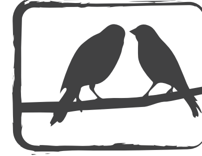

Cosmoecological Sheep and the Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet

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Abstract In recent decades, in the South of France some young people from urban backgrounds have chosen to become shepherds and to learn to reconnect with the herding practices that many livestock breeders had abandoned under the pressure of agricultural modernization policies. In some cases they have found themselves entrusted with sheep that are as naive about herding as they themselves were. Before their introduction to transhumance—seasonal movement between pastures—these animals were primarily confined and fed indoors or in small fenced areas. The shepherds had to learn how to lead, how to understand other modes of living, how to teach their sheep what is edible and what is not, and how to form a flock; the sheep had to learn how to "compose with" dogs and humans, to acquire new feeding habits, a new ethos, and moreover, new ways of living in an enlarged world. These practices cannot be reduced to a livestock economy: shepherds consider herding a work of transformation and ecological recuperation—of the land, of the sheep, of ways of being together. Learning the "arts of living on a damaged planet," as Anna Tsing has termed it, humans and animals are making their own contributions to a new cosmoecology, creating cosmoecological connections and contributing to what Ghassan Hage has called *alter-politics*.

Keywords cosmoecology, cosmopolitics, sheep, shepherds, multispecies, ethology, ethics

I have especially been swayed by Donna Haraway's conviction that there is something about our everyday engagements with other kinds of creatures that opens new kinds of possibilities for relating and understanding.
—Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think*

For centuries on the Olonbulag, when a herder died, people stripped him naked and tied his body up in a roll of felt, although sometimes they left the corpse clothed so they could forego the felt. Then they loaded the corpse onto a cart on which a long board had been laid across the shafts and made secure. In the predawn hours, two senior

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> male members of the family, each holding one end of the board, drove the cart to the sky-burial site, where they whipped their horses into a gallop. Inevitably, the deceased bounced out of the cart, and that was the spot where the soul would return to Tengger. The two relatives dismounted and, if the corpse was naked, unrolled the felt and lay the deceased out on the grass, facing the sky, exactly the way he (or she) came into the world, naked and innocent. At that moment, the deceased belonged to the wolves, and to the gods. Whether or not the soul of the deceased would enter Tengger depended on the virtues, or their lack, of the life lived. Generally speaking, that would be known within three days. If, by then, nothing but bones was left of the corpse, the soul of the deceased had entered Tengger.[1]

This excerpt is from an autobiographical novel by the Chinese novelist Jiang Rong, *The Wolf Totem*. The story takes place in northern Mongolia, where the author was exiled and where he lived for a few years with a group of nomadic pastoralists at the end of the 1960s. Though the wolves are the intercessors between humans and gods, these relationships are far from peaceful; they can even be extremely violent. However, wolves are an integral part of the lives of these nomadic pastoralists. Without them, neither their bodies nor their souls would survive. The survival of the Mongols mostly depends on their cattle, which feed in large pastures; these lands are regularly crossed by large groups of migrating gazelles that devastate the pastures. Wolves protect grasslands by chasing away excessive herds of gazelle. The Mongols have learned to trust them. When a group of gazelles passes through the land, wolves kill some of them. They feed on them and leave some of the corpses behind, which will be frozen. Humans in turn collect some of the corpses, but they always take care to leave enough for the wolves—if they did not, the sky would be offended. But they also know that their survival rests on the wolves' survival. Without the wolves, they would not be able to feed their cattle, and they would lose their one and only stairway to Tengger. But the wolves sometimes attack the cattle too, so they have to be kept at bay, and sometimes have to be fought. Some wolves are killed; some horses, sheep, and dogs that live with and perhaps protect local people succumb to their attack. And from time to time, some herders also lose their lives. Humans and animals are tied together by noninnocent bonds of respect, in the sense that Donna Haraway gives to the word, reminding us of its etymology: "To hold in regard, to respond, to look back reciprocally, to pay attention"—"to hold in regard" also in the sense of holding at bay, taking care, and being careful: to "live with," and without innocence.[2] Bodies, souls, pastures, steppes, cosmos, humans, sheep, dogs, horses, gazelles, and wolves are entangled in a net that connects the sky and the earth: ecology and cosmology are knotted in a common story, forming a cosmoecology

1. Rong, *Wolf Totem*, 162–163.
2. Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 19.

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of multiple beings, gods, animals, humans, living, and dead, each bearing the consequences of the others' ways of living and dying.

Isabelle Stengers writes: "Whenever a being raises the problem of its conditions of existence, it lies within the domain of ecological approaches."[3] The ecological question is about the needs that ought to be met in the ongoing creation of rapports and connections. The question ecologists raise is not, therefore, does this being really exist, or is it not a representation? Rather, the questions are how does this being achieve the task of holding onto its existence, and what does this achievement require? This is why every ethology is first and foremost an ecology and, even more precisely, a cosmoecology. This is because we may never know, safely and reliably, either ahead of time or a posteriori, which beings will bear the consequences, or will enjoy the consequences, of the concrete attention we give to them.

These interconnected lives, each of them having their ever-evolving requirements and habits, have nothing to do with the balance of nature, a machine analogy that became central for ecologists around the 1950s together with the concept of the ecosystem.[4] It is better to remember here that no one, neither human nor gazelle, will ever meet an ecosystem. As Robert O'Neill has put it, "The ecosystem is not an a posteriori, empirical observation about nature. This is a paradigm, a convenient approach to organizing thought. Like any paradigm, it is a product of the human mind's limited ability to understand the complexity of the real world."[5] Over decades, environmentalists and researchers in ecology have been qualifying *Homo sapiens* as the major invasive pest on Earth, the one that almost constantly, if not deliberately, disturbs integrated, equilibrious, homeostatic ecosystems. But this is a myth—*Homo sapiens* is not an external disturbance; we are a keystone species within the system. In the long term, it may not be the magnitude of extracted goods and services that will determine sustainability. It may well be our disruption of ecological recovery and stability mechanisms that determines system collapse.[6]

Thinking about our life and behavior in distinct societies not as disturbance but as integrated parts of systems has great implications. We are invited to pay attention to the health of ecosystems from the inside. Throughout millennia, as a keystone species, humans have influenced the shape and functioning of most landscapes, from savannas to some rainforests as well as, of course, agricultural and urban ecosystems.[7]

A true politics of attention does not confine itself simply to taking another into account—it demands more. A true cosmopolitics requires us to expand the scope of obligations. Other beings obligate us, in the sense Stengers gives to the word *obligation* when she equates "being obligated by a situation" and "giving the situation the power

3. Stengers, "Penser à partir du ravage écologique," 154.

4. Odum, *Fundamentals of Ecology.*

5. O'Neill, "Is It Time to Bury the Ecosystem Concept?," 3276.

6. Ibid.

7. Provenza, Meuret, and Gregorini, "Our Landscapes, Our Livestock, Ourselves."

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to obligate you." And, she adds, "without guarantees. Never the slightest guarantee, neither the judgment of God, nor a conceptual guarantee. It's all about fighting against the demand for a guarantee, it's about compromising oneself."[8]

It matters to us to acknowledge and to question the particular mode of existence of what obligates; doing so bears witness to an extension far beyond living humans of what/who it is that is able to obligate. When anthropologist Eduardo Kohn writes that forests think and that the very possibility for us to think that forests think rests upon the fact that forests think, he announces what will be the core of his book: to make us feel the possibility of a thought that goes beyond human thought, to make us sensitive to other modes of thought that dwell at the edge of thought.[9] To Kohn's project of creating an ecology of thinking, we would like to add an ecology of obligations that makes us capable of being better obligated to and obligated by other beings, on other trajectories. This is how, for example, we understand Deborah Bird Rose (quoting James Hatley) when she writes about the narratives the deceased make us create: "What is important about death narrative is that one's own passing away becomes a gift for those who follow, as well as an address to them. Death narratives are vocative; they call to one's survivor for some mode of response."[10] They obligate, in many ways.

The research that we have been undertaking together leads us to seek, in the most terrestrial paths, the multiple ways people are obligated. In doing so, we follow the philosopher Emilie Hache when she writes, relaying William James, that the pragmatist philosophy is an art of consequences. She distinguishes moral and moralist proposals:

> It will be important to describe carefully the moral situations, be they existing or "in the making" [as James writes]. I wish to testify for that and those to which/whom actors themselves are attached. That means that I will not say what ought to be done, but I will try to describe the best I can *what people do*. Not to prescribe which ways of living ought to be changed but to testify for those who do change their way of living; not to suggest that scientists should address lay people differently but to be interested in the changes that happen to some of these scientists.[11]

That is what led us to seek situations in which human and nonhuman beings become obligated through new connections. New shepherding practices, as they recently re-emerged in the South of France, appeared to be a good example of this kind of cosmo-ecology, and in its complex political interactions we all might learn to craft new ways of being obligated and new ways of helping life to flourish.[12] These practices interest us

8. Stengers, Massumi, and Manning, "History through the Middle."

9. Kohn, *How Forests Think.*

10. Quoted in Rose, *Wild Dogs Dreaming*, 20.

11. Hache, *Ce à quoi nous tenons*, 15.

12. This article rests on the survey materials that one of us (M.M.) collected while conducting interviews with shepherds in the South of France. For the complete story, see Despret and Meuret, *Composer avec les moutons*.

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in particular because of the way that these shepherds take an active role in what Tsing has termed the "arts of living on a damaged planet."[13]

Worlds to Re-member

Shepherding is a practice with long histories and traditions that in many parts of the world, including France, are often passed between generations of humans and of sheep. But the shepherds that fascinated us in this study are all of urban origin; none of them is the son or daughter of shepherds. As such, they were often left to learn on the job, with the sheep. We discovered with them that their practices fulfill multiple obligations that are not restricted to the well-being of their animals or their own livelihoods, however important these dimension are. These additional obligations fall under the realm of ethical and aesthetic relations to the world, obligations that belong to cosmoecology as *alter-politics*: "a politics that grows not from opposition to or critique of our current systems but one that grows from attention to another way of being, one that involves other kinds of living beings."[14]

To talk about sheep when so many species have already disappeared or are at the edge of extinction might be seen nonsensical. However, extinction should not be restricted to the death of species, as Thom van Dooren so convincingly shows in *Flight Ways*. In relation to the cranes that are mobilized in a captive-breeding conservationist program, he leads us to ask, Aren't these cranes that are supposed to keep the crane species among us in some ways already extinct? Do they still enjoy a life that is worth living as a crane? And will their offspring, and the offspring of their offspring?

It was upon this intuition that one of us (V.D.) fabulated the refusal of Martha and her companion, the last passenger pigeons, to reproduce. Why did they refuse to breed? Wasn't it because a life without others did not seem worth living?[15] "There are many kinds and scales of death," Kohn writes. "There are many ways in which we cease being selves to ourselves and to each other."[16]

What the shepherds were confronted with, and what they resisted, were particular forms of extinction: not the form that makes a species, in the sense of quantifiable biodiversity, disappear but those that make worlds die, worlds that were hitherto shaped and characterized by practices, by modes of inhabiting, by landscapes that are no more. The ewes confined in a small pen are, of course, still living. However, their world is so impoverished that it cannot be seen as what we call an existence, because to exist (*ex-sistere*) for a living being is to step "out of self," to be connected by multiple bonds, to compose a world, and to be associated with a world—as Gilles Deleuze translated the *Umwelt* of Jakob von Uexküll, "a world associated."[17] Extinction begins when the world

13. Title of a conference that Tsing and her colleagues organized at the University of California Santa Cruz, May 8–10, 2014: "Anthropocene: Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet."

14. Kohn, *How Forests Think*, 14, relaying Ghassan Hage.

15. Despret, "P Is for Passenger Pigeon."

16. Kohn, *How Forests Think*, 18.

17. Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues II*, 61.

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to which an animal was associated is reduced to nothing, or almost nothing. Extinction begins when the ways an animal composes the world and composes with the world are ended, when the ways he or she makes a world exist, according to the ways his or her ancestors had created it, have disappeared.

This process of loss began in the 1960s in France, when a program of agricultural modernization began to promote so-called rational fenced grazing on cultivated grasslands and to suppress shepherding on natural meadows and rangeland.[18] More efficient animals, due to intensive selective breeding, were endorsed as key to producing meat or milk in abundance. These animals needed richer and steady diets, obeying new rules of standardization. Industrial foods replaced grass and other grazed plants for animals in stables, and for those that still enjoyed being outside, field crops and cultivated forages were being standardized. For decades, breeders would be advised to keep their herd in stables or in small fenced areas, in simplified and predictable environments. And so the world changed, and previous configurations, previous cosmoecologies slipped out of existence.

But in the 1990s this system met its own limits. The price of lambs dramatically dropped, due to competition from meat imported from other countries, especially New Zealand. Simultaneously, because of the influence of financial speculation in cereals, the feed price for livestock increased. Breeders went back to the practices of herding, and sheep went back to hills and mountains, to rediscover cheap grasslands, abandoned fields, scrubby rangeland, and undergrowth. Together they tried to relearn the arts and practices of winter long-range transhumance in southern France.

Nobody, however, knew how to do it. With the breach in transmission, most of the new shepherds were coming from urban areas. They chose this profession for different reasons than their predecessors. But they all say that they have always loved being with animals, and they all claim that the world, as it was going, was becoming uninhabitable. These are political and ethical choices. Moreover, these choices are *ethological*, in the sense Deleuze gives to the word. In his teaching on Spinoza, Deleuze notes:

> Ethics is better known to us today under another name, the word ethology.
>
> When one speaks of an ethology in connection with animals, or in connection with [hu]man, what is it a matter of? Ethology in the most rudimentary sense is a practical science, of what? A practical science of the manners of being. The manner of being is precisely the state of beings (étants), of what exists (existants), from the point of view of a pure ontology.
>
> In what way is it already different from a morality? We are trying to compose a kind of landscape which would be the landscape of ontology. We are manners of Being in Being, that is the object of an ethics, i.e. an ethology.[19]

18. Hubert, Deverre, and Meuret, "Rangelands of Southern France."
19. Deleuze, "Lectures."

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Deleuze clarifies what should be considered manners of being—ethology is the practical science that studies what beings can do: "Of what tests is it capable? . . . What does it do?" What is it capable of? In his book on Spinoza, he adds: "The *Ethics* is an *ethology* which, with regard to men and animals, in each case only considers their capacity for being affected." Ethology defines bodies, animals, or humans by the affects they are capable of, and "the approach is no less valid for us, for human beings, than for animals, because no one knows ahead of time the effects one is capable of; it is a long affair of experimentation, requiring a lasting prudence."[20]

According to this ethology, or practices of manners of being and manners of being affected, these shepherds cultivate an aesthetic in the sense of a practice that learns to compose with the world in various ways, in the sense of an ethos. They invent ways of inhabiting a world that is being destroyed while resisting, locally and actively, this destruction.

Put simply, these shepherds had to learn the practices of herding.[21] They had to learn how to lead, how to understand other modes of living, how to teach their sheep what is edible and what is not, and how to form a flock. The sheep had to learn how to compose with dogs and humans, to acquire new feeding habits, a new ethos, and moreover, new ways of living in an enlarged world. These practices cannot be reduced to a livestock economy: shepherds consider herding as a work of transformation and ecological recuperation—of the land, of the sheep, of ways of being together. And they had to teach their sheep to live a very different life. It was hard and painful. They told numerous stories. One recalled that when he came with his car, on the first day, the ewes tried to get in—they were used to traveling by truck. Another recalled that when the young ewes were out of the stable for the first time, they seemed to wonder, what world are we in? They were scared to walk on fresh grass. Some were afraid of the wind shaking the trees, others of crossing a slope surrounded by bushes. All of them were scared of humans on foot and of dogs. Some, coming from a different flock, did not want to join the newly formed herd and instead wanted to live their lives on their own, sometimes taking advantage of the mist to hide. It took this shepherd and his dog two long and exhausting months running everywhere in the mountains to find them and convince them that it was better and safer to stay nearby.

When asked how they learned, most of the shepherds answered with stereotypical responses like "practice makes perfect" or "you have to *do* your craft." This is an example of what the sociologist Marcelle Stroobants recognizes as the sign of a metamorphosis: one does not remember when one did not know.[22] She notes that learning experiences that belong to the sphere of know-how transform the ones who go through them so deeply that the memory of the former state is effectively erased. The learning of

20. Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 27, 125.
21. Jallet, Labreveux, and Bel, "Herding Schools"; Meuret and Provenza, "When Art and Science Meet."
22. Stroobants, "Transduction," 311.

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reading illustrates this clearly: once you can read, you cannot help but do so. You do not know how you do it; you just do it. This is the hallmark of metamorphosis.

Of course, they remember failures and difficulties: the lost ewes, the ones that were caught by wolves, the herds that got lost. They especially had to learn what should not be done. They also say that they had to unlearn what they had been taught in their schooling.[23]

And all this was possible because they learned to observe. To learn is to learn how to see and to pay attention. This is a transformation of ways to feel; the shepherds learned a new way of being in the world. What Stroobants calls the metamorphosis resulting from this learning happens to be, as she suggests, "the creation of a new relation to the world and to another world, a way to inhabit a new milieu."[24]

Learning New *Savoir Vivre*

This is also what Stengers, relaying Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, refers to as *involution*. Stengers writes: "Involution is neither progression nor regression, since these judgments relate to an evolution by the means of descent and filiation, be it about species, disciplines, or technics." According to her, involution creates, between heterogeneous critters, a relation that brings into play their hereditary identity, that is, "the ways they 'naturally' differentiate themselves from each other."[25] We choose the term *involution* to refer to the achievement of the shepherds because it highlights the ways this metamorphosis was noticeable to us.[26] We noticed while rereading transcripts from the interviews, at some point, that the shepherds were talking about their ewes with a very particular syntax. They were using the personal pronoun *I* or *we* and speaking from the ewes' perspective: "I eat a plant and crickets are jumping on my nose"; "I see the dog, I pant, and I kick"; "It is a nice place here, let us rest"; "Oh no, this doesn't interest me, I'll lie down and wait for something better."

The shepherds did not become sheep, but they did begin to talk with them and for them—they became *with* them, and they now form a flock. One of the shepherds gave a very interesting definition of the flock as a "character." He then added: "The flock is a memory, a collective memory of the sites and a collective memory of itself, as a flock." Another says that he forms a "body" with the sheep.

In talking about involution, we aim to avoid tired psychological interpretations in terms of identification or symbiosis and instead stress the transformation of various identities as a result of the creation of the herd. Identities are transformed but not confused: each critter still differentiates, but differentiates differently—this is involution,

23. Of course not in herding schools. (France has five schools; see Meuret and Provenza, "When Art and Science Meet.")

24. Stroobants, "Transduction," 311.

25. Stengers, "Penser à partir du ravage écologique," 178.

26. For an inspiring story that led us to feel the importance of this concept, see Hustak and Myers, "Involutionary Momentum."

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an ongoing process. There is a flock, a collective memory, because a human became shepherd in relation to these ewes and because the ewes had become a character in relation with that shepherd. They differentiate differently in the process of creating trust. They became others with other others, and they differentiated otherwise.

What has changed is the way they created a relationship with time and space. They inhabited another time and another space. Time is of the utmost importance when one creates a flock. A common time, different from the previous flow of time, is established, and this common time, this shared time creates the flock—it is a herding time. Moreover, they changed the way they inhabited the space, the way they composed with the space. We say *compose with* because to inhabit is at once to be transformed by the environment and to transform it. Long-range transhumance is one of these ways of inhabiting and so composing with a place, a space in time.

In this case, to inhabit the land is also to relearn to inhabit well, to relearn a *savoir vivre* so urgently needed with these badly raised sheep. It is also to relearn how to eat well. Shepherds are very talkative on that matter. One of us (V.D.), as a philosopher, experienced some problems with the issue of food. Philosophers usually tend not to worry about food. Read Plato's *Symposium* and you will never discover what was on the guests' plates. It is not worth mentioning—philosophers are there to talk about love; food should not matter. Of course, reluctance to pay attention to issues relating to food is not only due to philosophical ethos. It may also be partially due to what the primatologist Thelma Rowell taught us when she noticed that in scientific literature about sheep, food was the first, and usually the only, question addressed. Most of this research focused on what sheep eat, how much they eat—how, in other words, they convert grass into meat.[27] This focus, as Rowell notes, worked to confirm the idea that sheep are stupid. But we also have Haraway, and the cosmoecology we want to map is a practical science of the ordinary, of the mundane, a practice of earthly companionship (with its roots in *cum panis*, "with bread").[28] Eating should matter, opening up questions of with whom, how, and what. *To eat* is a relational verb, so it is inseparable from all these questions.

None of the shepherds considered that his or her role should be reduced to the question of the weight and size of their ewes and lambs, of making them grow. To make them beautiful, yes—they mentioned this often. No one talked about kilos but, rather, about beauty. But this is not simply a question of the beauty of the ewes. To eat, and to raise sheep for eating, was not just about producing meat; it was, rather, part of a larger crafting of beautiful relations, a way to inhabit and, moreover, to give added value—we would say *to honor*.

27. This is retrieved from the interviews with Rowell by one of us (V.D.) in June 2003, which were conducted for research leading up to the making of the documentary *Non Sheepish Sheep* (dir. Vinciane Despret and Didier Demorcy, 2005), prepared for the exhibition *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy* (Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, curators, Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie, Karlsruhe, Germany, March 19–August 7, 2005).

28. Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 17.

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As such, their shepherding practices aimed to create beauty: a beautiful flock, a beautiful way of inhabiting, a beautiful way to shape the milieu and to become with. A flock is an embodied memory of this creation. One of the shepherds said that a flock is a consistent entity. To achieve that consistency, each member would transmit, generation after generation, the places where they sleep, where they eat, where they drink, where they find shelter from the north wind and the south wind, all the information that forms a collective memory. And each year the young would learn with the older and more experienced sheep. In this way, the flock is a memory of the land.

During the period when sheep were largely kept confined, many of the sites they had previously used disappeared, becoming developed, overgrown, or inaccessible. As lands lost their meaning for the sheep, the meanings they had with the sheep, these lands lost some of their ways of being, some of their modes of existence. The memory of the flock, in some ways, gives to the land a part of its existence. By the concrete memory of the mouths, the eyes, the guts, the bodies, the legs, and the feet, the flock multiplies the ways lands, paths, bushes, springs, and rocks exist. Haraway would call the current process of re-membering one of "partial recuperation."[29]

These shepherds take great care to lead the flock to places where difficult food abounds. They say that, with time, the land will be rehabilitated. To rehabilitate is not just about making a place livable again. In feeding in these places, the sheep will restore them. Their work in eating what is difficult or less palatable—thorns, weeds, coarse grasses, and shrubs—also contributes to another aim, that of learning a *savoir vivre*, which literally means "knowing how to live" with the land. It is learning not to waste, for example. Some shepherds say they ask their ewes to learn to taste and to eat everything. It is, they also say, like raising children—those who want to eat only green and tender grass behave like spoiled rich kids.

European policies have sought since 1992 to promote and financially support the management of agropastoral areas, resisting the large trend toward the homogenization of landscapes and the industrialization of conventional agriculture.[30] Targeted grazing is now promoted to help manage vegetation dynamics that may otherwise lead to loss of biodiversity and wildlife habitats.[31] In the past, the situation was one of too many shepherds, herders, and wood collectors. That led to severe overgrazing and damage to landscapes, especially in dry mountain areas. After that, national forest services, especially in France, that owned large parts of the land evicted the shepherds and planted pine trees to restore the soils, sometimes creating a "green desert." But foresters did not get enough funding to manage their plantations, to fight against undesirable shrub dynamics, and to prevent wildfires. This is why shepherds are now called to the rescue, to limit encroachment dynamics and to re-create, through targeted grazing, a

29. Haraway, "Sympoièse," 50.
30. Hubert, Deverre, and Meuret, "Rangelands of Southern France."
31. Launchbaugh, Walker, and Daines, *Targeted Grazing*.

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more diversified and less flammable landscape. Regional and national park managers, nature conservationists, and wildlife reserve managers mostly promote grazing contracts. As a result, many remarkable species, such as rock partridge, red grouse, alpine ibex, and bearded vulture, have found safe habitats in these areas. Pastoral activities maintain mosaics of natural swards, shrublands, and wooded grasslands, thus providing and renewing many amenities for those who appreciate flowering plants, insects, reptiles, and amphibians.[32] Elsewhere in the world, a similar story is taking shape, with the same kinds of grazing knowledge and practices being utilized and documented by scientists and land managers.[33]

To recuperate and to rehabilitate now converge. These shepherds care for the idea of a possible beauty on Earth, and they want their sheep not to waver in their commitment. Sheep do better: they perform the idea—they realize it, in the sense of making it real. Sheep and shepherds make the beauty real: beauty of the lands, beauty of diversity, their own beauty, beauty of relationships. And they do so with their mouths, their stomachs, their bodies, an art of living on a damaged planet.

But is this return of herded sheep flocks to grassland and woodland, with the aim of restoring habitats and biodiversity, approved by everyone, by all living beings? Gray wolves are approving. They came back to France in the 1990s under a strict protected status. These wolves are provided with large numbers of naive and tasty animals, herded by unarmed shepherds. Despite guard dogs and electrified night paddocks, sheep and goats, as well as calves, heifers, and sometimes horses, are much easier to catch than their wild counterparts, especially when they are grazed within landscapes of fear, that is, mosaics of small woods and open stretches of land, hedged meadows, and woodland undergrowth.[34] For their part, it is almost certain that wild boars do not approve of these changes. They prefer very dense, shrubby vegetation, mostly to avoid their predators: hunters. In France, the firsts (the wild boars) are more numerous, better reproducing, and more agile than the latest (the hunters). This is why wild boar populations grew so much when foresters evicted shepherds to plant their pine trees. Some other animals also likely do not appreciate sheep: wild birds that have mountain valley floors and foothills as common nesting habitat. Grazing sheep can destroy their eggs by accident, adding a supplementary stress for these birds that already have several predators. For this reason, grazing contracts restrict the use of valley floors during birds' nesting and early juvenile periods. Lastly, some flowering plants may also suffer from repeated grazing, mostly those that reproduce through seedlings. But even within the plant kingdom the impacts of increased sheep numbers are variable. For example, most orchids from calcareous grasslands in France are boosted by grazing that limits the extent of tall grasses as light competitors.

32. WallisdeVries, Bakker, and Van Wieren, *Grazing and Conservation Management*.
33. White, *Revolution on the Range*.
34. Laundré, Hernandez, and Ripple, "Landscape of Fear."

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These stories are far from being, as Haraway writes, "comfortable narratives of subjects in encounter, two by two."[35] She continues: "More often, the configurations of critters have other patterns more reminiscent of a cat's cradle game of the sort taken for granted by good ecologists, military strategists, political economists, and ethnographers."[36] The patterns of rapport and connection that are emerging here have nothing to do with morality, and certainly not a morality with a firm or universal basis. Final and universal judgments, alongside innocence, are not possible here.

Instead, an ethics in the Deleuzian sense is nothing but experimentation: ways of being that raise the questions, what are you capable of, and what might we be capable of together? This is the true meaning of cosmoecology: other ways of being obligated by those to whom you give the power to obligate you. What affects you, and whom does your way of living, your manner of being, affect in turn? This is, in other words, experimental cosmoecology: learning to hold possibilities open, learning attentiveness to the infinite ways of being affected and of affecting, where no one may know ahead of time the affects one is capable of or the kinds of forces and entities that will constitute landscapes and worlds with us. The cosmos emerges, again and again, out of diverse ways of composing worlds, of crafting attachments and connections that link soil and earth, compost, humus, mud, grass, dogs, sheep, humans, and more. All of this is to say that there are some places on Earth where the cosmos passes through the mouths of sheep.

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35. "And no answers will make one feel good for long" (Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 41).
36. Ibid.

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