"Mucky Water, Full of Shapes": Extinction and Cross-Species Connection in Ned Beauman's *Venomous Lumpsucker* and Ray Nayler's *The Mountain in the Sea*

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Abstract

Ned Beauman's *Venomous Lumpsucker* (2023) and Ray Nayler's *The Mountain in the Sea* (2023) share the similar theme of species extinction and cross-species communication. In both novels, the attempt to communicate with an underwater species is met with failure or limitations. The failure of cross-species communication lies in the focus on an animal's intelligence. Drawing on Eduardo Kohn's *How Forests Think* (2013) and other works on the interplay between the body and the environment, I argue that it is not intelligence, but the physicality of both the animal body and the environment that makes cross-species connection possible. In this paper, I analyze the relation between extinction and cross-species communication in the two novels, and explain the failure and limitations of focusing on animal intelligence when forming connections. Apart from pointing out the failure, by putting emphasis on the bodily characteristics of animals over intellectual capabilities, I argue that the ocean, as a site of shared experiences, is an important factor in forming cross-species connections with marine animals.

Keywords: cross-species connection; extinction; animal bodies; ocean; underwater activities

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Species extinction used to be a concept of absolute wonder. It was fun to imagine a world before us, with gargantuan sauropods roaming the earth and anomalocarids lurking in the ocean. It was also thrilling to imagine what caused their disappearance. Steadily, the concept of species extinction has become alarmingly close as human actions continue to affect the environment, causing ecological casualties big and small. Ursula K. Heise (2016) notes that there is a consensus that "at the turn of the third millennium, humankind likely faces a mass extinction that has occurred only five times before in the 3.5 billion years of life on Earth, but this time…due to human impact" (pp. 3-4). Various species have long been intertwined with the environment, but none other than humans have affected the environment in such a drastic and extensive way.

The great changes caused by human actions prompted attentive writers to address the issue of species extinction. In both *The Mountain in the Sea* (Nayler, 2023) and *Venomous Lumpsucker* (Beauman, 2023), species extinction works as the focal point of the major conflicts in the stories. In Nayler's novel, a distinct group of language-using octopuses are caught between human conflicts and face possible extinction; in Beauman's novel, the protagonists are set on a quest to find the last living group of venomous lumpsuckers after an accident that wiped out an entire group of them.

Apart from species extinction, the two novels share another similarity: the protagonists' desire for cross-species connection through communication. In *The Mountain in the Sea* (Nayler, 2023), the character Dr. Ha Ngyuen desperately wants to communicate with the group of language-using octopuses. More jarringly, in *Venomous Lumpsucker* (Beauman, 2023), Karin Resaint's desire to communicate is driven by her suicidal tendencies, as she thinks venomous lumpsuckers are intelligent enough to kill her in resentment. Both Ha's and Resaint's desire to communicate is driven by the grief of being witnesses to the large-scale species extinction happening worldwide.

The two novels share a similar theme of cross-species communication, more precisely its failure. The shared failure of the two protagonists is caused by the focus on animal intelligence. Instead, the two novels hint that the focus of human-animal connection should be shifted to the physicality of the marine species. My assertion is that the environment plays an important role in forming connections with marine species. In the beginning of Nayler's novel, the ocean is referred to as the "mucky water, full of shapes" (Nayler, 2023, p. 7). The ocean is where human lives and the lives of other species intertwine. It is the location that ties humans to a larger part of the biosphere.

By looking into the two novels, I intend to offer an observation of this emerging pattern of near-future narratives with an emphasis on species extinction and cross-species connection. This paper will offer a close reading of the two novels in four parts. First, the ecological grief caused by species extinction, as shown by the protagonists in the two novels, drives them to cross-species connection in the form of communication. Second, the focus on animal intelligence proves to be disorienting in forming human-animal connections, as attempts in both novels are either met with failure, or marked by their limitations. In the third part, a revaluation of animal bodies as bodily interpretations of the environment gives hope to other forms of human-animal connection. Building on the bodily interpretations of animals, part four addresses that the environment, in this case the ocean, works as a meaningful site of interaction for human-animal connections.

Eager Communication and Ecological Grief

A shared pattern of an eagerness to communicate with the marine species can be seen in the two novels. In Nayler's novel, the octopuses are discovered to have formed their own symbolic language. The symbolic language is made possible by displaying different patterns on their color-changing bodies. Ha speaks of her desperation to communicate with the language-using octopuses: "I want to *speak* to [the octopuses]…that is the only way we will save them" (Nayler, 2023, p. 418). Ha is fixated on forming connections with the octopuses through communication. Ha thinks communication is key to reaching a mutual understanding between her and the octopuses and the only way to cease the octopuses' apparent hostility towards humans. She also hopes to warn the octopuses of their possible extinction from human conflicts.

A similar desire to communicate is also explored in Beauman's novel. In the novel, Resaint sets out on a journey to find the last living member of the highly intelligent venomous lumpsuckers. In a more cynical sense, Resaint also sees communication as the answer to human-animal connection. The venomous lumpsuckers have been shown to perform ritualistic and emotional revenge on bigger fishes that used to attack the group (Beauman, 2023, p. 73). With this knowledge, Resaint wishes to utilize their behavior to commit suicide. Resaint states, ''no real moral reckoning was possible between two beings unless those two beings apprehended each other, recognised each other (Beauman, 2023, p. 135). For Resaint, death is the only atonement for species extinction caused by humans. When the animal kills, violence places the human and another species on two sides. Thus the human is recognized as the debtor and the animal, the creditor, a debt paid by the death of the human.

For both Ha and Resaint, communication is what makes mutual recognition between the two species possible. But what drives Ha and Resaint to focus so much on cross-species connections? Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2015) define grief as the response to losing connections: "grief is the intense emotional response to the pain of a loss. It is the reflection of a connection that has been broken" (p. 170). Although Kübler-Ross & Kessler are specifically referring to the death of loved ones, it would not be too far-fetched to conclude that Ha and Resaint felt the same towards the wild species. Because of Ha and Resaint's closeness to the wild species, their experiences are very similar to the loss of loved ones. Joshua Trey Barnett (2022) argues that intimacy plays a huge part in how one perceives ecological loss. Barnett (2022) draws on many instances where the ecological losses are unpleasantly close: the chief of an Indian tribe, reminiscing on the termination of the buffalos by the US government, in which "'the heart of [his] people fell to the ground'" (p. xii); farmers who "lose [their] land" (p. 10) by experiencing the drastic alteration of the farmland by large-scale industrialization; and environmental scientists who are on "the frontlines of ecological and earthly devastation" (p. 10). For the Indians, the loss of the buffalos is a loss of identity because identity is strongly tied to one's way of life. Similarly, the farmers have formed an intimate relationship with the land through their ongoing dedication to their work. The scientists feel the loss most deeply because of their closeness to it. To summarize, someone whose values and identities are formed around the animals who live with them feels the death of certain species more closely.

The two novels support Barnett's (2022) idea of ecological grief based on intimacy. Resaint is an evaluator of animal intelligence in *Venomous Lumpsucker* (Beauman, 2023). Working under a big corporation, she evaluates and writes reports on whether an animal is intelligent enough to be worthy of hindering the big corporations' never-ending process of development (Beauman, 2023, p. 11). She is at the forefront of determining whether an animal should live or die by the hands of megacorps. This closeness brewed her cynicism and

prompted her to find an animal intelligent enough to kill her with rage—an animal intelligent enough to understand the concept of revenge, and hold humans accountable.

On the other hand, in *The Mountain in the Sea* (Nayler, 2023), Dr. Ha is a marine biologist haunted by her failed project that caused the death of an entire group of cuttlefish (pp. 18-22). The tragedy is caused by her forceful attitudes towards the desperate and poverty-ridden villagers who lived off of the cuttlefish. In resentment, they poisoned the nearby shore, leading to the death of all the cuttlefish and their eggs (Nayler, 2023, p. 307). In the novel, the existence of the octopuses puts the world into a swirl, with companies fighting real wars to gain control of the octopuses, while the company that holds the Archipelago wishes to dissect them. Whoever wins, the octopuses will always lose, probably resulting in a damaged colony followed by their eventual extinction. Dr. Ha, caught among all the conflicts, feels the danger more closely because of her position.

Given their positions, both Resaint and Ha feel the lives of the animals are at risk. In both novels, grief is a driving factor in the desire to communicate. Resaint's desire to communicate is driven by an unresolved guilt that can never be known to the other species. Beauman (2023) relates extinction to crimes characterized by the innocence of their victims:

> "[It was] like picking sleepers' pockets in the night, like bilking the mentally incapable. It was such a tawdry and demeaning crime. And lonely too. Horribly lonely" (p. 247).

This inner monologue, vocalized by Resaint, speaks to the writer's observation of human reactions to extinction. For Beauman (2023), these reactions are marked by two characteristics: a great sense of loss, commonly followed by guilt, and a sense of powerlessness strengthened by the inability to make the tragedy *known* to the dying species. The inability to pass down the dreadful feeling of loss and guilt to nonhuman species, for Beauman (2023), results in the desire to communicate. In Nayler's novel (2023), Ha's determination to communicate with the octopuses is both driven by her reluctance to see another group of cephalopods die before her eyes, and by the urgency to warn them of the incoming danger. As Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2015) state, "in loss we are looking and longing for connection" (p. 89). Both Ha and Resaint try to connect with new species to cope with the ecological losses they experience.

Animal Intelligence and the Failure of Communication

Ultimately, the protagonists' eagerness to communicate is met with failure, and the failure lies in the focus on the animals' intelligence. Resaint never gets to meet the venomous lumpsuckers again, and Dr. Ha's attempts at communicating with the octopuses are still marked by their limitations. For both Resaint and Ha, whether a species is intelligent is a crucial question. In *Venomous Lumpsucker* (Beauman, 2023), species that have higher intelligence are recognized as more important and can potentially hinder investments from big corporations or cause huge scandals. Resaint's occupation of evaluating the intelligence of animals speaks to this idea directly. At the beginning of the novel, she is asked to offer a false report of the venomous lumpsuckers that deems them non-intelligent to cover up an accident caused by the mining machine that destroys their habitat (Beauman, 2023, p. 37). In *The Mountain in the Sea* (Nayler, 2023), the rich culture of the intelligent octopuses, including their own language, ritual, and art, is what makes their possible extinction more horrifying to Ha. Ha imagines the ongoing survey on the octopuses to "[end] with us wiping out yet another species. And this time, we will be wiping out a species that has a culture. It won't be extinction: it will be

genocide" (Nayler, 2023, p. 344). The seriousness of losing the octopuses is strengthened by their intelligence.

For both Resaint and Ha, it is through intelligence that communication is made possible. For Resaint, it is through an understanding of human actions that resentment from nonhuman species becomes possible, and Ha's continuous effort to communicate with the octopuses marks their intelligence. Unlike Resaint's total failure in finding another group of venomous lumpsuckers in her grand search, Ha's gradual understanding of the symbolic languages of the octopuses and their ongoing communication surely gives hope to understanding another intelligent species. However, it has the danger of strengthening the already existing favoritism toward intelligent animals.

Cross-species communication is not as useful as it is disorienting. In the two novels, human-animal communication, or attempts at it, are coated with irony and limitations. In *Venomous Lumpsucker* (Beauman, 2023), Resaint's journey is marked by her failure to meet the titular marine species. In the novel, we follow Resaint to various places in the hope of finding the last remaining groups of the intelligent fish species. Resaint travels through different sanctuaries and scientific sites in search of the fish, but she dies before she could ever find them. We never know if the venomous lumpsuckers will be able to understand Resaint, and her death is ironic in itself. It is implied she is eaten by a giant predator with "eyeshine and paws" (Beauman, 2023, p. 279) after falling off a cliff. Ultimately, Resaint is killed by an animal, but in the most non-personal way—as prey, as food. Her ironic ending shows that her desire to communicate is just another crude projection from the humans to the animals, and she will never be able to pass down her grief.

The depiction of human-animal communication in Nayler's novel is more complicated. On one hand, Ha comes to understand the symbolic language of the octopuses and is able to form conversations with them. On the other hand, the octopuses still hold onto an apparent hostility toward humans. The octopuses are known for causing diving accidents (Nayler, 2023, p. 98) and outright killing humans they meet (Nayler, 2023, p. 134), stirring fear and superstitions in the hearts of locals. The octopuses' hostility is another mystery Ha tries to solve, and she is fairly certain that they turn to violence because they want to protect their habitat from humans (Nayler, 2023, p. 175). But it is later revealed that the hostility itself is a misunderstanding from Ha's part. It is not an apparent hostility that makes the octopuses kill humans, but a lack of recognition—a sense of carelessness. Towards the end of the novel, Dr. Minervudottir-Chan is found dead on the beach, heavily scarred. The camera footage shows an octopus, holding sharp rocks, walking past her, and it appears that she is not killed out of hatred, nor does the octopus show any hostility. She is simply in the way. Upon this revelation, Ha added:

> [Dr. Minervudottir-Chan] had been killed for the same reason a dolphin, tangled in a tuna net and drowned, was killed: the species that caught her didn't care enough *not* to kill her. She meant nothing to them. (Nayler, 2023, p. 444)

Dr. Minervudottir-Chan is killed because the octopus does not perceive her as worthy of any trouble, just as humans have killed many species simply because we didn't care enough. One can make the assumption that Dr. Minervudottir-Chan is dead because she did not communicate with the octopuses. I wish to go against this assumption. Communication is not the key here, because language and intelligence do not matter in the face of carelessness. If the tables had turned, humans would still choose to kill an animal as smart as a dolphin, not because of the lack of communication. Humans kill because we don't care. Resaint and Ha miss the

mark in their fixation on intelligence and communication. But they are correct about the power of recognition. It is not a lack of communication that causes disasters, but a lack of recognition. Recognition is the first step to connection.

Before jumping into the intellectual realm of chatting with another animal, it is better to recognize the meaning in their existence.

Animal Bodies as Interpretations of the Environment

What is an animal's meaning in itself? Eduardo Kohn (2013), in *How Forests Think*, offers insight into perceiving the evolutionary line as a world of "living thoughts" (p. 90), of various interpretations. Kohn's (2013) use of *thoughts* does not imply what is inside an intelligent animal's mind, but rather refers to the bodily interpretation of the environment. Kohn (2013) uses the snout of anteaters as an example:

> The specific shape of the anteater's snout and tongue captures…the shape of ant tunnels…This interpretation, in turn, is manifested in the development of the subsequent organism's body in a way that incorporates these adaptations. This body functions as a new sign representing these features of the environment… (p. 74).

To put it simply, Kohn (2013) sees evolution from the angle of different animal bodies reacting to the environment in forms of interpretation. The bodies of the animals are their meaning. For Kohn (2013), it is not intelligence that distinguishes animals from each other, but the various self-oriented interpretations that make all species unique. Just as the anteater's snout is an interpretation of the ant tunnels, the various properties we see in a species are thoughts, and their interpretation of the world is also thought.

Despite Ha and Resaint's devotion to communication in the two stories, the narrative does not fully indulge in the importance of connection through communication. Communication is not seen as the only method to recognize an animal in the two novels. There are instances where the novels hint at a different way of perceiving animals, an alternative similar to Kohn's idea of living thoughts. In Nayler's novel (2023), Ha is against the idea of seeing the octopuses as some sort of cautionary tale for human development. Ha protested, "we can't treat them like a portent or a symbol…their existence is their own" (p. 176). Here, Ha proposes recognizing the octopuses without applying anthropocentric meanings to them. By finding value in the existence of the octopuses itself, Ha is protesting against seeing the octopuses in relation to humans. Ha's observation shows that there is a middle ground between crude projections toward animals and the total fixation on animal intelligence. If that middle ground means recognizing the animal's existence, there's nothing more fitting than analyzing the body of the octopus. If we shift the focus from intelligence to the body, a different interpretation is made possible. The intelligent octopuses, known to change the patterns and colors on their bodies to communicate, are quite literally *talking with their bodies*. The language-using octopuses should not be seen as the epitome of animal intelligence, but as active participants in the bodily interpretation of the environment.

Similarly, in Beauman's novel (2023), Resaint experiences an epiphany when she watched a video of a wasp larva climbing out of the corpse of a small spider. This species of wasp, the *Adelognathus marginatum*, has a peculiar strategy of reproduction that includes inserting the egg into the body of a living spider and disrupting its immune system that makes the innards a suitable cradle for the cocoon to thrive (Beauman, 2023, pp. 100-101). Resaint is fascinated not primarily by a sense of wonder given by how weird they are, but by the almost

impossible and blind process of evolution that made the wasps the way they are. Resaint cannot help but imagine that all justifications for why they matter are in vain, because the wasps have a value in themselves that needs no justification:

> How could this brilliant, intricate, hilarious thing—the fluke result of an unrepeatable process…striving unconsciously towards a single invention—not be valuable in itself? What did it matter if anyone appreciated it, if it did any good for anyone? (Beauman, 2023, p. 104)

The irony lies in the fact that Resaint experiences this epiphany not from the species she is trying to communicate with. Despite the irony, this conclusion is strikingly similar to Kohn's (2013) idea of living thoughts. Just like the snout of anteaters, the specialized reproductive cycle of the wasp is evidence of their living thought—their value in themselves. By recognizing animal bodies as interpretations of the environment, their existence becomes meaningful. Their intelligence does not dictate their value; their existence does.

Ocean as the Site of Interaction

If carelessness is the real enemy, recognition is just the first step when it comes to cross-species connection. How can one transform mere recognition of the bodily interpretations of animals into an internalized appreciation? It is no simple task, but my assertion is that the site of interaction plays a huge part in this transition. The ocean, being the place where cross-species interactions occur, changes human physicality and brings us closer to the fold of the nonhuman world. An animal is not just its body either, as Beauman (2023) adds: "A species was not just a set of bodies…it was a set of habits, relationships, territories, entanglements" (p. 28). The act of interpretation does not stop at bodily characteristics, as living is the constant interaction between the animal and the environment. All in all, the site of interpretation is as important as the animal bodies. My argument is that interactions taking place in the shared environment between humans and another animal make cross-species connections possible.

In Nayler's novel, the owner of a dive shop, Lawrence, is traumatized by a diving accident that took away his assistant. One vivid image that burns into his mind is the "mucky water, full of shapes" (Nayler, 2023, p. 7), as it is implied that the octopuses attacked them. For Lawrence, the ocean is a place of trauma. But the ocean is far from just a place for traumatic events to unfold. The reason why it can serve as a place of trauma is exactly that the ocean is where human lives and those of other species are intertwined. It is the location that ties humans to a larger part of the biosphere. I will focus on two aspects of the ocean that are shown in the two novels. First, I focus on the already recognizable human influences that massively affect the environment. These influences show the interconnectedness of the ocean and humans, and how the fate of both is directly tied to each other. Secondly, I focus on how interacting with the ocean reshapes human anatomy and human perception. Then, I argue that the reassessment of our body and mind opens the way for cross-species connection.

Human influence on the environment is an interaction of a different kind because of its unprecedented scope and the speed in which it operates. As Callum Roberts (2013) observed:

> [T]he oceans have changed more in the last thirty years than in all of human history before. In most places the oceans have lost upward of 75 percent of their megafauna… (p. 3)

The bleak reality is that the human race is the species single-handedly destroying the lives of many others. In the beginning of *Venomous Lumpsucker* (Beauman, 2023), Resaint is on a boat in the Baltic Sea, which she dubs "one of the filthiest seas on the planet" (p. 5). But all she sees are the spindrifters, artificial "ghost ships" (p. 6) built for weather modification. These ghost ships roam the ocean, messing with everything in its path without any sort of surveillance. Resaint added: "Such is the new fauna of this poisoned sea. No ringed seals any more, no harbour porpoises, no velvet scoters, no European eels, no angel sharks, no venomous lumpsuckers" (p. 6). When Resaint looks towards the ocean, there is no life, only the coldness of human technology and the faceless force of human actions. In *The Mountain in the Sea* (Nayler, 2023), the owner of the dive shop, Lawrence, recognizes the damage caused by human actions as a great force, as he recalling in fury "every reef they destroyed, every fish they poached" (p. 9). Lawrence knows it is not a single case of exploitation, but a formidable *they* that is destroying lives underwater. Humans interact with the ocean on a daily basis, not unknowingly, but without a firm grasp on how much we have changed it. Although these interactions are more precisely one-sided exploitations, they strongly verify the inseparable ties between human life and the ocean.

Apart from the one-sided exploitations, the ocean also changes humans in different ways. In the two novels, the ocean is depicted as having the quality to alter both the human mind and the human body. There is not a clear-cut differentiation between the bodily changes and cognitive changes, as they often influence each other. Sometimes it is through the limitations the human bodies experience underwater that we are able to *see* more clearly. Craig Foster (2024) speaks of how we are forced to concentrate on our vision underwater: "[Underwater,] sight is critical, the radar. Underwater, the eyes are looking for tiny signs: sight is the sense that closes the deal" (p. 70). The limitations underwater force us to focus more on our eyesight, which in turn brings about changes in our cognition. To look at the titular excerpt again: "mucky water, full of shapes" (Nayler, 2023, p. 7), in *The Mountain in the Sea* (Nayler, 2023), the shapes Lawrence sees are not only a sign of his trauma-ridden mind but also an overstimulation caused by the focus on the eyes underwater. Not long after, Lawrence reiterates this sentence with some minor differences: "Murky water full of shapes…blurred shapes his mind kept making into something else" (Nayler, 2023, p. 10). The concentration on eyesight makes the moving images underwater a horrible scene for his already troubled mind. But the physical and cognitive change does not always result in overstimulation and confusion. In *Venomous Lumpsucker* (Beauman, 2023), as Resaint is underwater, she is forced to focus on her eyesight, and she imagines herself seeing the world as a venomous lumpsucker: "[Resaint] tried to imagine herself seeing those moorings through a venomous lumpsucker's eyes" (p. 191). After reassessing her surroundings in the eyes of a venomous lumpsucker, she comes to the conclusion that what she is seeing could have been a perfect settlement for them (Beauman, 2023, p. 191), if they are still around.

Limitations are not the only things humans experience underwater. James Nestor (2014), drawing on physiologist Per Scholander's ideas, asserts that when we are diving, the human body experiences tremendous changes. These changes include "a variety of physiological reflexes in the brain, lungs, and heart…" (p. 9). Most interestingly, these changes are more precisely *adaptations*, as Nestor (2014) added:

> The deeper we dive, the more pronounced the reflexes become, eventually spurring a physical transformation that protects our organs from imploding under the immense underwater pressure and turns us into efficient deep-sea-diving animals. (p. 9)

The transformations human bodies experience enable a tighter connection to both the water and the marine creatures inhabiting the waters. In *Venomous Lumpsucker* (Beauman, 2023), another scientist on Con Dao island, Altantsetseg, in a moment of revelation, feels incredibly close to the octopuses. Altantsetseg is in charge of the defense system on the island, and the way of controlling the system is by immersing herself in the fluid that enables control of the weapons from both her body and her mind. It is a crude comparison, but she can be said to be a sinister, militarized octopus with the weapons as her arms. Seeing the movements of the octopuses, Altantsetseg muses:

> The octopus reminds me of myself…the way [the octopus] must feel in the sea, and that connectedness… At least I understand a part of it. And I spend part of my life immersed in fluid as well… (Beauman, 2023, p. 221)

This sudden connection to the octopuses is made possible by her recognition of their similar environment. It is because of the shared environment of watery fluids that her connection to the octopuses differs from pure projection. It is easy to falsely project human emotions onto animals, but the bodily changes underwater make the connection *physical*.

Moreover, the bodily and cognitive changes humans experience underwater connect us to the underwater animals in a deep, biological way. In Nayler's novel (2023), Resaint speaks of the joy of diving: "This was the way she always felt before diving…the surface of the water [is] a membrane…It [is] homecoming. She always felt she [is] in the place she [is] meant to be (pp. 240-241). The ocean, as the site where all life begins, offers a deep connection that ties humans back to the fold of the evolutionary line. Foster (2024) affirms this idea and states, "[s]wimming and diving is such a primal activity—our amphibious origins go deep into prehistory" (p. 103). To tie this back to Kohn's (2013) idea of living thoughts, the human mind and human body's adaptation and alterations in the ocean is a glimpse into the blind force of evolution, and our inseparable ties to the environment our bodies interact with. There is no doubt that humans change the ocean with unceasing activities. But when an individual comes into contact with the waters, the waters change the mind, the body, and connect that person to the fold of a larger world. The alterations make the ocean a perfect site of interaction for recognizing the physicality of marine animals.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have shown the relation between extinction and cross-species communication in the two novels. In both novels, the desire to communicate is driven by ecological grief and the desire to reconnect. However, these attempts at communication prove to be futile because of the fixation on animal intelligence. Beyond pointing out this failure, I argue that by emphasizing on the bodily characteristics of animals over intellectual capabilities, I argue that the ocean, as a site of shared experiences, is an important factor in forming cross-species connections with marine animals. One thing to keep in mind is that cross-species connections should be evaluated case by case. The quest for forming human-nonhuman ties should not be limited to marine animals and the ocean should not be considered as the only plausible site of interaction. Physical changes humans undergo in colder regions, hotter regions, or mountainous areas can also serve as meaningful reassessments in forming cross-species connections.

Vast changes are happening everywhere, and humans are a major geological force in destroying and forming new habitats. It would be unwise to treat the body of every species merely as the interpretations of its current habitat. The ocean works as an adequate site of

interaction because of its vastness and superficial similarity. But the ocean should not be seen as monotonous. Each habitat should be assessed with care and treated as a unique site of interaction when forming cross-species connections. Still, I believe the physical and perceptional reassessments humans undergo underwater are useful in forming deeper connections with our underwater friends.

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