able to run (in playful sprints), or being able to sing as part of long minor, modulating chords. Akin to these feelings is the curiosity of wolves, who have been reported, not just by Farley Mowat, to have been quietly observing the ethologists and wolf biologist who were searching for them in vain (Mowat, 70–71). To be curious about other creatures, but even other beings of all sorts within the environment, is to have a kind of *lived wonder*, as demonstrated by this observation: "a black wolf stood by her first patch of newly-opened dark-pink daisies, acquainting herself with them. She brushed her nose across them, raised her paw and touched them. . . . A wolf's curiosity is impersonal. It goes beyond food and fear" (Busch, 62). This is quite an image to add to our picture of the wolf, nuzzling, breathing in, and touching flowers with its paw. If wolves have striking vitality, awareness of their surround, playful enjoyment of each other and the things about them, it seems plausible

that they live in some sort of immediate wonder or appreciation of the richness of living things around them.

In quieter moments, wolves groom each other, licking each other's coats, nibbling with teeth to get things out of the fur of the other, and in doing so express affection or concern. This is also part of courtship. However, when there is a pack member injured, then "Injured wolves are intensely groomed by other pack members, providing both physical and mental comfort" (Busch, 75–76). This expression of concern is part of a matrix of communication among the members of the pack as "wolves continually communicate with each other" (Dutcher and Dutcher, 102). Wolf communication take places in body postures, tail positions, facial expressions, gestures of various sorts, continual and varied kinds of vocalizations (like whines, barks, growls, howls, whimpers, moans, etc.), and other ways. Jamie Dutcher categorizes a few of these in observing that

> When together wolves almost continuously communicate with one another with low, faint whines. A higher pitched, longer lasting whine is used in greeting or when a wolf wants something it cannot obtain. Whining is also used by submissive pack members, partnered with corresponding body posture—lowering the body and tucking in the tail—that denotes the social status. Barking indicates that a wolf is confused, agitated, or distressed. Growls accompany threats of challenges. (Dutcher and Dutcher, 114)

These vocalizations are often accompanied with gestures, including fine facial ones. The wolf community is not a mechanical synchronization of isolated units, but a group that makes its feelings, desires, fears, angers, joys, and distresses known to its partners, as well as negotiating actions together, or making invitations to others, for example, to play.

The best known feature of the pack is its social order, but it is important not to impose human structures upon it. Even though there is a "typical pack" as we have described, the size can vary greatly given many factors such as climate, topography, prey availability, etc. (Mech, 40). There is an organization where one wolf, when it is vital to the pack, will decide the direction of travel, the times to rest, whether to attack prey, how to respond to an intruder and so forth (Dutcher and Dutcher, 73). This "alpha" wolf usually eats first when devouring prey and is shown deference by other wolves in the pack who approach it with submissive postures, such as lower tail or lowered carriage, face licking, etc. What this means is that one wolf seems to be of a more confident nature and has great energy, a sense of decisiveness, or one might say "the alpha male is the most consistently highly motivated" (Dutcher and Dutcher, 74). However, it can be the case that a female wolf will be the alpha leader of a pack (Dutcher and Dutcher, 60). The females usually have their own organization with a female alpha and beta, and the female alpha will take precedence over the other dominant males.

However, it is also the case that any highly motivated wolf can effect behavior of the pack and in relaxed times "pack government seems the result of the impulses and motivation of various members" (Dutcher and Dutcher, 70). It is also the case that "if the pack hesitates, the alpha may change direction, etc." (Mech, 76). It is tempting to impose human rule governing formalities onto our idea of this fluid group of animals, but, as Barry Lopez cautions, these are projections:

> But the term *alpha*—evolved to describe captive animals—is still misleading. Alpha animals do not always lead the hunt, break trail in the snow, or eat before others do. An alpha male may be alpha only at certain times for a specific reason, and, it should be noted, is alpha at the deference of other wolves in the pack. . . . The wolf is a social animal; it depends on its survival on cooperation, not strife. Human beings, particularly in recent years, have grown accustomed to speaking of 'dominance hierarchies' in business corporations and elsewhere, and the tendency has been to want wolf packs (or troops of chimpanzees) to conform to similar molds. The social structure of a wolf pack is dynamic—subject to change, especially during the breeding season—and may be completely reversed during periods of play."[16] (Lopez, 33)

The loyalty among the members of the pack, the teamwork in hunting and raising the pups, marks their sense of affection.

Even the so-called "omega" wolf that some observers have dubbed the "scapegoat" of the pack is a vital member, often the wolf with the temperament who instigates play among the members or is least aggressive and apt to roll over or nuzzle and lick the others. But it may be a human projection to see this as an abasement or hurtful position because of our sense of human ego and self-respect. As Barry Lopez puts it, it might be less misleading to forget the word "submission" with its human neurotic overtones and call these gestures "'reassurance displays' aimed at group harmony rather than submissive whimpering at the feet of an ogre" (Lopez, 48). The Omega wolves may be last to eat, be the object of nipping, biting, pushing or even lose some fur to nips, but they are usually resourceful and "seem to be born with certain timid and submissive qualities that make them suited to the role. Although the lowest rank, the omega is nevertheless a solid position within the pack and so carries with it a sense of belonging" (Dutcher and Dutcher, 64). The wolf mentioned before as killed by a mountain lion and the cause of such grief in the other pack members was an "omega wolf" and obviously dearly cared about and mourned. What seems to be true of all wolves, whatever their role, is that "a wolf is lost

16. Lopez, 33. As Lopez implies in this statement, the behavior of captive wolves differs from wolves living freely or "wild" in their territory. Also, Lopez goes on to warn about misconstruing the sense of hierarchy in a pack of wolves: "To place a heavy emphasis on such supposed facts of behavior as 'intimidation,' 'pulling rank,' and games of psychological cruelty based on social structures is simply to confuse the tools of human analysis with the behavior of wolves" (Lopez, 33–34).

without the social context of a pack" (Dutcher and Dutcher, 60). This is not to deny that, within the pack, there are conflicts that arise or that there may be competition to become the new alpha when, for example, the present leader of the pack becomes too old to effectively fulfill this role. However, as Mech puts it, "Most conflicts, as severe as they may be, are solved through ritualistic threatening and fighting and only occasionally does the fighting cause any injuries" (Mech, 70). If only human beings could report the same about the stability of our extended families and the resolution of conflicts within social groups, and yet we label wolves as "savage" or even "rapacious"!

Two other aspects of wolf relations deserve at least a brief description to give a sense of their social world: breeding and raising the young pups. Wolves are ready to breed at twenty-two months of age. Unlike many animals, the pair have a long time of courtship, up to a year. They are often seen nuzzling, lying together, putting one of their necks on top of the other's neck, holding forepaws, leaning a head on the shoulder of the other, licking each other, rubbing their heads together, rubbing their snouts, and of course, playing (Mech, 112). According to Bekoff, they

> eventually form an exclusive unit. They also rebuff interlopers. When reuniting they greet effusively, whining and licking one another's muzzles. If another male attempts to mate with his consort, he will drive the intruder off and defend her. Likewise, the female will reject males with whom she has no interest in mating. (Bekoff, 21)

The pair stays together, unless one of them perishes. Sexually, wolf mating is also unique, as distinctive as the long and intimate courtship: "The second peculiarity in wolf breeding is the 'copulatory tie.' The male and female become physically fastened back-to-back for as much as a half hour and cannot break the tie (Mech, 47)." This sexual bond is resonant with the affectionate and intimate bond among pack members and between the breeding pair. For those who see animal behavior only in terms of the practical tasks of eating and reproducing, this long copulatory tie is puzzling, since it is not efficient and makes the pair vulnerable to being surprised by an adversary. Mech comments, "The function of this has baffled animal behaviorists" (Mech, 47). However, in Merleau-Ponty's perspective, the accidents of embodiment are taken up into a rhythm and style of life that pervades a human life and seems analogously possible in animal existence, which he calls a "preculture" (*Nature*, 176).

However, it is not only the behavior of the breeding pair that shows this closeness of bond among the wolves of the pack, but the relationship of all the members to the pups. The simple fact of this relation is "wolves are crazy about puppies" (Busch, 83). When the alpha female goes into the den that she has dug or found in the three weeks before this birthing time (Mech, 119), the pack is anxious and excited: "prior to a birth, pack members may gather at the den entrance, whining and scratching the ground" (Busch, 83). Then once the pups are born, "there is much excitement in the pack caused by the birth

of pups" (Busch, 83). Other members of the pack play with the pups, take turns disciplining the pups, and watch over and accompany the pups when the mother goes off to hunt (Dutcher and Dutcher, 84; Mech, 145). After a few weeks of breast feeding, the pups emerge from the den, and as the wolves of the pack return from the hunt, the pups touch their lips to mouths of any of the adult wolves of the pack. The adults respond by giving the pups regurgitated food that they have carried back with them from the hunt, perhaps for great distances (Mech, 48, 134). The feeding of the pups is a priority for all and "adult wolves will go hungry if necessary so that young pups may eat" (Dutcher and Dutcher, 82). Ethologists have coined the phrase "alloparental behavior" to describe this communal relationship of the pack as together parenting the offspring in calling it (Bekoff, 81). It seems evident in reading their behavior that "although, the pups typically are born to the alpha male and female, they belong to the group as a whole, as part of an extended family" (Dutcher and Dutcher, 70). The entire pack nourishes and cares for the pups.

Given this group parenting, it is fair to claim that "Few animals on earth display the same intensity of commitment to family in the collaborative care of the young" (Dutcher and Dutcher, 102). Not only do the adults feel this bond, but the relationship is reciprocal as the "pups idolize and imitate the adults," which allows them to be taught by all the members of the pack (Dutcher and Dutcher, 72). The pups are equally fond of each other, as they stay rolled up in a ball together in the back of the den for the first three weeks, and then, having emerged, spend many hours playing together (Mech, 49). Also, "indulged and adored by the adults, pups hold a special status within the pack. For a time, they are outside the pack hierarchy" (Dutcher and Dutcher, 62). Although, the pack has a certain fluidity, it is still true that "ties are year round, even if they wander off a bit in summer or winter" (Mech, 55). A wolf grows up in a web of caring and excited adults and playful littermates, and for the most part will stay with this group of wolves, mating, hunting, playing, journeying and resting together, feeling both its place in the group and a sense of belonging. There may be rough patches of competition for mating or rank in leading the pack, but these pass.

The strong bonds of affection, loyalty, care, concern, playfulness, cooperativeness, communicativeness, and trust that persist among the wolves of the pack mark their sense of the surround. This does not mean that wolves are not capable of fighting with members of other packs and injuring them, and at times even killing a trespassing nonmember of the pack in a particularly acute fight (Mech, 93). Nor does it not mean, as we will explore in the last section, that wolves are not able hunters who excitedly rip the flesh from deer, caribou, moose, or other prey animals, swallowing it in large gulps. However, what seems most significant to understanding their sense of the world is the way they treat the beings with whom they share a concerned life not only to eat and survive, but also to play and maintain their bonds. As humans, we now delegate a few of our species in the "slaughtering" industry (and their machines) to

kill the animals that we eat, as well as keeping these animals to be slaughtered in prolonged captivity in settings of psychic and physical suffering, and yet we do not take this one aspect of our existence in order to define this as our essence. Why, then, should the proficiency of jaws and teeth of wolves be taken to characterize how they enter into relationship with the world around them?

III. The Silent Conversation of Mortality, Projection of Evil, and Speciocide

In addition to observing wolves' strong capacity for affection in emotional bonding, Adolf Murie was struck by another aspect of the wolf personality: "A second characteristic of wolf personality is the animal's basic aversion to fighting" (Mech, 5). He related the anecdote of a wolf 'frantically upset" at a dog fight and breaking it up by pulling the aggressor dog by the tail off the other dog. The wolf will not attack a human being, even if the human were to take its pups from its den or take away the prey that it had hunted down and was in the midst of devouring (Mech, 292). As a matter of fact, Lee Smits, who looked over all the historical records, came to the same conclusion with previous researchers who have done this search: "no wolf, except a wolf with rabies, has been ever known to make a deliberate attack on a human being in North America" (Mech, 292). Of course, the tales often claimed otherwise.

Until the recent past, it was also the case that the wolf was the most successful mammal, except for humans, in inhabiting all habitats of North America but the tropical rain forest and arid desert (Mech, 31). Even globally, the wolf only failed to inhabit Africa (Mech, 32). It seems that for much of prehistory and even recorded history, human and wolf co-existed and helped one another as the two predators of large mammals: "Until about four hundred years ago the wolf was second only to man as the most successful and widespread mammal in North America. There is extensive evidence to show that far from being at enmity, the wolf and hunting man enjoyed globally something approaching symbiosis, whereby the existence of each benefited the existence of the other" (Mowat, vi). Wolves near human encampments were believed to have served as a warning system for humans of the approach of adversaries with the wolves' sensory acuity and tendency to communicate by howling. For many of the Native American peoples of North America, the wolf was an object of veneration for its strong loyalty and affection for its family, its skill as a hunter, and its role in maintaining the health of its prey by culling the weak, sick, and decrepit (Busch, 110–111).

As is common knowledge, however, the state of affairs between wolves and humans changed in the Medieval Ages (although scapegoating wolves is more ancient) and in North America with the arrival of European settlers: "Of the twenty-four wolf subspecies and races inhabiting North America at the beginning of the European invasion, seven are now extinct and most of the remainder are endangered. The wolf has been effectively exterminated in all

of the south-central portions of Canada, in Mexico, and in almost all of the United States south of Alaska" (Mowat, vii). To concentrate on North America, especially the United States, it is estimated that *since the first settlers arrived, two million wolves have been killed* (Dutcher and Dutcher, 148). Not only were wolves killed to the point of extinction, but they were slaughtered with a vehemence that is shocking:

> Wolves were shot, poisoned, trapped, bludgeoned, and tortured. Wolves were infected with mange and then released to spread the deadly disease across the plains. Wolves were staked down and torn apart by dogs. Wolves had their jaws shut so they could not eat, ensuring a long slow agonized death by starvation. Wolves were blown to bits by set guns or poisoned by wolf getters, devices that when bitten fired sodium cyanide into a wolf's mouth. Wolves were poisoned by the thousands by strychnine strewn carelessly across the prairies. Wolf pups were dragged from their dens and either beaten to death or shot. (Busch, 114)

Wolves were killed with a kind of zeal and self-righteousness that can only disturb anyone who knows about the ways wolves live and function within the ecosystem, and what they had to offer humans.

The settlers brought with them from Europe hostile attitudes towards wolves. The wilderness that confronted the settlers was seen as something dismally disordered and a threat to the moral order that had to be cleared and civilized (Lopez, 142–144). Of all the wild creatures within the New World, the wolf epitomized this threat. The wolf was seen as "the Devil, Red tongued, sulfur breathing and yellow eyed" (Lopez, 145). The wolf's tearing creatures limb from limb was part of its depravity, as was its attacks on the livestock the Europeans brought with them that were seen as innocent creatures. These animals were innately good and the wolf was innately evil—a murderer (Lopez, 146). Of course, the wolves were being displaced from their habitats and losing their prey to be confronted with the settler's livestock. When livestock were lost—and it is estimated that only one percent of livestock have been lost to wolves in the United States, and ninety-nine percent of farmers and ranchers in territories with wolf populations never lose any livestock to wolves (Busch, 137)—a killing campaign of many thousand wolves was sanctioned by the government of various states in return. However, their zeal went beyond practical concerns. It was felt that humans had *to wreak vengeance on behalf of the innocent animals killed by the depraved murderer.* "men felt a moral obligation, not simply that they had the right, to find the wolf and kill it" (Lopez, 146). The moral deficiency of the wolf was popularly expressed as long ago as Aesop (600 BC) and followed by centuries of tales of the wolf as the essence of avarice, greed, lust, and viciousness, followed by Medieval tales of wolves as the devil, followed by the sixteenth-century tale of Little Red Riding Hood eaten by the wolf, followed by hysteria in seventeenth-century France about the threat of werewolves as utter sinners (and hundreds of people were also

killed as werewolves), and accompanied by three centuries leading up to the 1800s of false European stories of wolves eating humans (Busch, 99–107).

The first bounty put upon wolves in the United States was passed by the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630, carrying on a European tradition that started in the 1500s in England (Busch, 115). It was followed by other states. To cite one example of these wolf-killing drives, between 1883–1918, there were 80,000 wolves killed in Montana (Busch, 116). It is interesting to see the pictures of slaughtered wolves hung up by their feet and nailed to sides of warehouses, such as the one taken in the 1960s in Minnesota (Lopez, 165): they have an eerie resonance to the pictures burned into our memories of Nazi concentration camps. Of course, the slaughter of wolves was part of a much vaster *speciocide* that reached a fevered pitch in the nineteenth-century. On the American plains, there were slaughters from 1850 to 1900 of not only wolves, but also buffalo for hides, pigeons for target practice, antelopes for backstraps, and Indian ponies to keep Native Americans poor that totaled 500 million creatures, 1 to 2 million of them wolves (Busch, 180). As Barry Lopez argues, the growing nation had to impose some control over the wolf population once their prey had been greatly diminished by the settlers and livestock kept near them, and this would entail killing some wolves, "but it didn't have to, as it did, kill every last wolf" (Lopez, 180). By 1900, the wolf became extinct in most of Europe and Eastern United States, and then gradually as the century wore on, also became extinct in other areas of the country. However, as late as the 1920s, 20,000 wolf pelts per year in Canada were taken. Even in the recent year of 2004–2005, still about 3,000 wolves per year were killed for parka trim in Canada and 700 in Alaska, as well as 452 killed by snowmobile hunters in Alaska. Humans still kill wolves for pleasure (Busch, 145).

In comparison to record of the so-called "civilized" human killing, it is instructive to turn to the wolves' manner of killing that has been represented as pure evil. Varying with the differing locations, wolves' main prey are deer, moose, caribou, elk, wild sheep of various sorts, and beaver (Mech, 173). In the summer denning period, wolves can also exert a lot of effort in catching mice (Mech, 179). However, the picture that haunts the minds of those who see the wolf as an evil creature is not that of them pouncing over and over again on little field mice, but of them ripping great chunks of flesh and organs from the body of a moose or an elk or a caribou (Mech, 185). Wolves have a capacity to eat twenty pounds of meat at a time, and their sharp teeth and powerful jaws allow them to rip large chunks of flesh from the body of the fallen prey (Mech, 181). Wolves hunt into the wind, picking up the prey's scent, and usually run them down after a series of chases (Lopez, 60; Mech, 197, 202). Barry Lopez feels that many more people would have protested the speciocide against wolves if "they could have got over the revulsion of the way wolves kill" (Lopez, 56). Wolves run alongside the prey and slash at it with their teeth, rip at its flanks and abdomen, tear at the nose and head, and either grab it by the flank or nose and throw it down, or wait until it collapses from loss of blood.

They then rip open the abdominal cavity and begin eating, even if the animal is not yet dead (Lopez, 56; Bekoff 95). Even though this may seem to be a horrific way to die, this way of killing needs to be seen in context. First of all, the prey animal probably has gone into shock with the first massive injuries and resulting blood loss, and does not feel the pain of the rest of the attack. Second, is this any more gruesome than the forced shuffle of domestic animals being prodded down shoots in a single file march, then being given a 300 volt shock to the back of the head, then hung upside down by the feet while remaining stunned, then carried along in this position until their main arteries and veins are cut by a knife in the neck, and then allowed to bleed to death?

It may well be that there is no kind way to administer a death blow to one's prey, yet savagery might consist more in the *relationship between* predator and prey or in *the way that the sacrifice of another being is carried out and used for the good of the greater web of life*, as we compare the two competing predators of large mammals—human and wolf. Human prey tends to live in conditions of confinement that involve crowding, boredom, lack of exercise, lack of normal life activities, lack of social existence, unhealthy conditions controlled by drugs, coercion, and many other causes of continual suffering. Food animals have been kept in this manner because humans have regarded other animals as not having rights or inherent dignity, and they want to make a greater profit from them. After the animal has spent its life in these conditions, the gift of its nourishment for humans is often used poorly, with much of its possible value gone to waste. This is, of course, to concentrate on the food industry and not focus on the many animals that humans have killed for pleasure, or for one small piece of their anatomy to be used in the fashion industry or for some other commodity. This is in stark contrast to the wolf, who eats every bit of its prey, with "virtually nothing" remaining, other than a few bits of hair and a few bits of bone with smaller prey, or perhaps the skull, jaw bone, a little hide, and long bones with larger prey (Busch, 95–96; Mech, 186). Wolves are very frightened of human beings, and this is a common feeling among animals (Dutcher and Dutcher, 32). They seem able to sense how we can kill them or even other humans, performing large scale massacres with little sense of how we are violating the web of life. It is also a myth that wolves enter into some sort of killing frenzy (Mech, 97). They seem restrained in the hunt, and do not rampage, but set about eating the animal they have hunted down. Humans, however, have been known to rampage in killing many animals for no apparent reason.

In looking at human killing in a larger context, it is striking that "In fact, the only animal that habitually preys upon prime, mature animals is man" (Mech, 94). The wolf by contrast is noted to prey upon the sick, infirm, aged, or incapacitated members of its prey. When carcasses of animals killed by wolves are available to be studied, the findings are that the prey had hoof disease or tuberculosis or tapeworm or botflies or other conditions that meant they were enfeebled in some way (Mech, 260). This is why the Keewatin Eskimo

have the saying, "The caribou feeds the wolf, but it is the wolf who keeps the caribou strong" (Busch, 93). Unlike the claims of many human hunters, who have blamed wolves for the loss of the hunted, wolves help maintain the vitality of the herds they hunt by culling those members who are in poor condition and would have to share the food resources, even if scarce. However, *humans* do usually go after the prime specimens, if possible. Farley Mowat relates the inland Eskimo tale of how the First Woman, borrowing from the power of the God of the Sky, created the animals from a hole in the earth, and the last one created was the caribou for the sustenance of the humans. However, the humans killed so many caribou in their prime that only the sick and weak ones were left. In response to the First Woman asking for help with this problem, the God of the Sky created the wolf to keep the caribou healthy (Mowat, 124–25). The wolf has fulfilled this function in the greater ecological balance of the surround. It can be explained mechanically and causally: the prey are either too fast or too strong to be taken down by the wolves except those that are ailing in some way. Furthermore, the prey animals announce their poor condition by subtleties of stance, peculiarity of gait, rankness of breath, wounds, hair loss, visible infection, etc., that the wolves can recognize. They test their perceptions by making several rushes at the herd and seeing if this member does indeed lag, labor, or seem unable to escape. So, David Mech concludes, "selection for young, old, and otherwise inferior individuals can be thought of as a very mechanical process" (Mech, 262).

However, there is another way to see the wolves' relation to the animals they hunt that incorporates these facts and also suggests that, as we have implied in this essay, wolves may have an affective and lived sense of the animals and beings of their surround. After the beginning of the hunt, when the wolves stalk their prey, there comes a moment of confrontation after the wolves run into their midst. Often, whether it is caribou or moose or deer, they stand there watching the wolves. Then comes a very striking moment: when the wolves see that the prey has noticed them, both stay still looking at each other—"for one or two moments neither predators nor prey moved" (Mech, 200). Mech complains that this pause is scientifically inexplicable (Mech, 201). Barry Lopez, however, has a profound interpretation of this moment: "Wolves and prey remain absolutely still while staring at each other. . . . I think what transpires in those moments of staring is an exchange of information between predator and prey that either triggers a chase or defuses the hunt right there. I call this exchange the conversation of death" (Lopez, 62). In the glance at one another, Lopez believes there is a mutual recognition, that the wolf announces that it is seeking prey to keep its vitality alive and the prey animal concedes that its life is ebbing, and an agreement that this is a *worthy death* of both feeding the wolf and protecting the rest of the herd. Certainly, there is much evidence in ethology of various animals sacrificing themselves for the sake of saving others of

their group.[17] Lopez imagines that in this silent interchange the prey animal could be expressing something like the following: "I have lived a full life, says the prey. I am ready to die. I am willing to die because clearly I will be dying so that others in this small herd will go on living. I am ready to die because my leg is broken or my lungs are impacted and my time is finished" (Lopez, 95). After this silent exchange the prey begins to run and the wolves follow after it to bring it down. Often the other members of the herd do not move.

It is plausible that there would be this silent recognition between animals. As mentioned before, Merleau-Ponty suggested in his nature lectures that, there is a "preculture" among animals that has a sacred or ceremonial sense in the way certain behaviors take on a symbolic dimension in celebrating animal vitality; belonging with others, and valuing that of which they are a part (*Nature*, 176). This sense of animality resonates with Lopez's interpretation of the meaning of this silent "conversation of death": "I call this exchange in which animals appear to lock eyes and make a decision the conversation of death. It is a ceremonial exchange, the flesh of the hunted in exchange for respect for its spirit. In this way, both animals, not the predator alone, choose for the encounter to end in death. There is, at least, a sacred order in this. There is nobility" (Lopez, 94). This interpretation makes us look at the wolf's hunting differently: the zest of the wolves is not a rapacity, but an attunement with other animals that feels fitting, an implicit mutual respect and cooperation.

Lopez feels that this is why wild wolves have a different bearing, a kind of dignity and vitality that is lacking in captive wolves. There is almost a sacredness in the hunt with other animals that is destroyed when the captives are fed on the meat of slaughterhouses. Certainly there are many reasons why the captive wolf seems crushed in its spirit—coercion of its activities and lack of its far ranging territory, for example—but being ripped out of the context of a noble recognition of life and death and cooperative survival with other animals is also a possible reason. As part of my research for this paper, I visited a wolf sanctuary. I will never forget, especially, the beauty and the power of the three gray timber wolves that I sat and watched for some time. Yet they broke my heart, as the pain of their captivity and the damage to their sense of vitality and dignity was palpable. I felt as Charles Bergman did when after traveling to Alaska to see wild wolves, he saw wolves by a trash dump:

> These were not the wild wolves I had traveled so far to see. Though they were wild, they seemed nearly tamed. I found in these wolves an example of one way the Western mind accommodates all these disturbing impulses we find in the wolf. . . . We control it, as we control the wolves of Alaska. Both the literal

17. See an excellent summary of this in Gary Kowalski, *The Souls of Animals* (Novato: New World Library, 2007).

> and the symbolic wolf are left to live along the margins of our lives, feeding on leftovers, as it were. It was a sad image, an image of loss.[18]

The contemporary American human way of dealing with death, whether our own or that of the animals that we kill to eat, is to hide from it and manufacture it in an impersonal way. It lacks the respect for those who perish, the gratitude for those who were part of the web of life and then pass, the acknowledgment of sacrifice among species, and obscures the sacred dimension of the cycle between life and death. So, rather than seeing the wolf as savage and evil in its frank immersion in dealing the death-blow to its prey, I would suggest that our way of dealing with the death of those we eat is more savage and perhaps, evil.

This brings me to my last point of this essay, hinted at by Bergman, and a concern that seemed to haunt the pages of each writer cited in this essay: humans have projected the most troubled aspects of our being onto our sense of wolves. Farley Mowat starts his book with the lament and warning, "So-called civilized man eventually succeeding in totally extirpating the real wolf from his collective mind and substituting for it a contrived image, replete with evil aspects that generated almost pathological fear and hatred" (Mowat, vi–vii). If there is a kind of rapaciousness and an urge to destroy other species that has been part of the human psyche, we must be careful not to project it onto wolves and other animals, where we can no longer take appropriate responsibility for our own demons and work through them creatively and courageously, and instead slaughter the supposed demons around us. That is why I feel an agreement with Bekoff's use of "anthropodenial" for describing the detached, scientific attitude that sees animals as objects and feels that only rationalized, quantitative data about animals reveal any truth about them. When we can no longer feel our kinship as part of the flesh of the world and know in our own embodiment the feelings that wolves feel of joy, affection, loyalty, attunement to other species and the natural surround, then we obscure their truth and substitute a blank screen upon which we can project our worst fears and unrecognized failings. This projection, in turn, allows us to commit speciocide in the seemingly justifiable attempt to obliterate this "evil" that has been "objectively" assessed. The study of wolves can teach us more about the ways of human self-deception.

The wolf was seen by many Native American tribes as a teacher of the spirit, especially among the Pawnees and Cheyenne and Marc Bekoff states that a key principle of "deep ethology" is that "Animals are a way of knowing" (Mech, 111; Bekoff, 9). If we take up the phenomenological perspective of Merleau-Ponty and hearken to the reverberations of the wolves about us in the surround within our own embodiment and its depth of perception in kinesthesis, the affective sense of things, the material imaginary, the sensual, the

18. Charles Bergman, *Wild Echoes: Encounters with the Most Endangered Animals in North America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 41–42.

proprioceptive, and other levels of the deeply felt, we can learn from wolves about the loyalty to those with whom we feel kin, the playful belonging with others and the natural world, the sense of wonder in vitality, movement, and perceptual acuity, and an implicit sense of the mutuality and respectful dignity in the mortality of all creatures who become food for the further nourishment of all other living beings.