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The Human-Animal Continuum in *Moby-Dick*

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Abstract

The readings and critical interpretations of *Moby-Dick* have been prolific and varied. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries the role of whales and nonhuman animals has been re-thought and has started to be seen as central in the novel. In addition, the new materialist turn has shown how Melville's characters and works can be read as a complex web of material relations that go beyond allegorical interpretations. This work aims to expand on these readings by considering the animality of nonhuman animals in *Moby-Dick* and by pointing out how their representation in the novel can tell us something about our own animality as humans. In particular, I will draw on Felice Cimatti's idea of unbecoming human and on Brian Massumi's theorization of zones of proximity and indiscernibility to illustrate how characters in the novel seem to cross traditional human-nonhuman boundaries and to point towards a human animality that places humans back (or better forward) into an integrally animal continuum, one that is possible mainly, as Cimatti suggests, through a return to the body. I will exemplify how both whales and human characters seem to point in this direction, which, I argue, makes *Moby-Dick* still poignantly relevant at a time in which re-thinking the human place in a nonhuman world becomes a matter of life-or-death importance.

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Introduction

There is no literature that does not carry language and syntax
to this limit that separates man from animal.

-- Gilles Deleuze, *The ABC Primer*

If only Melville were alive, how vastly more the whales, the wild world, and we
would have benefited from how he would have handled the fact that whales sing.

-- Roger Payne, “Melville’s Disentangling of Whales”

A lot has been written about Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*,[1] a text which has excited the imagination of the general public and puzzled academics for more than a century. Melville’s text has been read politically, allegorically, philosophically, as well as for its peculiar narrative choices.[2] So, why offer a new reading today? What is the meaning and use of actualizing *Moby-Dick* at a time in which concerns have shifted radically since 1851, and in which whales are understood much better than they were in Melville’s times?

To answer these questions, I would like to borrow Geoffrey Sanborn’s words. A long-time Melville scholar, in his contribution on *Moby-Dick* to the *New Companion to Herman Melville* Sanborn highlights how there is “an excitement” in reading Melville’s novel that does not necessarily come from a specific passage, or from the force of a chapter to wonderfully capture an image or suspend the narration (Sanborn, “Moby-Dick” 91). Rather, this enthusiasm emanates “from the way in which it [a chapter] could be made to serve as a kind of passageway, enabling one to crawl from a *Moby-Dick* one knows too well toward

[1] From now on, in parenthetical citations *Moby-Dick* will be quoted as MD.

[2] For a concise but thorough account of a variety of critical readings of *Moby-Dick* through the years, see Mariani (“Guida”).

a *Moby-Dick* one hardly knows at all" (Sanborn, "Moby-Dick" 91). Having personally experienced the excitement Sanborn writes about every time I have re-read *Moby-Dick*, I strongly believe there are many such passageways as the one described above, which enable readers to enter the text of *Moby-Dick* in new, unexpected ways. What I am detailing in the following pages is the passageway I have found in some chapters of *Moby-Dick*, one that has brought me to questions of humanity, animality, and the place of both in what Brian Massumi calls an "animal continuum" of nature (Massumi 112).

In addition, as John Maxwell Coetzee puts it, "criticism is that which is duty-bound to interrogate the classic" (Coetzee in Mukherjee 29), and even though what can be considered a classic is justly a matter of heated debate,[3] it is also true that *Moby-Dick* has spoken to many generations in different parts of the world,[4] making it an international classic of sorts, one that has overcome the national boundaries of North American literature to speak to people and ages very far away from the ones it was firstly written for.[5] Moreover, if classics are considered not only as mythical beginning, but more importantly as representing "a new departure" for future generations (Mukherjee 29), then they allows us to constantly interrogate them (and ourselves) at different times and in different places, in order to find new answers about our (literary and non-literary) present. This is what this work sets out to do: read the text of *Moby-Dick* with twenty-first century eyes, thinking *with* Melville's text (rather than about it, as Meredith Farmer advocates, 38) about issues of humanity, animality, and the possibilities and implications set in motion by rethinking these two apparently opposite terms into the two poles of a continuum.

Before moving on to detail my reading of *Moby-Dick*, I would like to quickly summarize what brought me to this interpretation of the novel, and why I decided to ground it on the theories of twenty and twenty-first century thinkers. In the work mentioned above, Sanborn suggests reading Melville's novel in such way as to follow

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[3] For an outlook on this debate, see Mukherjee.

[4] The history of how *Moby-Dick* has shaped popular culture all over the world and has been used as symbol of many different causes and groups the world over (such as ocean-protection groups) is being researched by Edward Sugden.

[5] For a reading of Melville's work in the context of Oceanic Studies, see Blum.

conscious and unconscious connections, arguing that it is Melville's writing itself which effectively and consistently draws his reader into a "dreamlike state", favoring this type of association-reading ("Moby-Dick" 92). Following Sanborn's suggestions, my reading of *Moby-Dick* was in fact prompted by a series of personal associations and impressions.

The first time I read Melville's novel I was almost immediately struck by the way Melville treats the nonhuman in his pages: whales, sharks, the ocean, the Pequod, whale bones are not simply accessories to the main characters, but are key components of the novel's world, and interact with human characters in surprising, unexpected ways. This fact prompted me to explore the world of the novel more deeply, in order to understand what critics had had to say about the human-nonhuman relations in the novel, and specifically about the way Melville depicts whales and other nonhuman animals. In doing so, I came across a much richer and deeper amount of academic research on the topic than I had expected to find. In fact, while attending the 2022 Melville Society Conference in Paris I realized how much of Melville's work (including, but not exclusively, *Moby-Dick*) speaks of currents of energy, ecologies, human-nonhuman relations and in general about topics that are still incredibly relevant in the twenty-first century.[6]

To pursue this line of enquiry, I decided to look into theoretical contributions to the debate on the nonhuman that could help me better understand Melville's text and the feeling of nonhuman centrality I had experienced while reading the novel. My aim became, as mentioned above, to frame *Moby-Dick* into our contemporary world and concerns, just as I had heard and read many scholars do in Paris as well as on the Melville Society journal *Leviathan*. I quickly realized that some of the thinkers who have shaped this debate, such as Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, and Donna Haraway to name but a few, were predominantly present in Melville scholarship. However, after discussing this with Dr. Pilar Martínez Benedí (University of L'Aquila), I realized that the lesser-known but still very relevant contributions of Brian Massumi and Felice Cimatti on the debate on animality had not yet been linked to Melville's work, and particularly to *Moby-Dick*. Furthermore, these contributions seemed to fit well with the text, as they seemed to help frame a reading of the

[6] See 13th International Melville Society Conference "Melville's Energies", Paris, June 27-30, 2022.

novel based on the notion of a continuum between the nonhuman and the human that had not yet been fully explored, but that I perceived to be present among Melville's pages.

This work is the result of such readings and reflections on the position of humans and nonhumans in *Moby-Dick* if seen from the perspective that rejects the traditional dichotomy between these two terms, and finds in human animality a way forward at a time in which finding our place in a nonhuman world is of paramount importance.

To develop my argument, I start by revisiting some of the key academic contributions that have reflected on the role of the nonhuman and the inhuman in Melville's oeuvre. In Chapter 1, I summarize what I see as some of the leading scholarship on this topic, in order to place my work within this line of enquiry and to show how my argument develops some of the earlier scholarship available on the subject. Starting from the 1973 groundbreaking book by Robert Zoellner, *The Salt-Sea Mastodon*, which contributed to re-evaluating the whale's key role as a nonhuman animal in Melville's novel, and moving all the way up to the twenty-first century new materialist turn in Melville scholarship, in this chapter I aim to give a brief but significant overview of how the whale and other nonhuman forces have started to take center stage in Melville studies in the last few decades.

In Chapter 2, I then move on to explore the way some human and nonhuman characters defy the boundaries of humanity or animality in order to navigate what Massumi defines the "animal continuum". In this chapter, I show how the boundaries between human and nonhuman are repeatedly and convincingly stepped over my characters such as Ahab and Stubb, whose becoming-animal is visible, albeit differently, all through the novel. On the other hand, I also show how the whale, and particularly Moby Dick, takes up more-than-animal and even more-than-human characteristics, and comes to represent a tendency to what Massumi defines "the supernormal" (15), a tendency which is precisely what allows these characters to move along the continuum and to find new creative solutions (or dissolutions) through this movement.

However, if one speaks about indiscernibility and fluidity in the separation between animal and human, the question of language immediately arises. What is the role and position of human language in the continuum? Is a continuum even possible, if the question

of the separating power of language is taken into consideration? Chapter 3 explores these issues through the text of *Moby-Dick*, by noticing how Ishmael repeatedly remarks on the inability of the whale to speak and on its possible potential to communicate with the world even though it is mute. In this chapter, I show how the whale seems to represent an alternative to human language, one which is based on the body and which might point to the whale as a possible solution to the divisions operated by language as detailed by Cimatti.

I therefore argue that, following other scholarly readings of the novel, *Moby-Dick* can be seen as staging – or at least hinting at – the return to a post-linguistic body advocated by Cimatti, one that overcomes the divisive power of language by allowing the body and the *I* to be one. This, I argue, is shown by whales in the novel, hence the human-animal continuum that is navigated by some of its characters remains valid even when considering the question of language.

In conclusion, I would like to spend a few words on the title of the present work. The phrase "animal continuum" is clearly borrowed from Massumi, but does not limit the scope of my argument to the theorizations of the Canadian thinker. It is indeed true that Massumi's proposal is partly embraced in this work, and that I use it to analyze some scenes from Melville's novel. However, the word *continuum* is here used in conjunction with its two ideal poles, human and animal, in order to stress the fluidity and porousness of the boundaries separating the human from the nonhuman in *Moby-Dick*, an idea which is at the center of this work. The wording is therefore not to be intended as a complete and uncritical borrowing of Massumi's formulation, but rather as inspired by such formulations in reading a text with twenty-first century eyes, exploring human and nonhuman animality in a non-dualistic way.

Chapter 1

Moby-Dick as an intersection of nonhuman forces

The first task for anyone wishing to enter the critical world of *Moby-Dick*[7] is to navigate the immense scholarly apparatus available on the subject. Since the Melville Revival at the beginning of twentieth century, a number of academics have read, interpreted, and helped frame the context and theoretical and narratological issues around the novel, giving a variety of answers to a range of key interpretative questions.[8] As Robert Zoellner succinctly puts is, "it is a critical truism that *Moby-Dick* is a mass of interpretive knots" (xi). It is therefore beyond the scope of this work to try to account for all the possible readings and interpretations that have been given of the text, a task which has been thoroughly accomplished elsewhere.[9]

Instead, this chapter aims to be an account of the most relevant critical works which have contributed to shed light onto the multiple nonhuman agents and forces at play in *Moby-Dick*,[10] and onto how these interact with human characters to create a complex web of relations in the novel. The above-mentioned relations were not completely overlooked by earlier critics, of course. However, as Geoffrey Sanborn contends in his contribution to *The New Cambridge Companion to Herman Melville*, they were underplayed or dismissed as mere symbolic elements representing "voracity" and "evocations of a void" ("Nonhuman World"

[7] In-text citations, from here on *Moby-Dick* will be referenced as *MD*.
[8] For a comprehensive overview of the Melville Revival phenomenon, see Marovitz.
[9] For a brief but comprehensive overview of the most influential critical readings and interpretative issues of *Moby-Dick* throughout the years, see Mariani (*Guida*).
[10] In this work, "nonhuman" refers to all other-than-human forces, including nonhuman animals, plants and vegetations, as well as inorganic forces such as the wind or sea.

12), i.e., figuratively representing elements and qualities exclusively related to humanity. In contrast, more contemporary critics have given a different role to such nonhuman forces and to their relations, seeing them not simply as a counterpoint to or an allegory of human action, but as independent forces that are intertwined with human ones, therefore becoming mutually dependent (Sanborn, "Nonhuman World" 13).[11] This approach "to the subject of the nonhuman world" in Melville's work accounts for a "recent explosion of analytic approaches" and constitute the basis onto which I will be building my analysis of some chapters and episodes of the novel. I will be starting precisely from the belief that the above-mentioned forces and interactions play a crucial role in the novel, and I will move on to explore the fluidity of the human-animal continuum that emerges from such relations. Hence, the purpose of this work is to demonstrate how, in light of these emerging critical approaches, it is possible to read *Moby-Dick* as clearly and insistently articulating the inextricable ties linking humans to their surrounding world, a critical premise that provides the foundation for the following analysis of the text.

Before moving on to the close reading of *Moby-Dick*, however, it will be useful to summarize the key concepts developed by some twentieth and twenty-first century thinkers which provide a theoretical framework to analyze the place of human as well as nonhuman animals in a human-animal continuum which seems to point to a possible, subtly implied animality for humanity in Melville's novel.[12] These, combined with the scholarship summarized in this chapter, will contribute to creating a critical and theoretical framework for the analysis of the text offered in the following chapters of this work. Ultimately, the contributions of the scholars cited here shows how Ishmael's depiction of nineteenth century American whaling industry relates to and ultimately anticipates some discussions about the role of human animality started in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, a time

[11] Spotlighting and understanding such relations is key to the present work, which asks questions about animality of the human and the nonhuman alike. For the theoretical background of this discussion, see section 1.4.

[12] As I will clarify below, this does not mean "going back" to a sort of pre-human or pre-linguistic condition (Cimatti 154), something that, as I will argue, does not happen in Melville's novel. Rather, it means going beyond what we have always believed to be humanity's distinguishing traits to embrace our animality (Cimatti 154). The distinction will be further clarified in section 1.4.

when, as Cortella points out, clear-cut separations and epistemological standards seem to clash with a reality which resists categorization (IX).

1.1. From anthropomorphism to environmental visions

One work which historically paved the way to early animal-oriented readings of Moby-Dick is undoubtedly Robert Zoellner's *The Salt-Sea Mastodon* (Mariani, *Guida* 108). In the book, Zoellner examines some of the key philosophical ideas conveyed in the novel by different characters, human and nonhuman, especially those regarding reality, nature and its meaning (3). In doing so, Zoellner dedicates a whole chapter (Chapter IX) to the "humanizing of Leviathan", i.e., to analysing how the closeness established between whales and humans in the novel serves the purpose of steering Ishmael towards a positive view of the world and of nature as benign, and does so by making something as "alien" and terrifying as a whale into a "brotherly" figure (Zoellner 186). The chapter criticises earlier scholars for seeing the whale simply through Ahab's eyes, as a mere symbol of something else – of evil or simply of "pure idea and transcendent archetype" (166).

His argument is that, if seen from Ishmael's perspective, whales are actually much more similar to humans than one might expect, i.e., they are infused with human characteristics and therefore tasked to represent traits of human life and predicament that are not seen elsewhere in the text.[13] This representation closes the gap with that "alien *other*" which Ishmael, and consequently his reader, can finally identify and feel "*with*" (Zoellner 169; emphasis in the original). In other words, Zoellner invites us to re-think Melville's leviathan as a being worthy of human compassion and sympathy, and even more than this,

[13] As an example, Zoeller argues that the whale is "femininized and infantilized" in a distinctly familial scene of Chapter 87. In a completely masculine novel, the presence of nursing mother whales and their babies, who Zoellner argues are "more baby than whale", seems to speak of a domesticity and femininity otherwise almost completely absent from the novel (181-183).

as a true "brother" to humanity, supporting his view by focusing on three specific moments in the novel which he reads as "typical of the entire process" of humanization present in *Moby-Dick* (167). These are moments when Ishmael has close encounters with live whales, and in which Zoellner identifies three whales or whale groups according to the human trait they represent.

In Chapter 61 "Stubb kills a Whale", a horror-stricken Ishmael sees a whale dying for the first time (dubbed by Zoellner "Stubb's Whale") and fills his description with images of blood and agony; in Chapter 81 "The Pequod meets the Virgin", Ishmael is present at the killing of the "Medicare Whale", representing in Zoeller's view the tragedy of the human condition, destined to be plagued by old age and sickness; and in Chapter 87 "The Grand Armada" the Pequod lowers its boats into a pod of whales, navigating through which Ishmael makes the acquaintance of the "Social Whale" and witnesses idyllic scenes of mother whales nursing their babies (Zoellner 167).

Despite the fact that this analysis is still clearly anthropocentric, the most relevant aspect of Zoeller's interpretation is his effort to remove the strictly mythic, supernatural aura the white whale (and by reflection all whales) had been seen as having by critics and scholars interpreting the novel up to that moment, influenced in Zoellner's view by Ahab's totalizing perspective:

> [i]mplicit in Chapter 55 is a repudiation of Ahab's version of Moby Dick as a creature of "outrageous strength" and "inscrutable malice," […] Ishmael's rejection of Fabulous Leviathan is helpful in arriving at a proper perspective on *Moby-Dick* as a whole. Almost without exception, commentators on the novel have been unable to resist the temptation to mythologize (and in the process, dehumanize) Leviathan. It is difficult to reconcile such an approach with Ishmael's persistent efforts, from Chapter 55 on, at demythification. (Zoellner 186)

The persistent effort referred to here is the one produced in the cetological center of the novel,[14] in which Ishmael uses biology to further subtract differences between humans and

[14] For a detailed definition of and discussion on the cetological center of *Moby-Dick*, see Vincent (126).

whales, consequently removing the otherness and highlighting the sameness of the whale in reference to human experience and anatomy (Zoellner 186), leading Zoellner to conclude that "Leviathan is not, after all, an alien. Rather, and in literal scientific fact, he is a brother" (185). In addition, Ishmael spends a whole chapter ("Of the Monstrous Pictures of Whales") debunking mythical representations of whales, while also representing the whale as a "flesh-and-blood Leviathan" with specific physical needs – the need to resurface every hour to breathe for instance – that would not fit a mythical creature (Zoellner 185, 187). In short, Zoellner's book opens up the possibility of reading whales no longer as simple vessels for ideas, but as real-life animals that are kindred to humans, and therefore to reflect on the feelings of empathy and compassion we as readers are compelled to feel towards them.

Despite the anthropomorphic nature of Zoellner's whales, the way he starts to close the gap between human and nonhuman animals by bringing to the forefront whales as living, suffering bodies informs Elizabeth Schultz's 2000 paper "Melville's Environmental Vision in *Moby-Dick*". As the title suggests, in this paper Schultz considers some of the same points expressed in *The Sea-Salt Mastodon*, but she links more explicitly whales and nonhuman animals to a broader environmental vision which the scholar believes is expressed in the novel. Interestingly, Schultz takes into consideration two of the same chapters analysed by Zoellner – Chapter 81 "The Pequod meets the Virgin" and Chapter 87 "The Grand Armada" – yet her focus shifts to the environmental message such scenes seem to convey to twentieth century readers.[15]

In Schultz's view, Melville articulates "an environmental position whereby nature and culture might co-exist" by debunking both Ahab's antagonization of nature as evil, and (contrary to Zoellner's point of view) Ishmael's idealized vision of the whale as a god (98). In contrast to these two extremes, Schultz argues that the overall view emerging from Melville's narration appears to be "based on an understanding of a unity between humanity and nature, a unity derived from an emotional and social kinship" (100). It is no longer simply a question of whales being anatomically similar to humans, but instead of Melville

[15] For an earlier but not as influential reading of *Moby-Dick* as an allegory of the current global environmental crisis, see Wixon.

consciously using the tools at his disposal (i.e., the fictional humanizing of whales) to establish "an intrinsic and irresistible interdependency among diverse species of life" (100).

According to Schultz, practical examples of this are the heavy revisions operated by Melville in Chapter 87 "The Grand Armada" compared to the sources the chapter is taken from; such alterations convince Schultz that this chapter is Melville's attempt at making his readers aware of human responsibility in the devastation and suffering caused to cetaceans and their habitat (102). In contrast with the peaceful nursing scenes described in "The Grand Armada"– the same scene that prompted Zoellner to see femininity as represented by mother whales in the novel – are the images of slaughter and destruction operated by humans in chapters where hunting and butchering of the whale's body are described in detail, as well as in this same scene in which the idyll of maternal love is brutally interrupted in a footnote (Schultz 104) by the image of a wounder nursing whale whose "pouring milk and blood rivallingly discolor the sea for rods" because the "hunter's lance" has hit her while she was nursing (Melville, *MD* 388; Ch. 87).

In fact, Schultz argues, humans seem to be the only creatures unable to appease their ravenous appetite in the novel. An appetite that is not simply material, but "assumes moral, political, and philosophical as well as environmental implications" in *Moby-Dick* (103). In other words, Melville seems aware of the tragic consequences of overconsumption on both humans and nonhumans and their habitats (Schultz 103), expressing concerns ascribable to present-day environmentalists. Whales are described not as mere products but as individuals,[16] while whalers are often compared to sharks, "thieves and pillagers" (106), thence representing the exploitation of natural resources that will soon be a distinguishing feature of industrialization, and which Melville had already experienced as he witnessed the disappearance of the buffalo from American prairies.[17]

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[16] In her paper, Schultz goes on to analyze the "Medicare Whale" scene, showing how the strongly empathic feelings the scene elicits are far from the cold, calculating view of nature as commodity typical of extractive industries (105).

[17] In fact, the whole of Chapter 105 is based on an explicit simile between the whale and the buffalo (Schultz 107).

Species extinction, habitat loss, overpopulation, and industrial pollution are explicitly mentioned in this chapter, where Melville seems to link the disappearance of whales not only to deforestation and species loss, but more crucially to "the demise of the planet itself" (Schultz 109). If nature collapses so will humanity, considering that species are profoundly interrelated: this seems to be Melville's message in Chapter 105 and throughout the book, according to Schultz's reading (109). This reading not only builds on Zoellner's to further consider the role of whales as living beings in the novel, but it also starts to ask questions about the interrelation between human and nonhuman forces in the novel by considering the (human and natural) environment surrounding the Pequod and its crew.

In a further step in this direction, "Melville's Environmental Vision" acknowledges the key role human technology plays in the novel and how artificial elements interact with human and nonhuman animals. The novel's final chapters have often been read as an *ante litteram* realization of the wish of many conservationists to see the perpetrators of ecological disasters being punished, if not completely destroyed, by the sheer force of nature (Schultz 110). However, Schultz reminds us of how the victory of Moby Dick over his pursuers is not the conclusion of the novel. In fact, it is after the tragic ending of the Pequod that Ishmael begins to travel the world and to acquire as much knowledge as possible regarding not only whales, but life in general, an experience which will lead him to retell, and eventually write, the story of the white whale (110). Indeed, it is through human technology that this whole story is possible: the ships that allow Ishmael to travel, the paper in which the book is printed, the libraries containing the knowledge he is after, the whaling industry itself, which allowed him to experience the ocean and close contact with these large cetaceans.

Could it be that Melville's environmental vision is about compromise, about the positive interplay between human, nonhuman animal and technology (111)? Schultz seems to think so, strengthening her argument with the numerous instances in which metaphors compare whales to ships and scythes, human characters look like sharks, and ships take the

shapes of whales.[18] In other words, in Schultz's reading Melville joins humans to the nonhuman ("technology and nature") by means of images and metaphors, thence expressing "a dynamic environmental vision" (111). This brings *Moby-Dick*'s descriptions close to Donna Haraway's cyborgs (111): "*monsters*" whose "social and bodily realities" are an inextricable union of human, animal and machine (Haraway 154). This clear erasing of the nature-culture dualism in these theoretical and analytical readings of *Moby-Dick* brings nonhuman elements closer to human ones, projecting the text of *Moby-Dick* well into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and, according to these scholars' readings, towards contemporary concerns for habitat preservation and marine conservation.[19]

Following on Schultz's footsteps, Susan Kalter reads *Moby-Dick* as an ecological text, and particularly analyzes the environmental ethic emerging in the novel. She specifically links environmental views in Melville's work to Native American worldviews, and goes further than Schultz in arguing that in *Moby-Dick* nonhumans are seen as "having the right to exist for their own sake" (Kalter 1, 3). While the link she posits between Melville's text and Native visions of nature and the world is beyond the scope of this work, what is relevant about Kalter's work for the reflection on nonhumans is her insistence on how "*Moby-Dick* embraces a vision of the nonhuman world that is precursor to deep ecology and other radical ecological philosophies *that decenter the human subject*" (1; emphasis added). The scholar not only insists that whales are present in Melville's novel both as nonhuman bodies and as representations of something else (in her view, native peoples), but she also insists that the cetaceans described by Melville are "always […] real whales first, even while he [Melville] inscribes them with many other meanings" (Kalter 3).

Interestingly, in Kalter's view Melville in *Moby-Dick* is advancing "simultaneously" two perspectives: one "cetocentric", concerned with the whale, its life and its imminent probable extinction due to extractive capitalism, but also and "simultaneously" one that is

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[18] In Chapter 2 of the present work I analyze one instance in which a character, Stubb, is compared to sharks, giving this analogy a different interpretation.

[19] After all, as Mukherjee aptly puts it and as mentioned in the introduction of this work, "the canon of literature and theory renews and transforms, achieves novel combinations, and fights obsolescence by being constantly on the move" (4–5).

Indianocentric (Kalter 7). In this way, the novel "decenters anthropocentric and ethnocentric thinking" at the same time, therefore powerfully linking the life and exploitation of the nonhuman to that of some human communities (Kalter 7), and particularly of Native and Black communities. This in my view is a first step towards seeing the fate and bodies of human and nonhuman communities as inextricably linked, a theme that will become prevalent in the new materialist turn in Melville studies (see section 1.3 below).

1.2. Beyond anthropomorphism

Partly opposed to these early environmental readings, in which whales are seen as kindred to humans, Philip Armstrong in his article "*Moby-Dick* and Compassion" radically rethinks both Zoellner's and Schultz's readings, re-contextualizing the novel against its historical background as well as through the sources used by Melville during the composition of the book (24).[20] In his view, such analyses are simply a projection of twentieth century environmental attitudes into a work of literature written at a time when such positions were non-existent (24).

In his sharp critique of these interpretations, which he regards as prone to criticism for their sentimentalism and anthropomorphism, Armstrong argues that not only were sentiments of compassion towards whales almost totally absent in the mid-nineteenth century, but that when they were indeed expressed, as in the case of *Moby-Dick* or of some of the sources from which the whaling scenes were taken,[21] they were mainly a rhetorical device used to enhance the heroic nature of whaling and the masculinity of whalemen (26-27). In the scenes that Zoellner and Schultz interpret as creating feelings of empathy and brotherly affection towards whales, Armstrong sees a sharp and ironic critique of "romantic

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[20] Armstrong2/15/23 7:23:00 PMmakes a similar argument and refines his criticism of Schultz and Zoellner in his 2008 book *What Animals Mean in the Fiction of Modernity*. However, I have decided to considered his earlier paper here as it aims directly at the points useful to the discussion on human and nonhuman forces.

[21] For a detailed account of how Melville's sources treat animal suffering, see Armstrong ("Compassion" 29).

idealism and religious hypocrisy" ("Compassion" 28), dismissing any intention on Melville's part of seeing whales as truly worthy of human compassion. Quite categorically, Armstrong concludes that "[e]ven the most emotionally charged moments of humanization in the novel do not exclude a taken-for-granted exploitation of the animal" (31).

On the other hand, in an effort to bring the argument towards a nonhuman reading of *Moby-Dick* a step forward, Armstrong theorizes a human-whale "inextricable interimplication" present in the novel, which in turn describes a broader trend present in mid-nineteenth century whaling industry ("Leviathan" 1041). The strength of such theorization compared to Zoellner's and Schultz's is that it is based on contextual and analytical clues, and therefore it probably reflects more closely Melville's – and more broadly nineteenth century – views of whales generated by the industrial whaling system and other social, philosophical, and economic dynamics at play in antebellum United States (1041). Armstrong justifies the strong swaying between two poles in the characterization of whales in the novel as a product of a society and an economic order in which the whaleman is both a romantic hero and an uncivilized brute, dealing with dangerous but majestic animals and working under terrible conditions to convert them into market commodities (1040).

In his analysis, Armstrong applies Bruno Latour's concept of "translation" to describe such constant but neglected back-and-forth movement between human and nonhuman in the novel, a movement which in Latour's work is described as present but unacknowledged ("underneath") in the "modern constitution", a condition in which separating humans and nonhumans is as artificial as it is effective (Latour 13). As scientific thought took the upper hand in the eighteen and nineteen centuries, ascribing animality to humanity became progressively less accepted, so the instances in which such animality came back into play (such as in romantic thought) became to be attributed to instances of anthropomorphism (Armstrong, "Leviathan" 1047).

However, simply reading whales in *Moby-Dick* as anthropomorphized ignores much more complex underlying relations: "[a]longside its anthropomorphic humanizing of the whale, Melville's novel invites the reader to recognize a zoomorphic animalizing of the human"; i.e., in a drastic move *Moby-Dick* places "the nonhuman, the inhuman, and the

inhumane" back within the most cherished and crucial category of "Enlightenment humanism": humanity (1050). An example provided by Armstrong of this "animalizing" movement is Ahab himself, a character who is concurrently human, animal, and technological. Not only is he akin to both his foe and his ship – both partly made of the bones of the same whale they strenuously hunt – but he is also driven to madness by this same "point of mediation between animal and human" (Armstrong, "Leviathan" 1042). In a nineteenth century theoretical system in which the nonhuman animal is completely excluded from humanity, finding himself materially dependent on the body of a whale Ahab loses his mind (1042).

Similarly, whales show their own form of "translation" between humanity and the nonhuman (1042) through the same animal-human-technology metaphors noted by Schultz. To put it another way, despite being critical of Schultz's environmental reading of *Moby-Dick* as a mere projection of twentieth century concerns, Armstrong is indeed pointing to the strong interconnection between human and nonhuman in Melville's work, dismissing previous anthropomorphic readings of whales as a modern tendency to place animality strictly outside humankind. Nonetheless, he believes these interconnections (found quite frequently in "mid-nineteenth-century scientific writing") to be the product of "economic and cultural ideologies" of a time in which nonhuman animals were a key component of an expanding industrial society (1043).[22]

Moreover, Armstrong advocates reading whales (and nonhuman animals in general), as *agents* who "might intend, signify, design or cause something beyond the meanings superimposed on them by humans", i.e., who might act in the world and produce change in a way which does not conform to the role of passive commodities humans want to impose upon nonhumans in modern, capitalist society ("Example" 94, 95).[23] As a matter of

[22] Armstrong then goes on to analyze the complementary descriptions of nonhuman animals and non-white humans in the novel, and Melville's critique of American society based on the exploitation of these two categories of individuals ("Leviathan" 1050-53). However, this part of his paper is not related here as it is outside the scope of this work.

[23] Armstrong convincingly defends the aforementioned view of nonhuman animal agency from the charge of anthropomorphism by arguing that such allegations are in turn based on the assumption that only "rational" and "conscious" human beings are capable of agency, a strongly anthropocentric view of the concept of agency ("Example" 95).

fact, *Moby-Dick* itself repeatedly challenges its readers' potential to signify the whale, namely through Ishmael's remarks on his inability to give a full account of the whale and his belief that the cetacean will never be fully known by humans, thus resisting "human signifying systems" (Armstrong, "Example" 97).[24] In Ishmael's view, it is only "seen at sea in unfathomable waters" (Melville, *MD* 263; Ch. 55), i.e., in the middle of the ocean during a whaling expedition, that the whale can be truly *experienced* (rather than scientifically or otherwise *known*), or, in Armstrong's words, "[f]or Ishmael […] the real whale is the fighting whale" (Armstrong, "Example" 98)

Notably, Moby Dick himself adamantly defies human classification by acting in a way that humans find difficult to frame into their anthropocentric view of animals as mere instinct (99, 100) when he seems to attack whale boats with "intelligent malignity" and "infernal aforethought of ferocity" (Melville, *MD* 183; Ch.41). The only two possibilities for nineteenth-century humans (and specifically for those writing about whales) remain to ascribe this behavior to whalemen's tall tales, or to a clear instance of anthropomorphism (Armstrong, "Example" 104), as nonhuman agency is completely unthinkable when so much thought and money has been invested in maintaining a clear distinction between humans and animals (104). Here is where Melville's work markedly departs from his contemporaries': he insistently juxtaposes and expands on a number of views on nonhuman agency, and in doing so multiplies it infinitely, creating a whale which differs completely from other fictional animals of his time – but in so doing also alienated many of his contemporary readers (Armstrong, "Example" 104).

Additionally, in the cetological center of the book, Ishmael spends pages describing every minutia of the whale body (such as the tail or the head) as well as of the whaling industry (such as how the line and other utensils work). This, in Armstrong's view, is a way for Melville to introduce a series of nonhuman agents in anticipation to the novel's ending,

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[24] Examples of Ishmael's epistemological attitude throughout the text include: "[a]s yet, however, the sperm whale, scientific or poetic, lives not complete in any literature" (Melville, *MD* 135; Ch. 32); "there is no earthly way of finding out precisely what the whale really looks like" (Melville, *MD* 264; Ch. 55); "[d]issect him how I may, then, I but go skin deep; I know him not, and never will" (Melville, *MD* 379; Ch. 86). This epistemological stance is discussed more fully in Chapter 3 of the present work.

in which all these agents – the whale's tail, eyes, and head, but also the whale-line and the harpoon – intersect and concur in playing a key role in Ahab's and the Pequod's demise (107). In addition, the whale's agency itself, as well as Ahab's, are further complicated in the novel by attributing Moby Dick's actions to the whale's head, then to some external agent, and finally to a human-like desire for revenge, and by characterizing Ahab as "monomaniac", a term used at the time to refer to individuals who had lost power over their own agency, or who were controlled by an external agent and were therefore unable to will their actions (108).

In short, Melville seems to reject his contemporaries' strict separation between human agency and nonhuman passivity by complicating their relationship and representing instead a network of inter-related agencies, which bind "human to the nonhuman actors" into "collectives". Such groups might work together or against each other, but in any case, exist as complex entities that refuse the "strictly modem separation between an active human subject and a passive or reactive animal object" (109).

In a similarly contextualized, non-anthropomorphic reading of the novel, Kyla Schuller reads *Moby-Dick* as a full-fledged examination of the strong affective bond that nineteenth century whaling practices generated between prey and predators "through the very intimacy of the hunt" (4). By drawing a parallel between the descriptions of whales in Melville's text and the tropes of nineteenth century sentimentalism, Schuller argues that Melville is interested in exposing the selfishness of human and nonhuman animal relations which stand at the center of a newly industrialized economy based on the extraction of whale oil (4). As the newly-emerged middle class starts to find solace in the company of pet animals, and caring for pets becomes the mirror of a person's character and morality, the same is not at all concerned by the brutalizing of men and whales perpetrated by the whaling industry upon which its wealth relies (Schuller 5).

As a response to this, in Schuller's reading Melville depicts a sort of inter-species intimacy that borders sexuality, in which "the bodies of whales and whalers interpenetrate: as whales chew human legs and humans chew whales for supper, humans wear whale-bone prosthetics and whales carry lances embedded in their flesh" (9). Indeed, sexual and

homoerotic images or metaphors often emerge when describing the process of harvesting the whale's body for oil and other precious substances (Schuller 10), such as in "The Squeeze of the Hand" (Chapter 94) or in the carpenter's words in Chapter 108, when he refers to Ahab's whale-bone leg as "his [Ahab's] bedfellow" and his "wife" (Melville, *MD* 472; Ch. 108). In short, Schuller argues that, in Melville's work as in real-life whaling, through hunting and slaughtering whalemen become intimately acquainted with whales, which come to represent both suffering pets and profitable products to be extracted, "a dualism that would challenge [Melville's] reader's sympathy and effectively critique an economic basis of elite, midcentury prosperity" (12).

In addition, Schuller reminds us of the Lamarkian view of evolution expressed by Melville not only in *Moby-Dick* but also and more explicitly in *Pierre*, according to which bodies that live closely together stimulate each other's transformation towards one another and create evolutionary changes that are then inherited down the generations (13). That is to say, the Pequod's crew, through their consistent interaction with whales – and for some crew members this is true for generations in their families – become closer and closer to the whales they are hunting, becoming in the process truly "whale-men" (13).[25]

In summary, both Armstrong's and Schuller's analyses move beyond reading nonhuman animals as simple projections of human elements, and provide solid textual and contextual clues to start thinking extensively about nonhuman elements in *Moby-Dick*. These reflections pave the way to non-anthropocentric interpretations of *Moby-Dick* and more broadly in Melville's oeuvre which take into account the theoretical and practical context in which the text was composed, while at the same time being rooted in twentieth- and twenty-first-century philosophical developments, in what has been defined a "new materialism turn" in Melville criticism.

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[25] See Schuller for a detailed account of how some crew members, such as Flask, Tashtego, and Ahab, seem to inherit not only the trade of whale hunting, but also whale-like traits from their families (13). Furthermore, Schuller highlights how most of the Pequod's crew is non-white, and continues by examining the orientalism used by Melville in describing both Fedallah, Ahab and whales, drawing interesting parallels between race and species (15-20).

1.3. The new materialist turn

As it has been hinted at so far, at the turn of the millennium the humanities started to embraced a newly-found interest in materiality, and particularly in matter's potential to help us frame a new understanding of fundamental questions of subjectivity, processes and knowledge (Coole and Frost 2). As a consequence, Melville studies have also moved towards a more materialist, less allegorical readings of his work in order to "free" it "from its constrictive local and national contexts" and allow it to "circulate as world literature" (Mukherjee 5) which still speaks to twenty-first century readers all over the world,[26] and they have done it beginning precisely from his most studied work, *Moby-Dick*.[27] Indeed, in their recent publication *Ahab Unbound: Melville and the Materialist Turn*, Meredith Farmer and Jonathan D. S. Schroeder include contributions that reframe Ahab (and by extension all of Melville's production) through "atomism, vitalism, neuroscience, disability studies, animal studies, posthumanism, political theory, the medical humanities, and the environmental humanities" (Farmer and Schroeder 2) in an attempt to re-contextualize Melville's most famous character.[28]

In addition, in the introduction to the volume Farmer outlines a brief history of the new materialist turn, a critical framework pioneered in 1999 by Samuel Otter's *Melville's*

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[26] An interesting testimony of the spread and influence of the text of *Moby-Dick* can be found in the ongoing research by Edward Sugden aimed at writing a biography of the novel, that is to say a narrative in which the novel's global life and influence unfold and which "journeys into the many worlds created and made possible by this once obscure classic" (Sugden).

[27] Not only *Moby-Dick*, but many other works by Melville have been read though this perspective, giving nonhuman forces a prominent role all through the writer's production. Apart from the above-mentioned volume by Farmer and Schroeder, other interesting contributions on this subject include Geoffrey Sanborn's reading of the short story "Cock-A-Doodle-Doo" mentioned below, Sharon Cameron's influential essay on the impersonal in *Billy Budd*, Colin Dayan reflection on Melville's "creatures" and "the uneasy boundaries between human and nonhuman" in "The Encantadas" (Dayan 46), and Pilar Martínez Benedí's and Ralph James Savarese's analysis of the mutenes of nonhuman elements in *Pierre*.

[28] In Farmer and Schroeder, Ahab is mainly read as a scarred body in pain, suffering from mental disorders and working under poor labour conditions (Farmer 1). Particularly, in the introduction to the volume Farmer distances the book from previous interpretations of Ahab (who, as the title implies, is the main topic of concern of the volume), re-thinking him as a deeply hurt and mentally ill individual who "never murders anyone" (2), a reading radically opposed to the Cold War frame in which Ahab exemplifies the totalitarian, strong-willed dictator who forces his crew towards certain death, and to which Ishmael opposes his free-thinking idealism (Farmer 35).

Anatomies, where the corporeal aspects of Melville's texts are discussed at length and take center stage in the analysis of his work (Farmer 2). Despite the fact that Otter's work is still mainly focused on human bodies, it has the merit of opening up a new materialist perspective, which later developed into two directions: "classical Marxist theories of labor" on the one hand, and "materialist models of psychology" on the other (Farmer 2). These latter readings in turn moved away from simply considering *human* bodies, to incorporate bodies and energies in a broader sense – up to most contemporary readings, which include "posthumanism, political theory, and disability studies" (Farmer 3). In short, new materialist readings do not deny, but celebrate nonhuman agents in Melville's work, in an attempt to distance themselves from anthropocentric, allegorical readings of his oeuvre (Farmer 11) and to markedly go "back towards materialism" (37).

In doing so, scholars who adhere to this approach have started to move away from considering Melville's sources as the center of the critical analysis in order to use them alongside Melville's texts to begin thinking "*with* Melville" (rather than *about* him) regarding "current political or philosophical" issues (Farmer 38; emphasis added). Many of these readings have been prompted or influenced by classic as well as contemporary thinkers who provide alternative ways of looking at matter and relations, such as Spinoza, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Bruno Latour, Donna Haraway, and Giorgio Agamben (Otter, "Afterword" 413–14). In what follows, I will present some key contributions to the interpretation of nonhuman forces in *Moby-Dick* that can be ascribed to this new materialist turn, with particular attention to those which focus on nonhuman animals and their role in Melville's texts in relation to human characters.

The early nonhuman readings of *Moby-Dick* presented in the previous sections of this chapter are acutely expanded upon by Geoffrey Sanborn, who not only includes in his analysis nonhuman agents other than nonhuman animals (such as trees and forests), but also extends the nonhuman argument to lesser-known works by Melville, such as his short story "Cock-A-Doodle-Doo" (Sanborn, "Nonhuman World" 13). The argument starts off by presenting Melville's relationship to nonhuman animals and to nature in general, which Sanborn describes as an "energizing feeling of fellowship" which emerges not only from

Melville's published work, but also from his personal correspondence, particularly those letters written during the composition of *Moby-Dick* (11).

Crucially, across his writings Melville seems more concerned about the opposition between "isolation and response" rather than in the separation of the human from the nonhuman (Sanborn, "Nonhuman World" 11). In other words, his texts seem to be more about reacting to the world around, as it "summons us" (11) in our present embodied self, than it is in creating general truths, which in Melville's own words are transitory and therefore impossible to universalize (Sanborn, "Nonhuman World" 15): "what plays the mischief with the truth is that men will insist upon the universal application of a temporary feeling or opinion" (Melville, *Correspondence* 194). Instead, Melville seems to postulate Life as an "ultimate reality" (instead of God) which can be at times terrifying, as in Pip's misadventure in the ocean, or "becharming", like the beetle in "The Apple-Tree Table" (Sanborn, "Nonhuman World" 12). This tendency to "lateralize", i.e., to remove hierarchies and give every element equal weight, seems to indicate a belief in an aesthetic experience generated by constituents of life that freely associate with one another, generating new, unforeseeable elements (13).[29] Otherwise stated, "[i]nstead of arraying Life and Death against one another, dialectically, [Melville] arranges them alongside one another, compositionally, because that is how he finds them in his experience" (13).

To support his hypothesis, Sanborn presents three propositions which, taken together, create a theoretical frame for his analysis of "Cock-A-Doodle-Doo". Firstly, Sanborn describes Melville's production as "exclamatory". In fact, in many of his prose works, such as the opening lines of *Typee*, Melville adds instability to an utterance by making it into an exclamation (Sanborn, "Nonhuman World" 13). This fluctuation in the utterance intensity should be read as a "special intensity of expression", that is to say an amplification in force and ultimately "a corresponding surge of life" (Sanborn, "Nonhuman World" 14).

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[29] A fitting example of this given by Sanborn ("Nonhuman World" 13) is Chapter 102 "A Bower in the Arsacides", in which a whale skeleton is described in the middle of a "grand temple of lordly palms" (Melville, *MD* 449). Here Ishmael muses: "Life folded Death; Death trellised Life; the grim god wived with youthful Life, and begat him curly-headed glories" (Melville, *MD* 450, Ch. 102), showing a moment of intersection between Life and Death that is typical of lived experience, and of Melville's vision.

Nevertheless, such exclamatory moments are not purely imbalances that create an uprush of life, they are also responses. Alternatively, exclamations can be reactions that create a counterpoint to moments of dullness or “stagnation”, or responses to other exclamatory elements coming from the surrounding environment (14).

Lastly, in proposition Three Sanborn argues that Melville is “acutely aware” of how all these states, exclamations and responses are completely transitory in nature (15). In his correspondence with Hawthorne as well as in his work, Melville repeatedly expresses the view that feelings and opinions are transitory and that applying them as universal laws would be foolish. By the time he’s writing *Moby-Dick*, he has come to the conclusion that “nothing in this slippery world, not even one’s awareness of the world’s slipperiness, can hold” (Sanborn, “Nonhuman World” 15). In short, in Sanborn’s reading Melville’s work is punctuated by nonhuman forces in an exclamation-and-answer configuration that is nevertheless shown as transient and impermanent.[30] This view, as I will argue in the following chapters of this work, paves the way for considering Melville’s work (and here specifically *Moby-Dick*) as characterized by fluidity and impermanence, therefore allowing the animal continuum to emerge as a possible interpretative key.

The politics of the inhuman

These reflections about the intensity of human and nonhuman forces at play in Melville’s work seem to usher in Michael Jonik’s analysis on the role of the inhuman in the writer’s production,[31] a notion which Jonik perceives as chiefly influenced by Spinoza’s thought (6). In fact, according to Jonik “Spinoza comes to signify for Melville a profoundly nonanthropocentric philosophy”, which is based on the assumption of the “inhumanness and impersonality of ‘God, or Nature’” (4), one of the core tenets of the Dutch philosopher.

[30] For a comprehensive study on Melville as an independent thinker and a philosopher, see Arsić and Evans.
[31] In his book, Jonik uses the Deleuzian term “inhuman” rather than nonhuman to refer to non-human (mainly inorganic) forces which “resist” the anthropomorphising gaze of European thought, as well as to conform to Melville’s own use of the term (14).

By re-tracing Melville's (probably indirect) reading of Spinoza's work, Jonik convincingly traces a parallel between some of the philosophical concepts expressed in Melville's work and Spinoza's idea of bodies as made of "an assemblage of various individuals with their own conatus" (6) – as is the case of the Pequod's crew made of whale-men as seen above – individuals who are not necessarily made only of human, or even organic parts.[32] In engaging with Spinoza's (and other philosophers') thought, Melville creates characters who are far removed from German Romantic standards (Jonik 10): they are not well-rounded "fictional individuals", with clearly defined personalities, but are instead a collection of human and inhuman components, humans who are "deconstituted by inhuman forces or driven by inhuman imperatives" (11) such as the wind and lightning, or his ever consuming monomania.

In Jonik's view, this does not simply have material implications, but instead it manifests Melville's concerns about "human political relations" and how these are affected by or investigated through the material world, physicality and the body (7). In other words, individuals are not distinctly separated entities, who then aggregate into communities of like-minded individuals (as in the case of a nation-state for example), but rather an interpenetrating collection of human and nonhuman beings, forces or entities which form inter- as well as intra-individual relations (Jonik 8). This in turn has political consequences, precisely because previously given-for-granted notions of "identity" and "community" are questioned and replaced with the notion of "transindividuality" (7), a term identifying a "relation of relations" within an individual as well as among individuals (Read qtd. in Jonik 239).

This is what Jonik terms "a politics of the 'common'" (8): a model of relation that posits a concurrent effort from all elements in creating a "collective of desubjectified subjects", as is the case for example with the multiethnic and polyphonic crew of the Pequod (8). In extending Sharon Cameron's reading of *Billy Budd* as well as Branca Arsić's

[32] In Melville's text, bodies are indeed disassembled, dismembered, or devoured by other bodies or forces, as clarified below. However, this does not deny their conatus, i.e., their innate and essential drive to preserve themselves (Vinciguerra 153). Hence, an intrinsic cause of self-destruction is inadmissible in Spinoza's thought (154).

reading of "Bartleby" (Jonik 13), Jonik offers an interesting analysis of *Moby-Dick* (as well as of other works by Melville) which brings the debate on the nonhuman presence in Melville's work a further step in the direction considered in this work.

In the chapter dedicated to *Moby-Dick*, aptly described as a text "composed of lines and planes", Jonik brings to the forefront the continuous flow of activity and movement present in the novel, in which the plot long hiatuses of stillness are followed by the sudden movement of a whale chase (20). It is from such movements, Jonik suggests, that characters who are "hybrid, partial bodies, disembodied and atmospheric" emerge (20) and interact in a web of relations that cannot be fully represented, just like the whale is for Ishmael (21). These inhumanities present in the characters are, as described above, peculiarly political as they join with the collectivities present in the text to form what Jonik refers to as "ethopolitics", a term he uses to describe the complex, multiform bodies and forces that enter into political relations, collectively creating the events that unfold. (Jonik 21).

Building on Sharon Cameron's analysis of the "dissolution of the self" in *Moby-Dick*, Jonik analyses how Melville depicts the physicality of bodies as including nonhuman elements, such as the landscape, the atmosphere or "more abstractly, material and immaterial forces" (Jonik 21). From Ishmael dreaming of undefined whiteness to minor characters such as Pip getting lost in the vastness of the ocean, everyone on the Pequod is both enveloped and part of a material world made of numerous substances and "affective assemblages" (22). Most prominently, Ahab's power itself seems to generate from atmospheric, nonhuman elements in a way that makes Ishmael exclaim how in order to grasp Ahab's true greatness, "it must needs be plucked at from the skies, and dived for in the deep, and featured in the unbodied air!" (Melville, *MD* 148; Ch. 33).

Besides these nonhuman features present in human characters, Jonik further extends Cameron's analysis by considering as part of the novel's "relational ontology" not only the human characters and their nonhuman constituents, but also the ever-present material energies themselves, as well as the many physical places in the novel in which characters "emerge with and through" (22). It therefore becomes clear how the "character system" of *Moby-Dick* is composed not only of the Pequod's crew, and possibly the whale

Moby Dick, but can be thought of as including elements that are generally considered "extra-characterological" because impersonal and nonhuman (Jonik 22), such as the ocean, the wind, the ship, Ahab's magnetism and so on.

More specifically, Jonik lists four ways in which characters in *Moby-Dick* (as defined above) manifest elements which are not usually taken to be part of what is considered personhood, and therefore contribute to the hypothesis that Melville's characters are not to be confined in self-contained, human individuals, "*viz.* concatenation, prosthetics, immanent materiality, and geometrics" (23). Of these, the first three aspects are the most relevant to the present work, and therefore will be briefly outlined in the following paragraphs.[33]

As regards "concatenation", it is interesting to notice how lines crisscross and interweave all through the novel in myriad ways, creating a textile of relations: from the whale line to the monkey-rope, from the lines in Ahab's face to Queequeg's tattoos, all these raveled lines seem to suggest "a complex ontology of relations" (Jonik 25), i.e., a reality in which bonds of interdependence are the building blocks of existence. To exemplify this reading, Jonik points to Chapter 47 "The Mat-Maker" and Chapter 102 "A Bower in the Arsacides", in which Melville seems to fully develop this sort of ontology by going beyond the interweaving of bodies and textiles present for instance in Chapter 4 "The Counterpane". In "The Mat-Maker", Queequeg and Ishmael rhythmically work the loom in a sort of dream-like state, and in doing so become individual subjects. However, their subject-making work does not come before or as a consequence of their weaving, but *through* it, thus creating associations that are no longer simply bodily, but also causal, temporal, and affective (Jonik 25–26). In other words, when comparing their work of weaving to a Goethian-like "Loom of Time" (27) by seeing their agency as symbolizing fate, free will, and chance, Ishmael is creating an "intricate meshing of temporal strands, causalities, and agencies" that include but are not limited to the human characters in the novel, in a show

[33] The last section of Jonik's chapter on *Moby-Dick* (49-58), not examined here, analyses how Melville uses what could be considered non-Euclidean geometry to mark how bodies and forces interact.

of Melville's ability to use his characters to render into fiction complex philosophical questions (Jonik 27).

Goethe's and Carlyle's influence notwithstanding, later in the novel in "A Bower in the Arsacides" Melville distances himself from his mentors. Through a set of complex nonhuman "material encounters" between whale bones and vegetation, i.e., between life and death, "Nature" in *Moby-Dick* is no longer a mirror of human activity (as it was in Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*), but a "nonanthropocentric or inhuman concatenation of forces" in which human-nonhuman political connections take place (Jonik 30). In short, in this chapter Melville seems to suggest that "[i]ndividual organisms die, but life itself relentlessly continues" in a zig-zag of "transindividual processes" that weave all through the text, blurring, mixing and recreating individuals[34], compenetrating and fusing separate forces, human and nonhuman (Jonik 29).

This interpretation holds true also if applied to Ahab, a character who has long been read as the epitome of ego, the very example of a clearly-defined individuality (Jonik 32). In reality, he is repeatedly described through the material elements that compenetrate, form and emanate from him: the line that crosses his face as if he had been struck by lightning, the weather that often accompany him in the form of wind or clouds that darken his "brow", the bronze of which he seems to be made when he first appears to Ishmael, the whale bone out of which his leg is shaped, and many more (Jonik 33). In short, he is indeed an "intricate play of materiality and mood, and of human and inhuman agencies" (34).

More specifically, the question of nonhuman agency and how it affects Ahab (a topic which Jonik sees as of "central importance in *Moby-Dick*" 35) seems to materialize precisely in his prosthetic leg. It is precisely this element which hints at a "broader system of relations" (Jonik 36): not only between Ahab and the self-same whale jaw that amputated his flesh-and-blood leg, but also between Ahab and the Pequod, also made of whale parts and providing Ahab with a new leg out if its "broken keel" once his old one is broken: "As Ahab and the whale are 'coterminous,' so are Ahab and The Pequod" (37), they share parts,

[34] In Deleuzian terms, Jonik effectively suggests that in *Moby-Dick* subjects are never definitive, "striated", or "completed" (30).

sometimes character traits, and most poignantly they share a tragic destiny. In addition, characters like Fedallah can be considered prosthetic additions to Ahab's body (Jonik 38), in a continuation of lines that go from Ahab's brow, to the whale's head, to Fedallah's hand as "'the Parsee's shadow' seems to 'blend with' and 'lengthen' Ahab's" (Jonik 38). Contrary to previous readings then, Ahab seems indeed to be in desperate need to establish his own identity, but his enterprise is presented as doomed to fail as the more he tries to define his and others' identities, the more the materials and affective encounters these produce end up blurring the contours of Ahab's identity, "further effect[ing] his undoing" (Jonik 39). Jonik expresses this idea clearly when he states that:

> Melville, through Ahab, advances an understanding of character that does not fix itself on the primacy of bodies. Rather, characterization is a rendering of processes of incorporation and disincorporation through an ensemble of forces and a set of emergent relations. Characters' bodies are a priori decorporealized in the sense that they are never whole organisms or closed systems, but always intersecting with or interenacting with other material forms or territories. (40)

Furthermore, when Ahab seems to be asserting his "idealist metaphysics", Jonik argues he could instead be "affirming the insignificance" of bodies, which are bound to be modified, commodified or destroyed by other bodies or elements, as it often happens on the Pequod (42-43). Indeed, the Pequod's journey is punctuated by processes of self-production and "auto-cannibalism":[35] the vulture representing Ahab feeding upon Ahab's own heart, the whale being eaten at its own light in "Stubb's Supper" and burned through its own oil in "The Try-Works", the general "vultureism of earth" in "The Funeral". All these processes of "material transformation" happen between different species, once again blending human and nonhuman in the effort that seems to be aimed at rendering the "porous boundaries of

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[35] Jonik points to a masterful example of this in his work: the image of the silkworm which spins its "own shroud", a metaphor used by Ahab himself when talking to the carpenter (41). The carpenter is another interesting character from this point of view, as he is described by Melville as sharing the "stolidity" of the "surrounding infinitude of things" (Melville, *MD* 467; Ch.107). For an in-depth analysis of the carpenter as a confluence of human and nonhuman elements, see Jonik (37).

the human" (Jonik 43, 45). Not to mention the innumerable variety of fluids and substances present on the Pequod (from the whale's blood to the blubber, from seawater to butter) which once again dissolve "individual or species boundaries" and substitute the wholeness of the subject with a multi-layered, active rhizome of relations (Jonik 47). In short, the several images where bodies and substances intermix and suffuse one with the other are not only there to prove Ishmael's thirst for knowledge and understanding, but rather as a way for Melville to explore in detail "all the ways in which human and nonhuman bodies are incorporated or digested, dismembered or dissolved, consumed with fire or rent by convulsive forces" (48).

In conclusion, Jonik advocates reading *Moby-Dick* as Melville's attempt to envisage a Spinoza-inspired "ethopolitics", that is to say an ontology in which inter-dependent individuals challenge their differences and come into non-predictable relations with themselves and others, being crucially affected by nonhuman and inhuman agents in a politics "attendant to the (micro) physics of bodies, forces, and relations" (63). Despite focusing mainly on inanimate or inorganic forces – which are not the main concern of this work – Jonik's contribution convincingly shows how a certain vitalistic philosophy (deriving from Deleuze's reading of Spinoza, Jonik 63) can be used to analyze Melville's work to provide a posthuman reading of the novel which considers nonhuman elements as playing such a key role as to cogently consider them part of the main acting characters in the plot. Hence, his work provides a solid theoretical background upon which to I will expand in the following chapters in order to examine the zones of proximity that are created in Melville's novel between human and nonhuman characters, and how these influence the characters and create instances of becoming that highlight the animality of humans, and the humanity of nonhumans.

Cogito with whales

As mentioned above, Jonik sees in *Moby-Dick* an ontology of relations that compenetrates all persons and ends up enveloping even the most resistant of characters, Ahab, whose idea

of strong, well-defined subject individuality is dismantled by the co-occurrence of pervading human and nonhuman forces (Jonik 66). In her contribution to the already-cited work edited by Farmer and Schroeder, Branca Arsić, envisages instead a double ontology: one represented by Ahab's "radical Idealism", and an alternative one developed by Melville through whales and their permeability with the surrounding environment (Arsić 65). The first one, which Arsić defines as being "only a version of the Western mind's mainstream narrative, told by many, from Plato via Christianity to Descartes" (65), posits the body as completely unaffected and impermeable to the surrounding environment, a completely separated entity from the mind or soul, which in this view is the locus of all feelings and sensations (68) endowed of "purity, eternity, and self-sufficiency" (65).

As an example of this, Arsić reads Chapter 108 "Ahab and the Carpenter" as a statement of the captain's conviction of the triviality of the body compared to the mind (67), particularly when the captain asks the carpenter to place his flesh-and-blood leg where Ahab's missing one once was, declaring that "here is only one distinct leg to the eye, yet two to the soul" (Melville, *MD* 471; Ch. 108). In keeping with Descartes's concept of *res cogitans*, i.e., "reasoning thing" – something Melville had been reading while writing *Moby-Dick* – Ahab seems to state that the sensations he feels are alien to his amputated body seeing that he can still feel his missing leg as if it were there, in an echo of the French philosopher's demonstration that places all feelings and thoughts in the mind rather than in a totally unrelated, unfeeling body (Arsić 68). The consequence of this conviction is that the suffering of a body is not real suffering, but rather is in the mind, and that "whales, albatrosses, and people [are] inherently dead matter that never changes or suffers of its own accord" (Arsić 70). The amputated man is unaffected by the tearing away of one if his limbs, thus he is not less himself than he was before the amputation, Ahab seems to suggest (72). Which poses a particularly thorny ethical question: how are bodies to be handled if what they feel is not really in the body, but in the mind which is completely unaltered by bodily pain? Why should anyone restrain from harming, killing, or butchering human and nonhuman animals, since their bodies are not who they really are, and their eternal soul remains unaffected (Arsić 74)?

As a consequence, human exploitation and destruction of human and nonhuman animal life, as well as of the environment, seems to have been justified by what Arsić defines as a "tale that philosophy" has been telling the West for centuries, one represented by Ahab in *Moby-Dick* (74). In fact, the captain asks the carpenter to make him "a complete man after a desirable pattern" (Melville, *MD* 470; Ch. 108), that is to say one with "no heart at all" and instead "about a quarter of an acre of fine brains", and more crucially without "eyes to see outwards" and instead "a sky-light on top of his head to illuminate inwards" (Melville, *MD* 470): a completely self-absorbed subject, markedly separated from the surrounding environment and unconcerned with anything that is not his own self (Arsić 75-76). In other words, Ahab's (as a reflection of Descartes's) ideal human being is cold and totally self-contained (Arsić 76), having a brain completely unaffected by emotion, which is "frozen calm" and cracks the skull "like a glass in which the contents turn to ice" (Melville, *MD* 563); Ch. 135) – that is to say, it is dead (Arsić 76).

In opposition to this Cartesian view, Arsić postulates the bodies of cetaceans. The novel's whale body cannot be fully grasped by humans,[36] it resists classification and "molding", it seems to have no clear discernible shape as even its bones – the most reliable account of a body's shape and functions – are not clearly definable as bones in human terms (Arsić 79-80). In short, whales are "elusive, neither-nor beings" (Arsić 80) whose boundaries cannot be accurately perceived or defined and whose skin blends in with the surrounding environment, erasing the demarcation not only between bones and muscles, and muscles and skin, but also between inside and outside.

> Woven into the cuticles is the skin's other layer of cutis, which, in Hunter's words, forms "small ridges, similar to those on the human fingers" across the skin's surface, and ends in "soft," hairlike, "extremely vascular" and sensitive outgrowths called "villi" that "float in the water" […] The villi thus extend neural ridge-fingers into the animal's ambience while simultaneously constituting the epidermis that

[36] See section 3.2 of the present work for a more extensive discussion of this epistemological problem.

> continues into the muscles, which, for their part, not only continue into but sometimes grow into the porous bones. (Arsić 80)

The categories of "interior" and "exterior" themselves become obsolete, as what is supposedly found outside, e.g., the "villi", reaches all the way into the inside and vice versa, seamlessly linking the body of the whale to the water surrounding it, and by extension to the whole environment (Arsić 81). Even more interestingly, the brain itself is difficult to pinpoint in the whale, a fact that prompts Ishmael to put forth a "spinal theory" of the whale brain as stretching through the whole spine, and in a more general view to the whole body of the cetacean (Arsić 82).

In a complete reversal of the Cartesian-Ahabian view of the soul as the site of feeling and thought, here the body takes center stage, in an ontology where "there is no thinking other than feeling, and what is called a thought is a feeling also" (Arsić 83). This cetacean ontology seems to affect Ishmael who throughout the novel moves from being a "firm idealist", influenced by Ahab's strictly dualistic view, to embracing the "ambiental cogito" represented by whales, a new theoretical stance he experiences first hand in the often-quoted scene of "A Squeeze of the Hand" (Chapter 94). In this well-known episode, Ishmael perceives himself as being one with the spermaceti lumps he is squashing, as well as with his shipmates whose hands he ends up squeezing in an "abounding, affectionate, friendly, loving" communion (Melville, *MD* 416; Ch.96, Arsić 85).

Whether one agrees with Jonik's Spinoza-oriented reading of Melville, Arsić's *ambiental cogito*, or any other of the analyses mentioned in this chapter, what is clear by now is how questions of nonhuman agency and of the pervasiveness and compenetration of human and nonhuman forces in Melville's work can no longer be understated. This work continues in this direction, by offering a reading of human and nonhuman animals in *Moby-Dick* which proceeds from the works mentioned in this chapter, but which in a way reverses their point of view: what if we look at *human* animality rather than at animals' animality? And what if we see all these elements as part of a continuum, rather than as separate, clearly distinguishable entities? What has Melville got to say about the role of human animality and

about how it enters (or does not) in relation with nonhuman animals in *Moby-Dick*?[37] Before moving on to the close reading of Melville's text, the following section will therefore briefly illustrate the key theories of Deleuze, Massumi, and Cimatti which will later be put into use in order to answer these questions through the text of *Moby-Dick*.

1.4. Philosophies of animality

The thinkers whose work I have used as a theoretical framework for my reading of *Moby-Dick* have been selected for a number of reasons. Firstly, Gilles Deleuze, being an acute reader of Melville himself,[38] has deeply influenced Melville scholarship recently – as a matter of fact many of the scholars mentioned in the previous section refer to or cite his works directly.[39] In addition, he has been instrumental in creating the foundations upon which Felice Cimatti and Brian Massumi expand to build their own propositions about human animals and their animality, and therefore play a key role in the theorizations used in this work. Secondly, all three thinkers – in spite of their undeniable individual differences – have contributed in defining the idea of human animality as overcoming the dualism between human and nonhuman– and as a consequence between mind and body. In this work, I hope to demonstrate that the vanquishing of these binary categories can be found hidden in the folds of Melville's novel. In particular, I show the way Felice Cimatti's idea of unbecoming human and Brian Massumi's suggestion of an animal politics can be seen at play in how human characters in the novel cross traditional human-nonhuman boundaries in order to point towards a humanity that is brought back into its animality. Lastly, although, as detailed above, much scholarship has been devoted to discussing the nonhuman or inhuman forces at play in Melville's work, or to look at nonhuman animals as they populate his fiction, the

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[37] I will expand on the notion of human animality, and on how I interpret it following Cimatti and Massumi in section 1.4.

[38] See for instance his influential reading of Bartleby (Deleuze, "Bartleby").

[39] As an example, *A Thousand Plateaus* by Deleuze and Guattari is cited by Armstrong, Coole and Frost, Farmer and Schroeder, Jonik, and Arsić. I will consider here mainly Deleuze's works written in tandem with Felix Guattari, as they are the main influence on the Melville scholars mentioned above.

thinkers considered here provide what I would suggest is an alternative approach: looking at humans from an animal perspective, which I believe has not been fully explored yet. Therefore, they provide a privileged theoretical background in order to analyze the novel from this point of view.

Animality

First of all, it is helpful to clarify what 'animality' means in the work of the thinkers considered here, in order to better understand the idea of human animality and of an animal continuum which are used in the present work to read Melville's novel.[40] In spite of their differences, all three thinkers mentioned above use the word 'animal' in their work, be it Deleuze and Guattari's becoming-animal, Massumi's animal continuum, or the human animality of Cimatti's *Unbecoming Human*. So why is animality so central? I will attempt to draft a necessarily partial answer, but one which can clarify why animality is so central to all three thinkers, as well as to Melville, as I argue in this work.

In an interview, when asked about what is his relationship to animals, and why they are so central in his philosophy, Deleuze replies by immediately bringing up animality in the human: "What I am going to say is completely idiotic because people who really like cats and dogs obviously do have a relationship with them that is not human. […] What is really important is for people to have an animal relationship with an animal" (Deleuze, "The ABC Primer"; section: "A as in Animal"). He goes on to explain that what really fascinates him

[40] As it will soon be clear, Cimatti's and Massumi's conclusions differ quite substantially in their vision of what human animality ultimately entails, as well as on the implications of bringing animality back into humanity. For Cimatti, this is a biological problem, which he insists has little or nothing to do with ethics or politics since where there is politics there must necessarily be a subject, and therefore an *I* that cancels animality and the body (203). On the other hand, Massumi assumes that, being at its core a "question of belonging", the very act of replacing the human into the animal continuum is necessary political in nature, a fact which cannot and should not be overlooked (3). In spite of these differences, in this work I will instead highlight the points of contact between the two thinkers, in order to benefit from both theorizations to read Melville's novel. As an example, both Cimatti and Massumi advocate a human animality which has nothing to do with going back to a presumed primitive state of being, but rather campions a going *forward*, i.e., learning from animality what it has to teach humanity, acknowledging mutual differences but also the vital zones of indiscernibility present in human and nonhuman animality.

about animals is how they "have a world", i.e., they have a defined territory[41] and a set of specific things that make up their worlds. In other words, besides being completely other from humans (as argued later on in this chapter), animals are those who are able to create a territory – the basic condition for the possibility of deterritorialization.

For Massumi, on the other hand, animality represents a wider, more qualitative and subjective way of looking at the world and of understanding relationships, one which is finally "freed from the traditional paradigms of the nasty state of nature and the accompanying presuppositions about instinct permeating so many facets of human thought" (2). In his view, humans can get rid of their own "anthropomorphism" by realizing that what sets them apart from nonhuman animals is actually present in the animal (and possibly plant) world too (3), hence the term "animality" indicates a shared set of characteristics and potentials such as creativity, play, empathy and even language. If humans can place themselves back into animality, and see the similarities rather than concentrating on the differences, what they can gain is what Massumi defines an "animal politics", i.e., an approach which includes rather than excluding, that encourages autonomy of expression and playful experimentation (38).

On the other hand, Cimatti clearly separates *human* animality from nonhuman animals, but in retaining the word animality maintains an undeniable link with the nonhumans, which serve as the starting point of his reflections on human animality.

Human animality

To begin discussing the animality of humans, Cimatti examines what Western thought has traditionally considered to be "human" – as opposed to being "animal".[42] As the

[41] For the centrality of the concepts of territory, deterritorialization and re-territorialization in Deleuze, see Godani.

[42] Derrida coined the word *animot* (which plays on the assonance with *animaux*, animals, and the meaning of *mot*, word) to draw attention both to the fact that animals have always been considered in philosophy as a single word, a single homogeneous group of non-humans, an abstract entity, and that they have been refused a plurality of species and subjects. With *animot*, Derrida wishes to avoid such stereotyped use of the word animal as a singular, uniform entity (Mallet x).

philosopher suggests, "[t]he anthropologic procedure through which a still non-linguistic member of the species *Homo sapiens* (an *infans*) becomes fully human consists in the implantation, in his or her flesh, of a machinery (language) that, from that moment onwards, will produce separation and dualism" (Cimatti 43). Not surprisingly, it is language which for centuries of western philosophy has been named to be the distinct mark of humanity, the human-generating device (or "anthropologic machine" to use Cimatti's term) that once set in motion cannot be stopped. Language produces an *I* which then distinguishes itself from the rest of the world – and of the animals – as well as from its own body, pursuing its own interests at the expenses of everything perceived as "other", to the point of creating environmental disasters and the current ecological crisis (Cimatti 172).[43] Cimatti defines this process as a "violent and painful operation" (44) since it generates a subject by creating a schism, a "separation" between one subject and an "other", between "I" and the body, between human and animal that cannot easily be recomposed (12).[44]

However, the animal other is not an inanimate object, it is a living being, and as Derrida suggests it "has been looking at us". The cat observing the philosopher naked in his apartment is not a general, undetermined "cat" (in other words, it is not an *animot*), instead it is *this* specific female cat whose stare generates "shame" in the philosopher (Derrida 3, 5). Cimatti warns us against humanizing this gaze by trying to interpret it: this would be both "useless", since what it means to be a cat is not the same as what it means to be a human, and "harmful", since it would remove the animality from the cat (Cimatti 6). Instead, the Italian thinker advocates finding "[h]uman animality […] between the philosopher and the cat" (6), that is to say in an animal space within the human subject, a space that reclaims the body and "interrupts" the "mechanism" of the anthropogenic

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[43] Cimatti ascribes this human tendency not to some evil or ill will, believing the questions not to be ethical but existential. It is because of the existential condition of humanity, i.e., our radical separation from the "other" (*viz.* our own body, animals, the world) operated by language that we cannot but behave in this way. In his view, it is only solving this dualism that humans can begin to address our current ecological crisis (11).
[44] This violence starts as existential, but soon becomes markedly physical as Derrida notices (26). It suffices to think about the way humans have been treating nonhuman animals for centuries (Derrida 26), or simply the way the human body itself has been treated for centuries by western philosophy (Cimatti 68). Physical violence on the human and the animal body is also at the center of *Moby-Dick*, where both human and nonhuman animals are repeatedly dismembering and slaughtering each other.

machine by allowing the "unspeakable truth of the body" to be revealed (Cimatti 175–77). A body that constitutes a "new existential possibility", one which is no longer an *I* but "simply a body", which does not need language to experience and interpret the world surrounding it (179).

It is crucial to notice how this new existential possibility traced by Cimatti is not to be intended as a "going back" to a supposed pre-human animal condition, nor is it a transformation into a nonhuman animal (Cimatti 154). Quite the opposite, it is about finding the animality of the body within the constraints of the linguistic individual by "transforming language: from a formidable machinery of separation and 'lack' into a locus of re-composition" (182). It is an animality "to be built rather than recovered", it is "in front of our eyes" rather than behind us (155). It is, in other words, something which could be defined as a post-linguistic *becoming-animal*:

> The speaking animal is entirely shot through with language, for this is not an additional characteristic, but something that defines the kind of animal it is, setting it apart from cats, or lizards. The first and most crucial consequence of the pervasiveness of language is a splitting of the human animal in two: an 'I' and a body that can never come into contact with each other. […] Human animality can be found at the end of this linguistic path. An animality trying to reconstitute the fullness of the body. The condition for reaching this fullness is that of transforming language: from a formidable machinery of separation and 'lack' into a locus of re-composition. (Cimatti 182)

In the philosopher's words, human animality is "immanence" (183), it is the core of the human animal that can "elude the grasp of language" and find an "absolute and radical singularisation" which is only possible when the linguistic animal is no longer trapped in the dualisms created by language (184). The one described by Cimatti is not an individual made of many inhumanities, as the one described by Jonik for example, but rather one that finds a way to re-enter an animal way of interacting with the world, of being one with itself and with the surrounding space and other "I"s, without the fear of losing oneself (Cimatti

158). Interestingly, Cimatti terms this condition *animality*, which in my opinion is a way of acknowledging the fact that this moving forward, beyond language can re-introduce humans into an animal continuum which seemed to be irremediably broken by language and its separations. I will argue how this seems to be present in *Moby-Dick* in section 3.3 of the present work.

The human-animal continuum

Just like Cimatti's post-linguistic human does not *lose* humanity but *gains* animality in the process of overcoming the linguistic subject and embracing the body, so in Deleuze and Guattari's terms *becoming* – and more specifically becoming-animal – happens in "zones of indiscernibility" between the animal and the human (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 280), in which dualism and separation are replaced by proximity and intensity (293). Becoming-animal "does not consist in playing animal or imitating an animal", i.e., it is not a Kafkian-style metamorphosis into the nonhuman, but rather "[b]ecoming produces nothing other than itself" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 238), it is a process of "absolute deterritorialization" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 13) without an end or a fixed destination: what really matters is the process itself. There is no "real" animal that the human becomes[45] since the process of becoming-animal involves abandoning the subject-object dualism to enter modes of being in which relations are established without implying hierarchical separations or categorizations, leaving only a "block of becoming" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 238).[46] Becoming-animal indicates "ways-out or means to

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[45] Although this becoming is not a "real" transformation, as seen in previous sections of this chapter in *Moby-Dick* characters often physically become other through the interplay of matter and individuals. See the example of the whale-men given by Schuller and detailed in section 1.2 if this work.

[46] Interestingly, in their chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus* about becoming-animal, the French thinkers mention *Moby-Dick* as "a masterpiece of becoming", as well as bringing Ahab's becoming-whale as an example of a becoming-animal favored by an "anomalous" animal, in this case of course Moby Dick and his peculiarity as a single, powerful whale (244). The question of Moby Dick as a supernormal whale will be analyzed more in detail in section 2.4, while the question of Ahab's becoming-whale is detailed in section 2.2.

escape" for the human that would not have been possible or thinkable otherwise – hence the deterritorialization mentioned above (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 35).

The concept of deterritorialization as it is created and used by Deleuze and Guattari requires a brief clarification. As theorized in *A Thousand Plateaus*, deterritorialization originally indicates "the movement by which 'one' leaves the territory" (508), and is included in a series of reflections of the two philosophers on the "geography of thought" (Godani 53). But there is more to this concept than physical movement outside of a designated territory: "any given element, including ourselves, is deterritorialized not only when it leaves the native land, but also, and more profoundly, every time it conquers a function that had not been assigned to it. It is a process of deterritorialization, for instance, when the mouth stops eating to start singing or speaking" (Godani 55). [47] In other words, the deterritorialization implied in the process of becoming indicates a non-physical (or not necessarily physical) movement outside of one's domain or assigned role, into new territory (i.e., a new domain or role) that is unexplored and unseen before. In Chapter 2 of the present work, I will demonstrate how both Ahab and Stubb "deterritorialize" their roles aboard the Pequod, to become-animal in a way that is unprecedented.

The reason why the two French philosophers discuss becoming-animal more than other forms of becoming is detailed in their work through the use of the concept of majority and minority:

> Majority implies a constant, of expression or content, serving as a standard measure by which to evaluate it. Let us suppose that the constant or standard is the average adult-white-heterosexual-European-male-speaking a standard language (Joyce's or Ezra Pound's Ulysses). It is obvious that "man" holds the majority, even if he is less numerous than mosquitoes, children, women, blacks, peasants, homosexuals, etc. […] There is a majoritarian 'fact,' but it is the analytic fact of Nobody, as opposed

[47] "un elemento qualunque, compresi noi stessi, si deterritorializza non solo quando abbandona il loco natio, bensì, più profondamente, ogni volta in cui conquista una funzione che non le era assegnata. È un processo di deterritorializzazione, ad esempio, quello della bocca che smette di mangiare per iniziare a cantare o parlare" (my translation).

> to the becoming-minoritarian of everybody. That is why we must distinguish between: the majoritarian as a constant and homogeneous system; minorities as subsystems; and the minoritarian as a potential, creative and created, becoming. (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 105-06).

Therefore, according to their own definition, womanhood, childhood, and above all animality are minoritarian subsystems (if seen from the perspective expressed above; 106), that well represent the condition of becoming something other, of moving towards something that is not expected or compliant with the standard of the majority. These formulations by Deleuze and Guattari of the concept of becoming-animal and their implications are central not only to Cimatti's reflection (as seen above), but also to Massumi's formulation of an "integral animal continuum".

By considering animal play as a privileged point of departure, Massumi notices how the animal ludic gesture "is a form of abstraction", i.e., it is a gesture which means something else from what it is, an act of metacommunication (Massumi 5). The example of a wolf cub nibbing another cub during play, a nib which indeed represents a bite in a combat situation, shows how animal play can bring together different fields (the play fight and the real fight), united in their difference (4). In addition, Massumi suggests that the playful nib of the cub differs from the wounding bite of an adult wolf not simply in intensity, but more crucially in quality: the playful nib is imbued with a "vitality affect", which he defines as "enthusiasm of the body" (9).[48] Such enthusiasm (also termed "-esqueness") creates a "surplus value" of vivacity in the play, it opens up new possibilities for animality and ultimately leads to creative inventiveness, something which allows the animal not only to use play as practice for survival (what animal play is generally intended to mean), but most essentially to use it creatively to "surpass the normal" (12, 15).[49]

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[48] I see in the return to the body as the main element and effect of human animality the chief common ground between Cimatti's and Massumi's theorizations, as I will detail in the following chapters.

[49] Massumi is well aware of the anthropomorphism charges he could face with such theorizations, but brings some scientific evidence, as well as Bateson's work on animal play, to counter such accusations (1-2).

It is precisely this supernormal that an "integrally animal politics" would bring to humanity, by "replacing the human on the animal continuum" (Massumi 3). The Canadian thinker argues that such a process would look like "an instantaneous transformation-in-place that is immediately transindividual in nature" (42). In other words, by establishing the possibility of a human-animal continuum, in which the two categories – human and animal – are no longer clearly separated, a human animal politics (because, like Cimatti, Massumi is predominantly concerned with *human* animality) is essentially transindividual in nature, i.e., it naturally establishes relations, as well as reconciling the playfulness of creativity with "function and utility" (40). It is important to point out that in Massumi's view, this can be achieved only if the human finds its position in a continuum whose two extremes (*the* animal and *the* human) are never truly realized and do not actually exist but are only seen as "ideals" or "virtual limits" which describe tendencies, but not actual transformations – in a clear nod to Deleuze and Guattari's becoming-animal.[50]

1.5. Towards human animality in *Moby-Dick*

It is clear from the overview presented here that much has been said about nonhuman elements in *Moby-Dick* and more generally in Melville's work. Moving away from anthropocentric and allegorical views of whales in the novel, Melville scholars in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have begun to pay closer attention to nonhuman animals, their physical presence in the novel and what this means for the humans present on the Pequod. In particular, the new materialist turn started at the beginning of the twenty-first century has placed new emphasis on the material, nonhuman elements at play in the novel, and has opened up new possibilities of reading the novel by thinking *with* Melville

[50] Differently from Cimatti, Massumi argues against the presupposition that the main and most valuable principle to separate humans from animals is language (91). In his analysis, "animal play, in fact, produces the real conditions of emergence of language" as it is through the animal ability to reach the supernormal and constantly "surpass itself" that language can be ascribed to humans (91). In Chapter 3, I will consider both perspectives and will show how both can be seen at play in *Moby-Dick*.

about issues of identity, materiality, relational ontology, and politics among others (Farmer 38). Reading the text through Spinoza, Deleuze and Guattari, Descartes, and many other classic and contemporary thinkers, scholars have explored nineteenth century as well as present-day concerns through Melville's text, finding answers that are still relevant to the contemporary reader (Farmer and Schroeder; Arsić and Evans). However, the question of human animality, although obliquely touched upon by some of the academics mentioned above, still needs to be explored in depth. In drawing from the analyses and theorizations presented in this chapter, the following chapters will be devoted to reading the text of *Moby-Dick* in order to find out what it has to say about human animality, its place in the animal continuum and its relation (or lack thereof) to nonhuman animals.

Chapter 2

Spouting and smoking: entering zones of indiscernibility

The link between human and nonhuman forces has been explored widely in Melville studies, especially in light of the new materialist turn described in the previous chapter. This connection has brought many scholars to conclude that previously held beliefs of Melville's supposedly expressed strong dualism, i.e. between good and evil, between Ahab and Moby Dick, between human and nonhuman, are at the very least put into questions if Melville's texts are read more closely.[1] As Ahab is made of "inhumanities" such as the wind, the atmosphere, the sea – and of course whale bones – (Jonik 33), and the carpenter shares the "stolidity" of the "surrounding infinitude of things" (Melville, *MD* 467; Ch.107), it is clear that the characters emerging from Melville's novel are more complex than simple representations of two opposite polarities. And since whales are as central to the novel as human characters, it is easy to come to the question: how to humans and nonhumans affect each other in *Moby-Dick*? How do whales and sharks relate to the Pequod's crew, and how separate and distinguished are humans from nonhumans in the novel? And ultimately, what does this tell us about human animality, and the place of humans in a nonhuman world? These questions are explored in this chapter using the theoretical background briefly summarized in Chapter 1.

The most appropriate place to start discussing this, I argue, is the very beginning of the novel, i.e., the two unnumbered chapters "Etymology" and "Extracts", which place the

[1] For a better understanding of how the new materialist turn has questioned previously held beliefs of Cartesian dualism in *Moby-Dick*, see Martínez Benedí ("Navigating").

whale immediately at the forefront of human history, establishing a long-lasting link between the two species. Secondly, I briefly summarize some key scholarship that has been written about Ahab's becoming-human, and the captain's connection with the nonhuman world through his encounter with the white whale. In addition, I analyze closely the character of the second mate, Stubb and the relation he has with nonhuman animals, arguing that it is through his becoming-animal that he manages to cope with the dangers and inhuman conditions of the whaling business. As Dagovitz points out, Stubb is a character who critics have tended to dismiss as a simpleton and a comic counterpart to the first mate, Starbuck (330). However, his role seems to be much more than that if examined more closely: he is the first crew member to successfully hunt a whale in the novel; he is the one who decides to feast on the whale's flesh, surrounded by the sound of sharks devouring the freshly-killed whale's carcass hanging from the ship; he is also the one on board to have the very peculiar, cross-species and cross-gender dream (Parker, notes to *Moby-Dick* 108) of being kicked by a merman in Chapter 31 "Queen Mab". Lastly, I survey some chapters where whales are central in order to understand how their humanization makes them enter into areas of action that are generally considered exclusive of humanity, but I will give a slightly different reading of this humanization than the one given by Armstrong[2]. In short, this chapter provides a reading of some scenes in *Moby-Dick* where humans – and particularly Ahab and Stubb – and nonhuman animals interact or enter into contact, in order to demonstrate how such chapters can be read in light of what Deleuze, Guattari, and Massumi define as *zones of indiscernibility* between human and nonhuman animals, thus shedding light into the inner workings of their reciprocal relation.

In the previous chapter (section 1.4), the concept of *zones of indiscernibility* has been briefly mentioned as the loci where becoming-animal happens for Deleuze and Guattari. I would like to expand briefly on this concept here, in order to clarify its meaning and thus indicate how it can be used to read the way Melville describes both human and nonhuman characters in his novel. In the two philosophers' own words, "becoming is to extract

[2] In Chapter 1 I have briefly summarized how Armstrong sees in this humanization a way for humans to maintain their exceptionalism by attributing the perceived agency of nonhumans to anthropomorphism.

particles between which one establishes the relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness that are *closest* to what one is becoming, and through which one becomes" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 272). That is to say that, for instance, becoming-animal consists in finding the part that establishes the most adjacent relations (here intended as relations of intensity and movement) to what one is to become, i.e., animal, in order to create a space *in between* (Godani 106), where the two are both present, indistinguishable but still distinct. This is what is intended as a "zone of proximity or co-presence" in *A Thousand Plateaus* (272-73), a concept which is then borrowed by Massumi in order to discuss what he envisages to be an "integral animal continuum" (Massumi 3).[3]

To elucidate this point, Massumi starts by considering animal play: during play (as in the example of the play-fight between wolf cubs mentioned in Chapter 1) both the play and the fight logic co-exist in an "*included middle* of their mutual influence" (6; emphasis in the original). That is to say that playing and fighting "enter into a zone of indiscernibility" (Massumi 6), where their difference is present but not perceived, as "they come together, without fusing together" (24). It is important to notice that this should not be intended as an exclusively physical proximity, where for example playing is physically close to fighting, but rather as a conceptual one. By "zone" and "middle", Massumi indicates not only a physical space, but also a moment, a situation, and most importantly a relation in which the difference between two elements is not demarcated (albeit still existing), and therefore they become indistinguishable.

Furthermore, the concept of a middle that includes rather than excluding is decisive here, as it opens the possibility of thinking about animality as a "spectrum of continual variation" (Massumi 3) rather than as a dualism of with/without language or with/without wings, etc., as the human-animal relation has generally been conceived in western thought.[4] In the example of combat and play, for instance, the essential -esqueness, i.e. the "excess of

[3] It is important to note that the zones of proximity as theorized by Deleuze are not to be confused with a process of identification. In fact, the French philosopher rejects the idea of identification as it implies the presence of a given, singular, immutable essence that can be the basis for identification itself (Godani 166).
[4] For a more thorough examination of the distinction between human and animal operated by western philosophy throughout the centuries, see Cimatti.

energy or spirit" (Massumi 9) typical of play, is actually present in both activities, but in different degrees of intensity, which is what creates the included middle that allows for the two modalities to overlap, while remaining separate (24). Naturally, fighting is not playing, but the two conditions share an included middle which makes them sometimes indistinguishable – even though they never merge one into the other. This is also the process which creates the above-mentioned "integral animal continuum", as both humans and nonhuman animals can be placed into a fluid assemblage of imperceptible differences where *mutual inclusion* (rather than exclusion) is the key (Massumi 3-4). As this chapter will show, it is precisely this included middle that can be perceived when human and nonhuman characters meet in *Moby-Dick*.

2.1. The beginning

To investigate the relationship established between human and nonhuman animals in *Moby-Dick*, one can only start from the very beginning of the novel. It is exactly here that Melville seems to want to establish a clue for what will come in the rest of the text. Many academics have noticed how *Moby-Dick* does not technically start with the world-famous sentence "Call me Ishmael" of Chapter 1, but with two unnumbered chapters about the presumed etymology of the English word 'whale', and a "glancing, bird's eye view of what has been promiscuously said, thought, fancied, and sung of Leviathan, by many nations and generations" (Melville, *MD* xvii; Ch. "Extracts"). Already in 1983, Frank Shuffelton advised Melville's readers not to overlook the "Etymology" and "Extracts" chapters as an important starting point to understand the subsequent text (528). While "Etymology" can be read as a problematization of language (Shuffelton 529), "Extracts" is a *de facto* fragmented history – albeit rough, personal, and incomplete – of the role of the whale in human history and culture, one that pushes the reader to ask questions and connect dots right from the beginning (529).[5]

[5] I will return to the problem of language and muteness in chapter 3 of this work.

Going further in the interpretation of the novel starting from these chapters, in a sub-section of his book aptly titled "Anti-Ishmael", Robert Tally warns against reading *Moby-Dick* exclusively as a tale of Ishmael's adventures, or of the tragic hero Ahab, and against glossing over the fact that the text actually starts with the two unnumbered chapters (50) in which the whale's presence in different languages and works of world literature is mapped, even if only "higgledy-piggedly". While Tally's critique relates to American nationalism and the way these chapters in his view pose *Moby-Dick* as a postnational epic (50),[6] what matters in terms of the present work is mainly how this inception seems to be exclusively about *the whale* and about how this cetacean has been perceived by and has meant for humans; in other words, how it has entered human imagination, literature, science, and therefore history in different centuries and places – starting from *Genesis* up to Melville's times.

It can therefore be argued that, if read starting from these unnumbered chapters, *Moby-Dick* can be understood as the very personal and haphazard tale[7] of the long-lasting relation between humans and whales; in Massumi's terms, it might even be possible to frame *Moby-Dick* as describing a process of creation of an included middle that allows both humans and animals to inhabit it, while never definitely blurring the differences between the two.[8] This process, I argue, starts from the extracts collected by a Sub-Sub Librarian, glimpses hinting at a shared history between humans and whales through their cumulative effect. It is the extracts in their *totality* that create this shared space rather than one isolated quote. In fact, the section includes many references to works that Melville consulted while writing the novel or that he was generally familiar with, such as Shakespeare or the Bible.[9]

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[6] In his reading, Tally understands the whale as the center of the novel – as opposed to Ishmael – contrasting the transnational nature of the whale to the "representative national figure" of Ishmael (50–51).

[7] The collection of extracts is presented as gathered by "picking up whatever random allusions to whales" a Sub-Sub Librarian could find in his wanderings (Melville, *MD* xvii; Ch. "Extracts"), therefore framing it as wholly dependent on the Librarian's individual knowledge and experience, as well as on an element of randomness which makes the collection both personal and not completely reliable.

[8] Another noteworthy feature of "Extracts" is the insistence on the whale's bulky size. For an in-depth analysis of the problem of scale in *Moby-Dick* and how scaling up or down in size opposes to tales of human exceptionality, see Hurh ("Expanding to Bulk").

[9] For a detailed account of Melville's sources for these "Extracts", as well as of the modifications operated by Melville on the original quotes, see Harrison et al., *Editorial notes* in the Northwestern-Newberry Edition of *Moby-Dick* (818-30).

In addition, many of the quotes directly or indirectly refer to episodes or chapters in the novel, revealing Ishmael's tale as a sort of summa of all this human wisdom on the whale: from the inability to truly know the whale in "[w]hat spermaceti is, men might justly doubt" (Melville, *MD* xx, Ch. "Extracts"), to Moby Dick's whiteness in "[o]ne of our harpooners told me that he caught once a whale […] that was white all over" (xxi); from the whale skeleton used as a building structure in "[t]he jaws of it stand for a gate in the garden of Pitfirren" (xxi) reminding of "A Bower in the Arsacides", to the reference to the novel's tragic ending in "we have been stove by a whale" (xxv) to name but a few. Right from the very start of the novel, these references pose the whole text of *Moby-Dick* as inspired by and at the same time containing a variety of sources that come from humans at different times and places, but that all have one thing in common: the nonhuman whale.

It is the text actualization of the history of humans and whales which I interpret here as a place where human and animal histories and cultures compenetrate. They are distinct, but not independent one from the other as they come into close relation over the centuries. The whale seems to have been there from the very beginning (*Genesis*) and to have represented both a foe or "monster" and a source of awe and wealth for humans, becoming *part of* human history without fusing with it. The narrator of *Moby-Dick,* whilst admitting from the opening chapters his inability to represent the whale fully and satisfactorily, begins from these unnumbered chapters by representing what could be considered a human-whale history. Hence from this very starting point, Ishmael is placing the whale at the forefront, and in doing so is asking his readers to think about the physical and historical space that humans have been sharing with whales for centuries.

2.2. Ahab's becoming-whale

Who more than Ahab shares life, body parts, and death with the whale? As seen in Chapter 1 of the present work, "Ahab's inhumanities" (Jonik 32) have been thoroughly explored and accounted for by Melvillian scholarship throughout the years. For example. his

prosthetic leg made of whale bones links him to the much-hated whale in an intimate, physical way, as well as binding his destiny and life to that of his foe, Moby Dick. However, since it is difficult to start discussing the relations between humans and nonhumans without considering the Pequod's captain, it is worth summarizing and clarifying what Deleuze and Guattari define as Ahab's "becoming-whale" (*Kafka* 36), and how the captain's character marks the emergence of an instance of animal becoming. As I show below, human animality is not limited to Ahab, but it manifests itself also on a secondary character such as Stubb, who in the novel is seen entering into zones of proximity with the nonhuman in several occasions, as I present in the following section. Ahab's becoming-whale, however, is much more subtle and at the same time much more radical than Stubb's, and therefore it seems worth starting our discussion on human animality precisely from the captain.[10]

Deleuze himself briefly discusses the process of Ahab's becoming animal as a state in which "Achab n'imite pas la baleine, il devient Moby Dick, il passe dans la zone de voisinage où il ne peut plus se distinguer de Moby Dick, et se frappe lui-même en la frappant" (Deleuze "Bartleby, Ou, La Formule" 100).[11] In other words, according to the French philosopher Ahab is the perfect example of a human who enters into a zone of proximity (*zone de voisinage*) with the whale, i.e., the nonhuman, and in doing so he *becomes* the nonhuman. This does not mean, of course, that Ahab physically transforms into a whale, even though, as discussed in Chapter 1 of this work, Ahab includes whale bones in his body and is the one of all the Pequod's characters who most prominently approaches what I would define as a material, physical becoming-whale. But rather, as again I already mentioned in Chapter 1, Ahab's becoming-animal means that he deterritorializes[12] his role as whale ship captain and as human being. He does so by reacting in unexpected and

[10] By radical I intend to specify how Ahab's becoming-whale brings him to his and his crew's death as well as to his ship total destruction, as clarified below. On the other hand, Stubb's becoming-whale and becoming-shark clearly does not change the second mate as radically as Ahab is changed by Moby Dick, or in any case does not bring such radical consequences.
[11] "Ahab does not imitate the whale, he becomes Moby Dick, he passes through the zone of proximity where he can no longer be distinguished from Moby Dick, and strikes himself in striking him" (my translation).
[12] For a brief overview of the concept pf deterritorialization in Deleuze and Guattari, Chapter 1 section 1.4.

unpredictable ways, allowing his first encounter with Moby Dick to shape his person and his actions in ways that are no longer those of a typical whaling captain.[13]

The work of Tamsin Lorraine is particularly useful in this regard, as the scholar convincingly indicates how Ahab's becoming-whale manifests itself all through Melville's novel, and in a variety of ways. Firstly, one of the clearest signs of the deterritorialization of his role as a sea captain – a process which Ahab is going through all along the novel – is his very same monomaniac obsession for avenging his severed leg, one of the traits for which he is most well-known. Instead of seeing the unfortunate accident for what most other people in his line of work would, i.e., as one of the possible negative consequences of a profitable but perilous line of work, Ahab seeks his blind, all-encompassing and ultimately all-destroying revenge on the white whale in a "course of action with a logic of its own" (Lorraine 164). This obsession pervades his entire person, so much so that the whole purpose of his office as sea captain, as well as of his entire life, is finding and killing Moby Dick. The lucrative business of whale hunting is transformed by Ahab into an all-consuming pursuit for one individual whale which he holds responsible for his suffering and misery. He is imbued with a "wild vindictiveness against the whale, all the more fell for that in his frantic morbidness he at last came to identify with him [Moby Dick], not only all his bodily woes, but all his intellectual and spiritual exasperations" (Melville, *MD* 184; Ch. 41). In other words, the expected behavior, interests, and preoccupations of a whale ship captain are completely overturned and disregarded by Ahab after meeting Moby Dick, and encounter which creates "intensities" and subtle forces which push him over the edge of becoming. He resists and almost erases any common sense which his years of whale captain might have given him (Lorraine 169), and turns his role of sea captain into something unexpected, taking himself and his crew into uncharted territory.

In fact, Ahab is already embedded in a setting which Lorraine describes as a "smooth space" (Lorraine 167), i.e., a space that is free from the organizational and structuring lines of a striated space (Godani 55). Since "[i]n striated space, lines or trajectories tend to be subordinated to points: one goes from one point to another" and

[13] For a more thorough presentation of this concept, see section 1.4 of the present work.

“[i]n the smooth, it is the opposite: the points are subordinated to the trajectory” (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 478), then clearly the ocean in which the Pequod sails can be considered a smooth space. Whale ships in general do not have a clear destination, but normally try to cruise into the waters where they are most likely to find whales (Lorraine 167). The whaler movements and trajectories are generally dictated by the movements and habits of whales, i.e., it does not have a clearly-set departure and arrival point in space or time, as for instance a commercial ship has (167), and the Pequod makes no exception. In fact, Ahab’s ship even more so: it is indeed guided by its captain’s obsession for finding one specific whale, a pursuit which is entirely based on conjectural and second-hand information provided to Ahab by other ships passing by, or by charts of his own design.[14]

The smooth essence of the ocean that the Pequod is navigating becomes even more evident towards the end of the novel, when Ahab loses all his navigation instruments and exclaims: “I crush the quadrant, the thunder turns the needles, and now the mad sea parts the log-line. But Ahab can mend all. Haul in here, Tahitian; reel up, Manxman. And look ye, let the carpenter make another log, and mend thou line” (Melville, *MD* 521; Ch. 125). Apparently, Ahab seems to be trying to fix the log and line which have just been lost, the last of the navigation tools still remaining functioning on board the ship; he seems to be interested in re-establishing some sort of structure to the Pequod’s journey, to the space of the ocean that the ship is sailing. However, a few pages earlier he had already refused and totally rejected this same structure by crushing the ship’s quadrant in a moment of rage:[15]

> Then gazing at his quadrant, and handling, one after the other, its numerous cabalistic contrivances, he pondered again, and muttered: “Foolish toy! babies’ plaything of haughty Admirals, and Commodores, and Captains; the world brags of thee, of thy cunning might; but what after all canst thou do, but tell the poor, pitiful point, where thou thyself happenest to be on this wide planet, and the hand that

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[14] These are detailed by Ishmael in Chapter 44 “The Chart”, in which Ahab is described while “threading a maze of currents and eddies, with a view to the more certain accomplishment of that monomaniac thought of his soul” (Melville, *MD* 199).

[15] The quadrant is a navigation instrument that allows ship captains to determine the ship’s position by means of sunlight or starlight and a system of mirrors.

holds thee: no! not one jot more! […] curse thee, thou quadrant!" dashing it to the deck, "no longer will I guide my earthly way by thee;" […] the frantic old man thus spoke and thus trampled with his live and dead feet. (Melville, *MD* 501; Ch. 118)

In this scene Ahab succumbs to his obsession and rage, and in so doing he abandons any hope or will to care for his crew's life. This, in Lorraine's view, is one of the moments in which Ahab "risks the territorial refrains of whale hunting and becomes an anomalous member of the pack of whale hunters" (168). He is no longer the typical chief whale hunter, trying his best to find and kill whales in order to extract oil and make a profit. Instead, in crushing the navigation instrument he totally surrenders to the deterritorialization of his becoming-whale by following his obsession and disregarding everything an ordinary sea captain would do or care about. By severing his "already tenuous tie with the striated space of conventional life", Ahab launches the Pequod into a totally smooth space, where his becoming-whale can take the upper hand (Lorraine 168).

In the end, his becoming-whale brings him to his and his crew's death. But he does not seem to do this intentionally. As critics have pointed out (Lorraine 169; Farmer 1), Ahab seems pushed by some force out of his own control which, as Lorraine indicates, can be defined as his irresistible becoming-whale (169). In freeing himself of the behavioural and social norms set for whale ship captains as a consequence of his first encounter with the white whale, Ahab "no longer relates to his situation in terms of a personal self" (Lorraine 169). Instead, he finds himself to be a "configuration of forces" which were previously untapped or dormient, and which begin in him the process of becoming-whale, a process which will bring him to his death.

2.3. Stubb's zones of proximity

While Ahab's becoming-whale not only brings destruction to him and his crew, but also unfolds subtly and progressively throughout *Moby-Dick*, I argue that Stubb's animality is different but equally evident in the novel. As I show below, differently from Ahab, Stubb

navigates the animal continuum in what seems like a joyful, carefree way, and in spite of being presented as a simpleton, he seems to manage his animality in ways that benefit him and that allow him to make the most of his whaling voyages. I argue that the character of the second mate, in spite of naturally being less prominent than Ahab, points to the same creation of a shared space between humans and nonhumans hinted at in section 2.1 of this chapter – a physical proximity with the nonhuman which quickly transforms into a more radical contiguity and indiscernibility.

When presented for the first time in Chapter 27 "Knits and Squires", Stubb is immediately characterized as "happy-go-lucky" and "indifferent" to the difficulties and dangers of the whaling industry. He seems more concerned about his material comfort than about the continuous threats to his and his crew's life that the job of a whaling ship second mate entails. However, he does so not in a cruel way, but simply because he seems unaffected by the worries and anxieties that are typical of humans who find themselves in a perilous situation: "[g]ood humored, easy, and careless, he presided over his whale-boat as if the most deadly encounter were but a dinner, and his crew all invited guests. He was as particular about the comfortable arrangement of his part of the boat, as an old stage-driver is about the snugness of his box" (Melville, *MD* 118; Ch. 27).

John Bryant attributes Stubb's indifferent attitude to his role as comic relief to Ahab and Starbuck, the latter representing "faith" and the former representing "doubt". This is indeed a role that Stubb plays in the novel, particularly in the chapters where his soliloquy follows Ahab's and Starbuck's (Bryant 206).[16] However, as stated by Zoellner, "beneath a mask of flippancy Stubb stands as a serious figure of consummate realism" (76).[17] If looked at from a different angle, in this first introduction as well as in later scenes Stubb is indeed

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[16] In fact, in Chapter 99 "The Doubloon" as well as in Chapter 114 "The Gilder", Stubb's speech and musings follow in sequence Ahab's and Starbuck's. In Chapter 99, the reflections are prompted by the images on an Ecuadorian doubloon nailed to the mast, while in Chapter 114 the meditations come from a moment of placid tranquility while sailing in the Japanese ocean. In both cases, Ahab's speeches are full of egotism and despair about the human condition, while Starbuck's show faith and hope in a higher power. Indeed, in both cases Stubb's cogitations strengthen his role as a third point of view, one who is "always jolly" (Melville, *MD* 492; Ch. 114) and who does not worry about the difficulties and hardships of life. However, in line with the reading of Stubb I am proposing here, in Chapter 114 Stubb's light-heartedness is represented by a striking nonhuman image: "Stubb, fish-like, with sparkling scales, leaped up in that same golden light" (492).

[17] For a take on Stubb's role in the novel as more than mere comic relief, see Zoellner (75-6).

deterritorializing,[18] through his encounter with the cetaceans, the dangerous business of whaling by approaching this deadly endeavor as if it were a dinner with friends, re-signifying the hard and physical job of a whale hunter into an enjoyable recreational time, in a way not unlike the indistinguishability posited by Massumi between animal play and animal fight. Just like playing and fighting, the two actions of hunting a whale and having dinner with friends are on the one hand clearly separate since, after all, one is a potentially fatal enterprise while the other is a social occasion, but on the other hand indiscernible through Stubb's attitude and his – as well as the whale's – actions. And what is interesting is that this indistinguishability seems to be set forth by the whale itself.

In fact, in Chapter 61 – where Stubb kills his first whale of the voyage – as soon as the Second Mate hears the cry that signals a temporary break from the chase,[19] he immediately decides to take a relaxing break by "producing his match and igniting his pipe", not unlike the whale itself who just a few lines above is described by Melville as looking so "tranquil" and "lazy" as to look like "a portly burgher, smoking his pipe of a warm afternoon" (Melville, *MD* 283; Ch. 61). This reference to "placidity" is noted by Zoellner, who describes it as an "anthropomorphic analogy" and considers it the beginning of the anthropomorphizing of the whale (167). However, by reading the text closely it is possible to perceive how the chapter is in fact not simply conferring the whale human traits, but more subtly establishing a double connection: one between Stubb, the human hunter, and the whale, the nonhuman hunted; and one between leisure and work – and specifically a treacherous and potentially deadly work which resembles a fight.

The two links are brought forward all through the chapter by Melville, who insists on Stubb's pipe during the height of the chase, when the whale line is rapidly unfolding following the successful harpooning of the whale, and "a hempen blue smoke now jetted up and mingled with the steady fumes from his [Stubb's] pipe" (Melville, *MD* 284). This

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[18]For a definition of what Deleuze and Guattari refer to when invoking the concept of deterritorialization, see the subsection "The human-animal continuum" of Chapter 1 of the present work.

[19] This is due to the fact that the whale has plunged into the ocean to escape its pursuers, but will be forced to resurface after an interval of time in order to breathe. Stubb knows this mechanism very well, and in this scene takes advantage of the momentary respite from the chase to light his pipe.

scene blends Stubb's pipe smoke, the epitome of a relaxing leisure activity, with the smoke coming from a nonhuman object, the line, which is a working object in the process of performing its duty, i.e., harpooning the whale and keeping it attached to the boat in order to kill it.[20]

A little later in the same scene, the parallel between Stubb and the whale is again drawn when during the killing of the cetacean "jet after jet of white smoke was agonizingly shot from the spiracle of the whale, and vehement puff after puff from the mouth of the excited headsman" (Melville, *MD* 285). In these passages, the smoke of Stubb's pipe rather than (or in addition to) representing "the on-going life-processes which unite all sentient beings" (Zoellner 168), intermingles with the blue smoke coming from the whale line, as well as with the vapor ejected from the whale's spout, making the three elements indiscernible in spite of their different source and nature – just like the fight-like job of a whaler is for Stubb indistinguishable from leisure. It is this hunt-fight-dinner which becomes the zone of indiscernibility for Stubb, a territory inhabited by both the second mate and the whale (as well as by the whale line), yet in which the hunter and the prey never become one. Just like in animal play, "[p]lay and combat overlap, without the distinction between them being lost" (Massumi 6), so in Stubb's hunting leisure and work overlap, creating an included middle which encompasses nonhuman elements such as the whale and the line. Crucially, the "porous boundaries of the human" envisaged by Jonik in his work (46) are not produced by mixing or fusing together human, nonhuman, and inanimate elements and materialities. Instead, such material constituents tend to create zones of proximity that make humans and nonhumans at times indistinguishable, but always separate. Stubb never truly becomes a whale, as much as his pipe smoke cannot become the whale spout.

As a matter of fact, the chapter ends with yet another scene which reinforces this reading of a zone of proximity existing between Stubb and the whale through the image of the pipe: "'He's dead, Mr. Stubb,' said Tashtego. 'Yes; both pipes smoked out!' and

[20] For a clear overview of the role of nonhuman agency in *Moby-Dick*, see the works of Armstrong cited in chapter 1.

withdrawing his own from his mouth, Stubb scattered the dead ashes over the water; and, for a moment, stood thoughtfully eyeing the vast corpse he had made" (Melville, *MD* 286). Stubb's pipe, which has now completed its function just as Stubb has accomplished his task of whale hunter, produces ashes which Melville describes as "dead", an adjective that unequivocally creates a point of contact between the now-dead whale and its hunter. Furthermore, the "dead ashes" are scattered over the water where the dead whale is lying, reinforcing the shared space between leisure and labor. A space in which the main difference between the two poles seems to be one of intensity (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 274): both through leisure (pipe smoking) and work (hunting) Stubb has produced death, and it is through death that a zone of proximity between him and the hunted cetacean is created. In this respect, it is possible to see a parallel between Ahab's becoming-whale, which as stated above brings him to his death, and Stubb's proximity with the whale, which brings about the whale's death. Hence, Stubb is left "thoughtfully eying" the dead body of the whale, possibly considering this proximity between human and animal which, as Armstrong argues, was considered unacceptable by an "Enlightenment humanism" still mainstream in mid-nineteenth century ("Leviathan" 1050).

In another key episode, a few chapters after his first hunt (Chapter 64, "Stubb's Supper"), Stubb is presented side by side with another nonhuman animal, the shark. This time the apparent indiscernibility between the human character and the animals swimming around the Pequod is reversed compared to Chapter 61: it is the sharks which seem to enter into a zone of proximity with humans, becoming indistinguishable from them by sharing some of the worst traits of humanity. The episode happens once the successful hunting party returns on board the Pequod, and Stubb demands that, in spite of the late hour, he is served a whale steak. In a highly humorous scene, the second mate requests that Dagoo cut a steak from the whale's "tapering extremity of the body" (Melville, *MD* 292) and that Fleece, the black cook, prepares it for him. In a crescendo of comedy, Stubb complains about how the steak has been overcooked and, in a sort of punishment for Fleece's mistake, Stubb insists that the cook, grumpy from having been woken up late at night, preach silence

to the sharks who are noisily biting away the whale carcass attached to the ship's side, disturbing Stubb's dinner.

In the lines in which he is happily eating his whale steak, Stubb seamlessly enters into a shared territory with the sharks swimming around the ship through the action of voraciously consuming another being's flesh: "[m]ingling their mumblings with his own mastications, thousands on thousands of sharks, swarming round the dead leviathan, smackingly feasted on its fatness" (Melville, *MD* 293). The alliteration of the sound /m/ emphasizes the sounds produced by both Stubb and the sharks while eating, creating a first auditory link between the human and the nonhumans, one based on the act of munching away the whale's body.[21] In this images, the vital, almost ludic action of eating is indiscernible from the macabre action of feasting on a recently-killed nonhuman body.

However, a few lines later the extent of this indiscernibility is fully disclosed, while its political implications become evident. Sharks become house dogs, sailors become butchers, and both are solely focused on "carving" meat. As the role of the butcher and the butchered start to blur into a horror of ravenous consumption of human and nonhuman flesh, through the presence of sharks Ishmael explicitly links the butchering of the whale to war, and then to the Atlantic slave trade:[22]

> Though amid all the smoking horror and diabolism of a sea-fight, sharks will be seen longingly gazing up to the ship's decks, like hungry dogs round a table where red meat is being carved, ready to bolt down every killed man that is tossed to them; and though, while the valiant butchers over the deck-table are thus cannibally carving each other's live meat with carving-knives all gilded and tasselled, the sharks, also, with their jewel-hilted mouths, are quarrelsomely carving away under the table at the dead meat; and though sharks also are the invariable outriders of all slave ships crossing the Atlantic, systematically trotting alongside, to be handy in case a

[21] For an interesting perspective on the phonetic and rhythmic qualities of *Moby-Dick*, see Sanborn ("Moby-Dick").

[22] It is possible that the reference to slave trading is also a wink to Fleece and the bullying he has just received from Stubb. For an overview of the use of racialized bodies in the novel, see Fruscione.

parcel is to be carried anywhere, or a dead slave to be decently buried; ". (Melville, *MD* 293)

Jonik points out how in this passage cannibalism is used by Melville to mount an accusation against the abominations committed by white, Christian Americans during the Atlantic slave trade, and goes on to enumerate the several instances of cannibalism – intended as self-consumption – present in the novel (Jonik 44–45). Similarly, Arsić interprets the scene as representative of "all the massacres, exterminations, and extinctions that accompany Western modernity", one made possible by the separation between mind and body operated by some Western thought (74).[23] Sharing the two scholars' readings of the scene, I would add that in this scene Stubb, and humans in general (i.e., the sailors-butchers on the ship-slaughterhouse) enter once again into a zone of indiscernibility with nonhumans, in an act of happy banqueting that turns into a massacre of human and nonhuman individuals alike. Just like work and leisure share a zone of proximity in the hunting scene of Chapter 61, here killing and eating become closely linked so as to become indiscernible, for both humans and nonhumans. Clearly in this scene sharks are not simply eating: they are endowed with greed and gluttony, two attributes which make them enter into a territory of proximity with human animals. Both feed on the body of somebody else, with similar intensity and voraciousness.[24] On the other hand, sharks merely devour what humans have killed (a whale, the sailors killed in the "sea fight", the animals providing the "red meat", slaves), so their actions are difficult to discern, but in fact still different from those of humans.

Going back to Stubb, according to Zoellner in this scene he "becomes a paradigm of the futility of our efforts to be other than the sharks we are" (143). In other words, in his reading Stubb represents the inability of humans to get rid of their "sharkishness", i.e., their desire to immoderately consume everything around them. In a slightly different reading, I argue that both Stubb and sharks in this scene are placed in what could be

[23] See chapter 1 for a longer presentation of Arsić's argument.
[24] Schultz asserts that in the novel it is mainly humans who are unable to control their "voracious insatiability" (103), however as I argue here sharks partly share this trait too, at least in this scene.

considered a human-shark continuum, within which variations of intensity and movement (Massumi 52) create individuals who are neither totally shark, nor totally human.[25] Instead, both find areas of proximity in the separate but indistinguishable activities of killing and eating: sharks feast on "dead meat" killed by human-butchers, humans are "sharkish" in the way they consume red meat, and the two polarities become indistinguishable, and yet distinct – after all it is humans who are responsible for wars, whale hunting which has later resulted in resources depletion, and the horrors of the slave trade.

It should be noted how both episodes mentioned here deal with death (as did Ahab's becoming-whale), and that in both cases the zone of proximity established between humans and animals have to do with suffering and destruction: hunting, killing, and devouring both human and nonhuman bodies. On this point, Armstrong analyzes these and similar images in the novel as Melville's critique of nineteenth century American economic structure and of the role of both animals and humans in the logic of resource consumption in industrial capitalism ("Leviathan" 1052). Armstrong's reading is all the more reinforced if considering the possibility of an animal continuum. It is precisely because of the constantly increasing demands made on the human and the nonhuman by industrial economy that Stubb is hunting a whale, slave-traders are throwing dead slaves overboard, and sailors are slaughtering each other for the control of a particular territory or part of sea. Hence, although some of the zones of proximity described above are encouraged, if not directly produced, by mid-nineteenth century American industrialization, they also represent a way for Stubb to cope with the pressures of the whaling industry: through his becoming-animal, Stubb can re-signify the death and suffering caused by an economic system based on the infinite consumption of human and nonhuman resources. In other words, it is through the deterritorialization of his role as killer and butcher, which I term his becoming-whale and becoming-shark, that he can temporarily bestow the morbid role

[25] It is important to notice that for Massumi the two poles of the continuum are simply "ideal", i.e., the total human and the total animal are never fully actualized. What we have instead is always a variation within the spectrum, which tends towards one or the other of the two poles. What matters for Massumi is the included middle, rather that the two extremities (52).

of slaughterer, and therefore can continue his work as second mate without losing his mind or being excessively affected by the death and destruction it is causing.

Moreover, in spite of the negative judgement passed by Ishmael on humans and sharks alike in "Stubb's Supper", and in spite of the fact that both the above-mentioned episodes deal with death, what is striking about Stubb in both cases is the natural ease with which he seems to enter these zones of proximity: he naturally blends work into leisure, while seamlessly entering a continuum with sharks or whales without ever losing his *de facto* separation from these nonhuman animals. Differently from Ahab's tragic obsession, Stubb seems to exploit his becoming to his own advantage, as described above. If, as Zoellner quite dramatically puts it, Stubb "may, indeed, be the healthiest man in the crew excepting only Queequeg" (75), then the straightforwardness with which he accepts and sometimes proactively cultivates his deterritorializations, i.e., his possibility of assuming functions which are deviant compared to the ones he is expected to assume as a whaling ship second mate,[26] might also represent an alternative way of perceiving and living the nonhuman world.

In fact, in other episodes in the novel Stubb operates a similar movement towards deterritorialization in passages which, I argue, cannot be read as mere representations of his "easy-going" nature. One example of this is the peculiarly oneiric Chapter 31 "Queen Mab". In this short chapter, Stubb describes a dream he has had after having been scolded by Ahab. In the dream, he is physically kicked by Ahab who, when Stubb tries to kick him back, becomes a pyramid. While Stubb is busy trying to kick this pyramid back, and is musing about whether a kick received by a whale-bone leg is as offensive as a kick received by a flesh-and-bone one, a cross-gender, cross-species creature appears:

> But now comes the greatest joke of the dream, Flask. While I was battering away at the pyramid, a sort of badger-haired old merman, with a hump on his back, takes me by the shoulders, and slews me around. 'What are you 'bout?' says he. […] 'What am I about?' says I at last. 'And what business is that of yours, I should like to know,

[26] This is for example the case when Stubb enters his becoming-shark, i.e., when he is no longer acting as a human would be expected to act, but assume shark-like traits. Or again, when he lives and perceives the whale chase as leisure time.

> Mr. Humpback? Do *you* want a kick?' By the lord, Flask, I had no sooner said that, than he turned round his stern to me, bent over, and dragging up a lot of sea-weed he had for a clout—what do you think I saw?—why thunder alive, man, his stern was stuck full of marlin-spikes, with the points out. (Melville, *MD* 132; emphasis in the original)

The merman is further described as muttering the words "wise Stubb" over and over, "sort of eating his own gums like a chimney hag" (132).

In a chapter explicitly dedicated to this dream sequence, Zoellner warns against dismissing Stubb's dream as a merely nonsensical sequence simply on the assumption that if it is linked to the "easy-going" second mate, then it must be a joke (74), and instead gives a very articulate interpretation of both the image of the pyramid and of the character of the merman (75-90).[27] In his view, both elements are two parallel and key "images" that represent "*the natural world*" as conceived in *Moby-Dick* (76; emphasis in the original). The pyramid, which in Zoellner's argument represents inanimate nature as well as being "an image of a dimly intuited past", is referred to explicitly when describing Moby Dick elsewhere in the text (78). Its "stolidity" and its implicit reference to Egyptian architecture makes the pyramid a perfect representation of the indifference and "monolithic aware[ness]" of nature (Zoellner 83).

Complementary to this inanimate nature, in Zoellner's reading the merman stands for "*animate nature* in all its manifestations, living and non-living, sentient and non-sentient", that is to say for a nature that is deeply processual and "pauselessly active" (83; emphasis in the original), a sort of moving, ever-changing pyramid. Interestingly, what Zoellner sees as the active side of nature is a character who is not entirely human nor entirely nonhuman, whose gender is not completely clear and who seems to be both bizarre and wise. In other words, a hybrid character physically and literally placed in a human-nonhuman continuum, in a middle ground which includes both human, animal, and inanimate elements: he scares

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[27] Zoellner goes as far as to tentatively propose Stubb's dream as one key, if there can be said to be any, to interpret the whole novel (76).

Stubb when he first appears (like a wild animal would), but then mutters like a "chimney hag"; he has a back covered in marlinspikes but speaks like a human.

In addition to this physical description, what is remarkable in this passage is that the merman appears precisely in Stubb's dream (and not, for example, in Ahab's), i.e., in the dream of a character who, as seen above, shows to be perfectly at ease with his animality. Hence, it is possible to expand Zoellner's reading of this chapter by adding that the vital, "animate nature" represented by the merman is also one which creates an included middle, where human and animal compenetrate and cannot be clearly disjointed.[28] It is as if Stubb were dreaming the animal continuums he will experience later on, in Chapters 61 and 64, when he enters into a shared zone of proximity with whales and sharks. The merman, in a way, physically foretells this possibility, something which in the dream initially alarms Stubb, but soon becomes a source of great wisdom – namely the merman will help him understand how to behave in order to avoid Ahab's rage in the future. In short, Stubb's dream creates a physical representation of the deterritorializations and proximities that characterize his person in the rest of the novel, and posits a nature – following Zoellner's reading – which makes of imperceptible boundaries and confused categorizations one of its distinguishing traits.

Finally, during the last chapters of the chase to Moby Dick, Stubb once again shows his ease in entering into proximity with nonhuman elements, this time with an inanimate object: "'By salt and hemp!' cried Stubb, 'but this swift motion of the deck creeps up one's legs and tingles at the heart. This ship and I are two brave fellows!—Ha! ha! Some one take me up, and launch me, spine-wise, on the sea,—for by live oaks! my spine's a keel'" (Melville, *MD* 556; Ch. 134). This passage exemplifies what Sanborn means when he describes Melville's work as exclamatory, and how such "exclamatoriness" is often "a response to exclamations or their equivalent in the surrounding world" (14). Here Stubb's energy and

[28] For Massumi, as well as for Deleuze and Guattari, the process of becoming-animal and the zones of proximity this relies on are not a physical transformation into a nonhuman animal, as illustrated in Chapter 1. My argument here follows the philosophers': in the fiction of writing, and particularly in the imagination of a dream sequence, such transformations are made real, physical transformations which represent in writing the non-physical deterritorialization of becoming-animal. For other literary examples of becoming-animal, see Deleuze and Guattari (*Kafka* 12–13) and Cimatti (157).

excitement for the chase, expressed in exclamatory interjections, is a response to, as well as a direct consequence of the "swift motion" of the ship (i.e., the ship exclamation), a motion which "creeps up" Stubb's body through the ship planks and which causes him to respond in such an overwhelming way that he eventually identifies with the ship, feeling like he is the one speeding through the waves. This response seems to come to him naturally, as he is compelled to share this exclamatory moment of identification with his shipmates.

As a consequence, I argue that, in the same way that Jonik understands Ahab's power as made of "inhuman" elements, and particularly deriving from the surrounding atmosphere (Jonik 22), so this concise but conspicuous image of Stubb's becoming-ship confirms how the surrounding nonhuman elements affect Stubb's person in a way that allows him to easily move within the animal continuum without losing his personhood.[29] This movement (which, as already mentioned, never physically transforms him into an animal or a ship) is achieved by the second mate with his peculiar "invulnerable jollity of indifference" (Melville, *MD* 186; Ch. 41), i.e., without the monomania or forebodings linked instead to Ahab's becoming-whale.

2.4. The whaleness of whales

Just as Stubb can be seen shifting with ease between the poles of an animal continuum, so in many episodes in the novel whales create a similar movement, bending the limits of their animality in order to present possibilities and compose realities which are nonexistent in the rest of the novel, and furthermore seem inaccessible to the human characters of *Moby-Dick*. Two examples of this are Chapter 87 "The Grand Armada" and Chapter 88 "Schools and Schoolmasters". The two chapters are quite different in tone and imagery, but in both cases, whales represent what is totally absent, or is only vaguely hinted at, in the rest of the

[29] Although the ship is clearly not an animal, Massumi specifies how the word 'animal' is a deliberate choice, but that "there are no 'substantial difference' enabling categorical distinctions between kingdoms, genuses, and species. From this point of view, the 'animal continuum' could also be called the 'plant continuum', depending on which middle one chooses to begin from" (Massumi 53).

novel: love, kinship, femininity, motherhood. As already mentioned in chapter 1, "The Grand Armada" has opened the novel to twentieth and twenty-first century environmental and nonhuman readings. In particular, Zoellner sees the mother and baby whales in this chapter as a "femininization" and "infantilization" of the size of the whale, i.e., a way for Ishmael to render so alien and sometimes terrorizing a scale into something more manageable to process and understand (181). In addition, in this scene Ishmael gazes "over the side" into the ocean (Melville, *MD* 387) and instead of seeing the terror of a "subtle" sea which deceives with its beauty by hiding terrible monsters as he predicted in Chapter 58, he witnesses a placid and loving scene of whale mothers nursing their babies (Zoellner 182).

While this reading focuses on Ishmael's beliefs about nature and its relationship to humankind, what is interesting to notice is how this scene discloses to Ishmael and his shipmates facets of reality which are almost completely absent in his tale of the Pequod's tragedy. While brotherly, queer love, and some forms of kinship are at the forefront in chapters such as "A Bosom Friend" and "A Squeeze of the Hand", femininity or parenthood are only hinted at but they never take center stage as in "The Grand Armada".[30] Ishmael places these whale mothers and their calves into an animal continuum by juxtaposing them to other human and nonhuman animals: "we were occasionally visited by small tame cows and calves; the women and children of this routed host"; and "[l]ike household dogs they came snuffling round us, right up to our gunwales" (Melville, *MD* 387). The homely images of women with children and housedogs evoked in these passages, despite being linked to a patriarchal view of the role of women (Mariani, *Guida* 109), task whales of representing parenthood by imitating the behavior of human mothers and their

[30] In point of fact, femininity is present in Chapter 132 "The Symphony", where the "masculine sea" is contrasted to the "feminine air" (Melville, *MD* 542) and the two are referred to as uniting in a "[s]weet childhood of air and sky" (543). In addition, kinship is present later on in the same chapter, where Ahab references to his family directly by reminiscing of his "young girl-wife" he "wedded past fifty", and Starbuck talks longingly about his "wife and child of his brotherly, sisterly, play-fellow youth" (544). However, these images of the comfort of home and the love of a family are not as visually poignant as the nursing scene in "The Grand Armada", as they are simple nostalgic hints rather than fully visual scenes as in Chapter 87. Furthermore, these references to home and family seem to be placed here mainly to enhance the pathos of the upcoming tragedy (Chapter 132 is right before the beginning of the chase to Moby Dick).

children, as well as that of house dogs. However, "one never simply imitates a form, in the sense of conforming oneself to the given form of another being. One can certainly make as if one were effectively imitating. But something else is really going on, unacknowledged and inexpressibly […] What, sentimentally, is taken for imitation is in fact the catalyzing of a germ of invention" (Massumi 82). In "The Grand Armada", whales are not simply imitating human mothers, but instead they are exceeding what is given, i.e., what humans expect of them as nonhumans. They are going beyond being unintelligent brutes, as they are often referred to by the human characters in the novel, and creatively invent a new role for themselves, one which speaks about love, kinship, and care rather than about resource exploitation and death as is the case on the Pequod.

It could be argued that on the Pequod we do find moments of care and fellowship between shipmates, as in the case of the already-mentioned "A Squeeze of the Hand", or partly in "The Monkey Rope".[31] Yet that bond is always linked to the extractive activity of killing whales and removing their oil, and can therefore never disenfranchise itself from the logic of consumption that generated it. On the other hand, whales in this scene seem to demonstrate a way of mutually supporting and caring for each other, protecting the weak and allowing for the peaceful upbringing of their youth (Sten 325) that is believed to be the peculiar domain of humanity.

In fact, at the beginning of the chapter, Ishmael explains how

> owing to the unwearied activity with which of late they have been hunted over all four oceans, the Sperm Whales, instead of almost invariably sailing in small detached companies, as in former times, are now frequently met with in extensive herds, sometimes embracing so great a multitude, that it would almost seem as if numerous nations of them had sworn solemn league and covenant for *mutual assistance and protection.* (Melville, *MD* 382; emphasis added).

[31] In Chapter 72, Queequeg and Ishmael are tied one to the other through the "monkey rope" as a sort of safety system for the dangerous job of inserting a hook into the whale in order to be able to lift it. In the chapter, Ishmael muses on how this rope locks the two men's destinies, as should one slip and fall into the ocean, the other would inevitably follow him (Melville, *MD* 319–22).

Later in the chapter, Ishmael notices how the pod of whales has created a circle, seemingly to protect the nursing mothers and their calves: "as if the cows and calves had been purposely locked up in this innermost fold; and as if the wide extent of the herd had hitherto prevented them from learning the precise scope of its stopping …" (387).

In both cases then, whales manifest a mutually-cooperative behavior aimed at reciprocal help and protection. This is what ideally could or should happen among the humans on board whale ships – or in any human community. Instead, the Pequod's crew have left their families and relationships to embark on a several-year-long perilous journey, with the task of slaying whales in order to harvest fluids from their bodies. In spite of the camaraderie that arises from living in such close contact for years, still Stubb seemingly heartlessly leaves Pip alone in the ocean when the latter jumps off the boat for the second time (Melville, *MD* 413; Ch. 93), Ahab refuses to help the heartbroken captain of the Rachel looking for his missing son (530-33; Ch. 128), and in Chapter 132 Ahab laments that he does not have a wife but "rather a widow with her husband alive" (544). The strong kinship shown by nonhuman whales in "The Grand Armada" might be a way for Ishmael of showing his readers a possible alternative way of living, one not based on the unchecked exploitation of human and nonhuman resources typical of industrialization, in instead build on mutual assistance and solidarity.[32]

As Christopher Sten indicates, Ishmael himself in the cetological chapters often brings the whale as an example of behavior for humans to follow (325), an in "The Grand Armada" muses about how "there is no folly of the beasts of the earth which is not infinitely outdone by the madness of men" (Melville, *MD* 385). Sten goes as far as to posit that "Melville anticipates an intriguing development in recent studies of cognitive ethology and anthropology, namely the idea […] that much of human behavior and human culture has been learned from observing the behavior of our animal 'others'" (326).[33] In terms of the

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[32] These arguments are reminiscent of the myth of the noble savage. In fact, in Chapter 3 I will briefly outline how Melville often draws parallels between whales and Natives, a topic that has been thoroughly explored by Melville scholars (Fruscione, Kalter, Otter).

[33] For recent developments on the notion of culture in animal groups, and on how some cetaceans such as whales and dolphins are now understood to have, and pass on, cultural information, see Whitehead and Rendell.

zones of proximity discussed in this work, the ability of whales to express modes of living and ways to operate in the world that seem precluded to the humans portrayed in the novel demonstrate their ability to creatively bend the animal continuum and provide an alternative to the insatiableness of human industrial societies.[34]

On the other hand, in the following Chapter 88 Ishmael takes the humanization of whales one step further and falls fully back into pathetic fallacy by describing whale schools as "harems" or "mobs of young collegians", and individual whale which are part of these groups as "Ottoman[s]", "concubines", "ladies" and "schoolmasters" (Melville, *MD* 392–93). By reading Thomas Beale, one of the sources of information for the cetological chapters in the novel (Parker 501-02),[35] it is clear how the human component of the description is almost entirely Melville's. Beale's description of the schools does not include human elements: "The groups, herds, or 'schools,' which are formed by the sperm whale, are of two kinds: — firstly, by the females, which are accompanied by their young and one or two adult males; and, secondly, by the young and half-grown males, but the large and fully grown males always go singly in search of food" (Beale 20).

In Melville's words, a schools of female whales accompanied by a male become a "harem and its lord", who leisurely navigate the world waters in order to avoid the very cold and very hot seasons (Melville, *MD* 392); while a group of half-grown males is compared to a group of young students, eager to experience and enjoy life, "full of fight, fun and wickedness, thumbling round the world at such a reckless, rollicking rate, that no prudent underwriter would insure them any more then he would a riotous lad at Yale of Harvard" (Melville, *MD* 393).

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[34] As presented in Chapter 1, these images are intermingled with destruction images of the mothers being killed and their milk mixing with their blood, as well as with the image of the umbilical cord getting tangled with the whaling line. Similar to Schultz (as introduced in 1.1), Armstrong sees in these scenes an allegation of the "price paid by both the animal and the human female for their place within industrial capitalism" ("Leviathan" 1054). While I share these readings of the scene, the focus of this work is on how whales enter into zones of proximity with humans, creating possibilities that seem unavailable to them. The fact that such possibilities are immediately destroyed by hunters seems to support the interpretation of this scene as Melville's critique of industrial capitalism.

[35] I assume that Beale is the source of inspiration for this chapter from the fact that some of the passages quoted here were underlined by Melville on his copy of Beale (Marnon et al.), and because the wording of the two texts is very similar.

Armstrong interprets Melville's humanizing of these whales as a way to justify what is seen as a "sociological 'truth' " by showing how the same gender roles are reproduced almost exactly also in nature, and are therefore natural ("Leviathan" 1057). In the scholar's view, this obeys a gender-defining logic that needs to find a new place for women as the childbearing part of society, since their role as active members of the family economy is lost through industrialization (1056). While this reading is definitely in keeping with gender roles construction in mid-nineteenth century, the fact that this chapter is highly ironic should not be overlooked. Despite the fact that some of Ishmael's comments certainly adhere to this gender constructions,[36] it is also clear that Melville is making fun of such images by projecting them into a completely unfamiliar context: that of wild whales. Hence, whales again push the limits of their animality by deterritorializing human behavior, and therefore become a tool in Melville's hands to subtly but effectively criticize some key aspects of western society and particularly of higher-class youth, such as their carelessness and excessive attention to pleasures and diversions.

But what about Moby Dick, the mythical white whale who can destroy an entire ship and its crew with one blow? Where can he be placed in the animal continuum considered so far in this work? As already mentioned in chapter 1, Armstrong sees Moby Dick as an example of an animal possessing qualities, such as agency (and I would add malice and vengefulness), which humans in Melville's time found difficult if not impossible to attribute to a nonhuman animal, and which were therefore dismissed as tall tale or as anthropomorphism (Armstrong, "What Animals Mean" 104). The White Whale is in fact described by Ishmael, in the eponymous Chapter 41, as something between a legend, a mariner's tall tale, and a real, living animal, who is "incredibly ferocious as continually to be athirst for human blood" (Melville, *MD* 181), equipped with an "unexampled, intelligent malignity" and an "infernal aforethought of ferocity" (183). He terrorizes sailors the world over and has become notorious among whale ships because of "his treacherous retreats"

[36] One clear example of this is at the end of the chapter, when Ishmael justifies the presumed difference in behavior between male and female groups by imputing the fact that female whales tend to stay around the wounded members of their schools to a typical feminine trait, implying that it comes from women's natural role as mothers in society (Melville, *MD* 393–94).

and the fact that, upon being pursued by whale boats trying to harpoon him, "he had several times been known to turn around suddenly, and, bearing down upon them, either stave their boats to splinters, or drive them back in consternation to their ship" (Melville, *MD* 183). This description clearly testifies to an individual who has supernormal tendencies,[37] i.e., one who tries to overcome the limits and boundaries imposed on his species by humans by willingly trying to kill his pursuers.

Even though, as Christopher Sten indicates, Melville lifted the idea of a willingly vengeful whale from Owen Chase's *Narrative* (322), one of the two main sources of inspiration for the adventures of the Pequod (Parker 504), it is also clear that Moby Dick is presented as more than simply an intelligent whale.[38] In Chapter 41, Moby Dick is not only endowed with a will to destroy and take revenge on those who pursue him and his species, but he is also described as having mythical powers, notwithstanding the attribution of these characteristics to "superstitiously inclined" seamen (Melville, *MD* 182): some believe him "obliquitous", while others insist that he is "immortal" (182-83). In short, he

> expresses the supernormal tendency plying whaleness from within, and placing it on the integral animal continuum. [...] [He] is the receding horizon of being-whale. He is the transindividuating, extra-species becoming of whaleness, in person. But he is not a person. He is an envelope of becoming-animal potential. He is an envelope of animal potential becoming [...] as only a written whale can [be]. (Massumi 60)

[37] By supernormal I refer to Massumi's conceptualization of a "tendency to surpass the normal, by dint of enthusiasm of the body" (15). In his view of animal politics, the Canadian thinker advocates learning from human animality's capacity to exceed the minimal function necessary for survival, going beyond the already-given and already-done, in order to generate a creative "supernormal" (15). This, in his view, is the basic tenet of an animal politics which goes beyond "normative ethics" (38). For more on the ethical implications of the supernormal, see Massumi (38-40).

[38] There is evidence in the text that Melville insists in presenting whales, and more generally nonhuman animals, as intelligent and, as mentioned above, even as examples of behavior to be followed by humans. For a complete argument on this, see Sten (323-29).

The While Whale is identified as the supernormal individual[39] who manipulates the boundaries of (in this case) whaleness, positioning it into an integral animal continuum that includes humans and nonhumans alike. He is a whale, but has supernormal characteristics that make him more than a whale. Some of these features, he shares with humans, such as vengefulness and premeditation, while others surpass both the human and the animal, such as ubiquity and immortality. He is therefore the quintessentially deterritorialized individual, i.e. the individual who more than others surpasses and moves beyond what is normal or expected of it to become something else, and who seems to embrace the whole animal continuum in order to show its possibilities, in a way that is only possible for a fictional whale. Ishmael stresses this point quite strongly in Chapter 41, where he uses the adjectives "uncommon", "supernatural", "mystic", and "unexampled" to stress the anomalous nature of Moby Dick (Melville, *MD* 180–83). In other words, the white whale is, above all others in the novel, the one who pushes the boundaries of the already-known in the animal continuum and tests its own and others' animality in a process of constant becoming.

Is this "edge of deterritorialization" possible, or is it only a mariner's tall tale? Is there an individual who can encompass the continuum and show its full potential? Ishmael seems to point in this direction. Although he ascribes the most fantastic attributes of Moby Dick to superstition, he then adds that "even stripped of these supernatural surmising, there was enough in the earthly to make an incontestable character of the monster" (Melville, *MD* 183), making the figure of Moby Dick one that cannot be comfortably classified as animal.[40] If the other whales in the novel are creating a space for possible alternatives to human aggression and mindless exploitation, Moby Dick is instead the embodiment of the possibilities generated by pure becoming. These are perceived as monstrous by Ishmael, yet both Ahab and himself cannot refrain from pursuing the white whale, in an "irresistible becoming-whale […] that bypasses the pack or the school, operating directly through a monstrous alliance with the Unique, the Leviathan, Moby Dick" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 243).

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[39] Deleuze and Guattari write instead of an "anomalous" individual, defining it "the unequal, the coarse, the rough, the cutting edge of deterritorialization" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 244).

[40] See note 25 for a problematization of the categories, or poles, of animal and human.

2.5. Language in the animal continuum

To sum up, this chapter has explored how Ahab's becoming-whale as understood by Deleuze and Guattari unfolds in *Moby-Dick*, as well as both humans and nonhumans enter into zones of proximity with each other,[41] creating an integral animal continuum which some characters, such as Stubb, are able to navigate with apparent ease. As human characters find themselves in close proximity with nonhuman ones, their individualities start to become indiscernible, but never completely mixed with each other. Simultaneously, nonhuman characters creatively place themselves into zones of proximity with humans, allowing for other possibilities beyond the extractivist logic of whale hunting. In addition, Moby Dick himself is an example of a creative deflecting of the boundaries of animality which allows for intense deterritorialization, a process which seems to create never-before-thought possibilities. All these elements speak of *Moby-Dick* as a novel which deeply questions the position of its characters in the continuum, moving between the two poles in order to find affordances which allow humans and nonhumans to establish relations. Such relations in the novel are generally detrimental, as humans and whales or sharks enter into zones of proximity associated with death, eventually destroying each other.

Nevertheless, as in the case of Stubb or Moby Dick, I argue that the novel might be inadvertently pointing to ways of turning these proximities into beneficial relations, delineating a path for both humans and nonhumans out of the deadly grip of industrial whaling. In fact, as detailed above, Stubb successfully navigates his becoming-animal to deterritorialize the most gruesome and deadly aspects of whaling, i.e., the fact that this business makes him a killer and slaughterer of whales. This does not stop him from taking part in this extractivist practice, but it does create what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as a "line of escape" (*ligne de fuite* Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 298), which brings him to new territories and open up new possibilities. In addition, Moby Dick shows the potential of the supernormal to go beyond what is given in order to find new paths and

[41] For a definition of zones of proximity, and how these are not to be intended as areas of physical proximity, see the introduction of this chapter.

new possibilities. In short, in my reading these two characters in particular might be implying a way out of the exploitative nature of industrialization, even though these are only faint hints which are not fully developed in Melville's novel.

In all this, the question of language as the hallmark of humanity remains open. If the novel expresses the possibilities of an animal continuum, how can that be reconciled with the presence of human language, one of the most prominent marks that have been named to separate humans from animals? How does the placing of characters in the animal continuum relate to this peculiarity of *homo sapiens*? Does the text of *Moby-Dick* reflect on these issues, and if so, what is the novel's stance, in light of what has been presented in this chapter? If so, where does this reflection appear in the novel, how is it being expressed, and how does this representation affect the way human and animal characters interact in the novel?

The following chapter is dedicated to the analysis of language and muteness in human and nonhuman characters, and explores the deep link that the faculty of language, or the potential for language, establishes with the possibility (or lack thereof) of knowing and understanding the world.

Chapter 3

“The whale has no voice”

So far, human and nonhuman animals have been considered in their proximities and areas of indiscernibility, focusing on characters and scenes in which such zones are most visible. However, it is difficult to discuss animality (human or nonhuman) without taking into account the question of language, that is to say the question of how human language seems to separate irremediably humans and nonhumans. Language and animality are so closely linked as to prompt Cimatti to state that “animality concerns language” (1). In other words, it is through language that the human subject, i.e., the *I*, is created, and it is because of language that we, *homo sapiens*, create the animal other in order to distances ourselves from it – an *other* who quintessentially does not speak (Cimatti 1).[1]

Hence, in light of what has been discussed so far about human-animal zones of proximity, what can be said about the issue of human language in *Moby-Dick*? Can there still be such a thing as an animal continuum, if there is also such a neat dividing line as language to separate humans from nonhumans? How is the question relevant to human and nonhuman characters in the novel? And how does it contribute to the larger issue of the human animality and to its representation in the novel? This chapter explores these questions and aims at shedding light onto how the presence or absence of language, the issue of the adequacy of language to represent reality, as well as the power of language to separate the *I* from the body intersect each other in the text of *Moby-Dick*, while also helping reinforce the reading of a human-animal continuum in the novel.

[1] For a summary of Cimatti’s argument about how human subjectivity is created through language, see Chapter 1, section 1.4.

Taking off from the curious fact that Ishmael feels the need to state twice during his account that the whale does not speak, and goes as far as to speculate how else the whale might communicate with the world, this chapter explores the possible meaning and implications of such muteness. As Martínez Benedí and Savarese state about *Pierre*, I would like to explore here how *Moby-Dick* "stages the problem of language—how it [language] produces the categories [...] which then require the bandage of personification" (486) in order to justify the zones of proximity already described in the previous chapter of this work. That is to say, humans through language divide the world into seemingly neat categories which cannot account for the fluidity of the animal continuum seen in Chapter 2 of the present work. As a consequence of this conflict, Melville resorts to what has often been regarded as personification to justify the moments in which characters move along the continuum, such as in the cases of Stubb or Moby Dick described in the previous chapter.

However, in their work the two scholars develop their argument by employing a distinction taken from cognitive sciences (Martínez Benedí and Savarese 486). They refer to "lower-level perceptual systems", which sense the world without the interference of language to categorize and explain, and "higher-order thought", which subsequently describes and classifies that initial perception, and in doing so reins in the sensations created by the former (486). Applying this approach to Melville's work, Martínez Benedí and Savarese refer to the way in which plants become human-like, and humans tree-like in *Pierre* as a form of animism which can be read as Melville's wish to "linger over sensation, to delay the moment of conceptual mastery". That is to say, in their view Melville's animism in *Pierre* is as a way of remaining with the lower-order perceptual system and of suspending the labelling power of higher-order thought, a process which removes the animistic flavor of the pure sensation. As a consequence, they argue that Melville tends to use language to explore pure sensation, what comes before the rational interpretation of it.

Similarly, in this chapter I look at how the question of human language is explored though the lens of the nonhuman in *Moby-Dick*. Not only is language shown to be

inadequate to express reality, a fact that many scholars have discussed and which I briefly account for in section 3.1, but most importantly I show how it is the body of the whale which composes this dichotomy, just as it is the body which Cimatti argues we need to return to in order to compose the subject-object dualism of language. In short, I wish to show how it is through the body of the whale that Ishmael frames the problem of language, and it is still the same nonhuman body which will provide what I consider to be a possible answer to both the problem of the effectiveness of language, and the issue of the divisive nature of language categorizations.

In analyzing the passages in the novel in which Ishmael ponders about the voice of the whale, I show how the narrator's idea about the ability of the whale to communicate quickly evolves from a traditional western view of animals as lacking language (albeit a nuanced one, as I will show), to new possibilities of communicating through something other than language, in ways that are different and possibly more profound than human language itself. In discussing this, I also briefly summarize the hermeneutic problem presented in the novel, i.e., Ishmael's oft-quoted inability to fully grasp and describe the whale, and I summarize some of the key scholarship which has contributed in re-contextualizing this limit within epistemological concerns about the inadequacy of science to reliably describe and understand the world through language. I finally propose that Ishmael might be unintentionally indicating the whale as representing a different idea of communication (and therefore of expression), one based on the body.

3.1. The muteness of the whale

As Luca Briasco notices, *Moby-Dick* can be read as an "adventure of interpretation" ("avventura dell'interpretazione"). As Ishmael the first-person narrator tells his story retrospectively, years after the Pequod demise, Ishmael the character tries to make sense of the world he lives in, as well as of the tragic facts he witnesses. Concurrently, his

adventure on board the Pequod generates in the Ishmael narrator "a deep transformation of interpretative perspective" (Briasco 28).[2] That is to say, Ishmael is not a static, omniscient narrator, but rather one who takes up a variety of roles and who, in the process of doing so, evolves and changes throughout the narration, modifying his philosophical and epistemological perspectives to suit the new knowledge he develops as the Pequod's adventure unfolds and as his understanding of the world deepens.[3] This transformation, I argue, is visible, among other places, in the way Ishmael's reflections on the muteness of the whale seem to evolve in the space of just a few chapters.[4]

The first occurrence of Ishmael mentioning the whale's voice is in Chapter 81 "The Pequod Meets the Virgin", in which, witnessing the killing of an old blind whale, he remarks:

> It was a terrific, most pitiable, and maddening sight. The whale was now going head out, and sending his spout before him in a continual tormented jet; while his one poor fin beat his side in an agony of fright. Now to this hand, now to that. He yawned in his faltering flight, and still at every billow that he broke, he spasmodically sank in the sea, or sideways rolled towards the sky his one beating fin. So have I seen a bird with clipped wing, making affrighted broken circles in the air, vainly striving to escape the piratical hawks. But the bird has a voice, and with plaintive cries will make known her fear; but the fear of this vast dumb brute of the sea, was chained up and enchanted in him; *he had no voice*, save that choking respiration through his spiracle, and this made the sight of him unspeakably pitiable. (Melville, *MD* 354–55; emphasis added)

In keeping with most Western thought on the matter, we can infer that Ishmael's observation on the inability of the whale to speak seems to highlight the animality and

[2] "una profonda trasformazione delle prospettive interpretative di Ishmael" (my translation).
[3] For some interpretations of the evolution of Ishmael as character and narrator, see Briasco, Shuffelton, Mariani (*Leggere Melville*), and Zoellner.
[4] This evolution interestingly seems to follow the epistemological steps detailed by Briasco in his reading of the novel (114-15).

otherness of the cetacean, which is, as mentioned above, *other* precisely due to its lack of language. In other words, in this instance Ishmael seems to align with the wider consensus that animals can be separated from humans mainly through the category of language. Hence, the chased whale becomes the epitome of what Cimatti terms "the animal",[5] i.e., the image that the human mind projects onto the body of a nonhuman animal to make it part of that completely discretionary category of the-animal-which-is-not-human (2). Specifically, in this scene the whale is described by Ishmael as not speaking, and in (not) doing so it perfectly conforms to the expectations humans have of nonhumans.[6]

These initial remarks seem to contrast with what has been said so far regarding the animal continuum which Stubb and other characters have been shown to navigate in the novel. Having a voice, that is, being able to communicate through it, is presented as the discretionary but clear category which allows for a net separation between the "dumb brute of the sea" and the rest of human and nonhuman animals. However, when reading Beale and Browne, the two main sources which provided Melville with the material to write this scene (Vincent 268), it is interesting to notice how they do not mention the silence of the whale. Hence, I infer that this detail has been purposefully added by Melville himself, an addition which seems particularly interesting when considering the question of language referred to nonhumans in the novel. It is therefore worth reading the scene in more detail, in order to understand whether this reading holds true, or whether this dualistic view of human vs. animal starts to show some cracks that will later be expanded in other chapters.

For some scholars, this is clearly a scene designed to move the reader and to generate feelings of pity and empathy towards the old whale: in these lines, "Melville adds the rhetoric of sentiment to that of sensationalism to intensify his reader's sorrow for the whale's death" (Schultz 105). In this context, it seems that the comment about the

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[5] See also Derrida's concept of *animot* as summarized in section 1.4.

[6] Compare this conformity of the "Medicare Whale" to human expectations to how another whale, Moby Dick, completely disattends such assumptions, instead exhibiting a behavior and malignity which seem supernormal, as detailed in section 2.4.

cetacean's lack of voice primarily serves to enhance the pathos of the scene in which the horror-stricken whale moves "spasmodically" when attacked by the Pequod's boat. However, there is more to it than a simple rhetorical device: in this short but significant remark I read the beginning of a reflection on language (which as mentioned above has been introduced by Melville himself, being absent from his sources) through the filter of the nonhuman cetacean, a reflection which will shortly be expanded to include the whales' ways of mysteriously communicating with the world.

As seen in Chapter 1 of the present work, Schultz reads this scene as an attempt on Melville's part to make the reader aware of the suffering of the whale. In fact, the scholar compares the scene to Harriet Beecher Stowe's description of the death of a child, written to raise awareness of the brutality of slavery (105). On the other hand, Armstrong stresses how Melville subtly uses such a pathos-filled scene to ironically criticize the hypocrisy of some Christian groups who "preach inoffensiveness by all to all", and disapprove of the violence of some human activities, e.g., whaling, but do not see anything wrong in enjoying the fruit of such cruel labor (Armstrong, *Fiction of Modernity* 107), e.g., whale oil.[7] In addition to these interpretations,[8] Robert Zoellner sees in these pages Ishmael's "redemptive realization that the largest and most powerful creature on the face of the earth is, like man, subject to all the ills that flesh is heir to" (171). That is to say, the "Medicare whale", as he nicknames it, in his view is humanized to show Ishmael the possibility to love and cherish a nature that is much more benign and closer to humans than any immense, terrifying "Omnipotent Leviathan" could ever be (Zoellner 173). In Zoellner's view, the pity and compassion Ishmael feels towards this whale due to its peculiarly human characteristics brings the narrator towards a "pan-naturalistic love" which rejects the "triumphalism and arrogant transcendentalism of traditional Christian theism" (Zoellner 173).

[7] "For his old age, and his one arm, and his blind eyes, he must die the death and be murdered, in order to light the gay bridals and other merry-makings of men, and also to illuminate the solemn churches that preach unconditional inoffensiveness by all to all" (Melville, *MD* 357; Ch. 81).

[8] For a more comprehensive summary of Schultz's, Armstrong's, and Zoellner's readings of this scene, see Chapter 1 of the present work.

However, what is essentially missing from all these scholars' reading is the fact that the whale has one key difference which singles it out from humanity: it cannot emit a single sound – of fear in this case – except the noise of its heavy breathing. In fact, Ishmael highlights how the scene of the old whale is "*unspeakably* pitiable"; in other words, the narrator is implying that what makes the scene even more pitiful is the fact that the hunted cetacean cannot express its terror through a "voice", but has to keep the sentiment "chained up" and "enchanted" within itself, unable to released it through a cry of some sort.[9] Going back to Martínez Benedí and Savarese's theorizations, one could say that through the adverb 'unspeakably' the perception of the suffering and terror of the whale comes spatially and temporally *before* the articulation of these into language, at a pre-linguistic level – the lower-level perceptual systems defined by the two scholars.

On the other hand, "unspeakably" is referred not only to the whale's terror, but most importantly to the scene that Ishmael is witnessing. In so doing, the adverb not only indirectly stresses once more the inability of the whale to speak its fear, but most importantly it points to the inadequacy of the narrator's words to fully account for the pity inspired by the dying whale, anticipating the theme of the ineffectiveness of language, a theme which is more thoroughly explored in other chapters, as detailed below. In this word, Ishmael is already subtly reflecting on the inadequacy of language to describe reality, and the hunted whale is the filter through which he is able to see and express these doubts.

In addition to this, the narrator creates a powerful link between speech, i.e., having a voice, and inspiring pity. The whale creates feelings of empathy precisely because it is mute, and therefore its fear and suffering reach us *before* language, before we can analyze it and classify it with linguistic categories (as mentioned above). As this sight reaches us before we can articulate it through language, in that moment we do not (and cannot) dismiss it as the suffering of something which is not human (and therefore a suffering

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[9] Interestingly, Melville chooses the word "voice", which immediately brings to mind the human voice rather than a more neutral, nonhuman term such as 'noise' or 'sound'. This seems to corroborate Zoellner's view that the whale is here humanized in order to make Ishmael, and therefore his reader, empathize with the whale

that does not matter to our human eyes), and this is because the categories of human/nonhuman come with language and are not present in lower-level perception. Instead, we purely recognize it as suffering:

> How we describe the manner in which our lower-level perceptual systems respond to nature matters, for in the twenty-first century these systems might be the only thing that can save us from environmental catastrophe. Melville's emergent eco-sensitivity expresses itself, we believe, less as an argument about human arrogance, an argument that cannot help descending from frontal lobe processing, than as a kind of silent, perceptual affinity which lurks beneath language and higher-order thought. (Martínez Benedí and Savarese 487)

What the two scholars state about the perception of nature in *Pierre* is faintly visible in these pages of *Moby-Dick* too, where the whale seems to show its fear and anguish at a "lower-level perceptual system", one that does not involve language. The whale is voiceless, and its suffering is unspeakable, yet Ishmael manages to perceive it, and trying to make his readers experience it too realises how language is inadequate to the task. In short, through the adverb "unspeakably" Ishmael is subtly remarking his own inability to express himself through language, therefore tracing a parallel between the whale's and his (human) incommunicability. Or, as Martínez Benedí and Savarese suggest, he seems to be realizing his and the whale's common ability to perceive and communicate before language, at a "lower-level perceptual system" – one which is common to both humans and nonhumans and which erases the dualisms implicit in language itself.

In fact, in keeping with Ishmael's epistemological evolution hinted at above, the absolutist perspective of the whale as "the animal", lacking language and therefore being completely other to humans, is soon contrasted to a much more nuanced one, which questions the foundations of the epistemological certainty of this separation.

3.2. The limits of human knowledge

Ishmael's nuanced attitude towards the muteness of the whale shows more clearly a few pages later, in "The Fountain" (Chapter 85), where he returns to the question of the whale's voice in a chapter dedicated to "the mystery of the spout" (Melville, *MD* 372; Ch. 85). While detailing the anatomy and use of the whale's breathing organ, Ishmael finds this part particularly difficult to classify by human standards: it cannot really be considered a nose, since it inhales and exhales water together with air and therefore seems to have no sense of smell; nor can it be considered a mouth, since it is not used to eat (372). Unable to make sense of this mysterious organ ("you might almost stand in it, and yet be undecided as to what it is precisely" 373), the only image that is left for Ishmael to use is a nonhuman one: "this curious canal is very much like a gas-pipe laid down in a city on one side of a street" (372). In these lines, the proximity of the whale to humanity perceived by Zoellner contrasts with the alterity of the spout, which is so different from what humans can and do experience as to be compared to a "canal" or a "gas-pipe", i.e., something that is completely alien to human anatomy and that stresses the bulky size of the whale (here compared to a whole city).

This is one of the chapters in which Ishmael's essentially hermeneutic quest takes the upper hand, as detailed by Briasco. As already mentioned, the Italian scholar reads in *Moby-Dick* Ishmael's deep and conscious exploration of the limits of human knowledge, and particularly of scientific knowledge, which in turn extends to questioning "the very same possibility of human language to express and capture reality through a directed, unambiguous grid" (Briasco 142).[10] This is a quality found all through Melville's work, in which the writer insistently surveys the varying nuances and often radical implications of

[10] Christian P. Haines well summarizes the main scholarship on Melville's epistemological stance as follows: "[s]cholars such as Mark Anderson, Branka Arsić, Sharon Cameron, Cesare Casarino, and K. L. Evans demonstrate that Melville's fiction doesn't simply reflect or parody philosophical positions but, more importantly, performs its own philosophical labors, including speculations concerning epistemological (un)certainty, the relationship between language and knowledge, and the ontological contingency of the world" (Haines 111).

"epistemological skepticism", an outlook which challenges clear-cut divisions such as "the self and other, subject and object, human and nature", and asks questions about the possibility of humans to meaningfully know the world (Hurh, "Clarel" 79).[11]

In *Moby-Dick*, one of the most obvious places where this questioning arises is Chapter 32 "Cetology", with its well-known taxonomy of whales categorized by size, as if they were books.[12] In trying to classify "the constituents of chaos" (Melville, *MD* 134; Ch. 32), Ishmael realizes this is an extremely hard endeavor as the "science of Cetology" is in "uncertain, unsettled condition" (136). He therefore decides to classify the cetaceans into "three primary BOOKS (subdivisible into CHAPTERS)" (137; emphasis in the original), implicitly mocking the scientific attempts of those who preceded him. Briasco reads this taxonomical effort as the conscious parody of a need to grasp reality through careful and exhaustive categorization typical of "classic" natural history, represented in the chapter by the mention of Linnaeus (Briasco 119–20). In addition to dismantling the possibility of understanding the world through arbitrary groupings and rigid interpretative grids, this chapter deeply questions the ability of scientific knowledge to meaningfully explain reality. Against empirical proof and what is now – and was then – well-established scientific knowledge (i.e., that the whale is a mammal), Ishmael insists "that the whale is a fish", simply on "good old fashioned ground" (Melville, *MD* 136), and settles on the definition that "a whale is *a spouting fish with a horizontal tail*" (137; emphasis in the original). Scientific knowledge and categorizations become meaningless, so Ishmael can decide to arbitrarily classify whales by their size as if they were books, or to consider them as fish, almost as if to show that any arranging pattern can be as valid as any another.

As Briasco points out, "the narrator-cetologist's perspective is in fact all directed toward the 'beast', and therefore toward the subterranean quality and opaqueness of structure that makes it so disagreeable and uncongenial to the classic discourse" (Briasco

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[11]"la possibilità stessa del linguaggio di esprimere e catturare la realtà in una griglia univoca e orientata" (my translation).

[12] For a compelling reading of this chapter as representing Melville's rejection of reductionism and other philosophical theories linked to Descartes and Locke, see Evans.

120).[13] In other words, it is the lack of transparency and the unintelligibility of the beast/animal – representing reality – that interests Ishmael, who does not, in fact, end up successfully classifying the "chaos" of the whale as he set out to do at the beginning of the chapter.

In a similar but less explicit fashion, in both Chapters 81 and 85 the whale is for Ishmael the vehicle of such exploration and of the resulting realizations. He cannot fully grasp rationally or describe with words the terror and suffering of the whale in Chapter 81, but he is able to feel its fear and pain at a pre-linguistic, pre-rational level (the lower-level perceptual systems mentioned in the previous section). Similarly, he cannot adequately understand the spout in Chapter 85 if not by comparing it to a "gas pipe", to something of a scale and making that are alien to the human body. Nor can he elsewhere in the novel suitably solve the mysteries of the face of the whale (Melville, *MD* 379; Ch. 86), of its tail (375-76; Ch. 86), or of its skin (305; Ch. 68), all of which, Ishmael insists, are too out-of-reach and impossible to be satisfactorily described by human language, and therefore fully and rationally understood by the human mind.

Moreover, together with the crisis of epistemological truth, *Moby-Dick* forefronts the modern concern for the impossibility of language to represent reality (Briasco 142). From the very first pages of the novel, before Ishmael's tale starts to unfold, the unnumbered chapter "Etymology" forces the reader to consider the question of language (Shuffelton 528–29)[14] by exemplifying "the scattering of the whale-reality into a babel of different and incompatible meanings" (Briasco 118).[15] Hence, it is no surprise that, later on in the novel, the whale is once again used by Ishmael to reflect on language, and on its possibility of representation.

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[13] "la prospettiva del narratore-cetologo è infatti tutta orientata verso la 'bestia', e quindi verso quella sotterraneità e opacità di strutture che la rendeva così sgradita e poco congeniale al discorso classico" (my translation).

[14] See Chapter 2 of the present work for a discussion on the other of the two unnumbered chapters, "Extracts".

[15] "la dispersione della realtà-balena in una babele di significati diversi e incompatibili" (my translation).

In fact, it is precisely in Chapter 85 "The Fountain", in this context of deep epistemological uncertainty and of manifest inability of the human language to successfully represent the whale/reality, that Ishmael once again comments on the voice of the whale:

> As this windpipe solely opens into the tube of his spouting canal, and as that long canal […] is furnished with a sort of locks (that open and shut) for the downward retention of air or the upward exclusion of water, therefore the whale has no voice; […] But then again, what has the whale to say? Seldom have I known any profound being that had anything to say to this world, unless forced to stammer out something by way of getting a living. (Melville, *MD* 372; Ch. 85)

In a drastic change of tone from Chapter 81, here the fact that the whale is silent is used humorously to criticize those humans who always have something to say, by implying that if they are speaking it is because they are shallow (since no "profound being" really has "anything to say to this world").[16] The whale here is the *other* of the human, an *other* who can avoid to speak and therefore is not trapped in the dualisms and impossibilities of language.

The chapter goes on to facetiously compare the spout of the whale to the "semi-visible steam" surrounding the heads of great thinkers such as "Plato, Pyrrho, the Devil, Jupiter, Dante, and so on" while they are meditating their "deep thoughts", as a sort of indication of the profundity of their reflections (Melville, *MD* 374). Nevertheless, in spite of the jocular tone of these remarks, it is significant that in this instance Ishmael's position is much more radically ambiguous compared to Chapter 81. Instead of subtly hiding his

[16] The same rhetorical question used here for the whale's ability to speak is used in the previous paragraph of Chapter 85 to comment on the cetacean's lack of a sense of smell: "the Sperm Whale has no proper olfactories. But what does he want of them? No roses, no violet, no Cologne-water in the sea" (Melville, *MD* 372). In both cases, Ishmael is trying to compare the spout to a human organ: if it is a nose, it should be able to smell, and if it is a mouth, it should have a voice. The fact that the spout does not include any of these functions seems to add to its otherness. Nevertheless, this sense of alterity is in both cases mitigated by the rhetorical question: why are we humans trying to understand and classify nonhumans by our own standards? Ishmael seems to ask in these pages. Once again, the questioning of scientific knowledge is central in these ironic remarks.

doubts regarding the possibility of language to convincingly describe reality in single adverbs and muted remarks, in this chapter the silence of the whale is no longer described as a shortcoming typical of nonhumans, an inability that the animal must live with, but rather as a feature that makes it a "profound being". Here the cetacean is silent by its own choice, and what is more, this condition is praised by Ishmael as positive and preferrable to that of those who are "forced to stammer out something by way of getting a living".

Furthermore, the assumption that the silence of the whale is a demarcation line that separates it from other human and nonhuman animals is implicitly questioned in a sentence which not only includes the whale in a group of "profound beings" (a group which interestingly comprises both human and supernatural beings such as Dante and the Devil), but also seems to cast doubts upon the possibility of truly understanding this silence. The question "what has the whale to say?" frames this point as an unsolved mystery. Ishmael does not state that the whale has nothing to say, but rather wonders what the whale might have to say to the world, therefore questioning his own ability to understand this silence.

In short, in the context of a chapter (and a book) which profoundly questions the ability of human language to express reality, it seems that the certainty that the whale does not speak and can, therefore, be considered a 'dumb brute', is itself challenged by other possibilities: what if the whale willingly does not speak? And what if, even if it spoke, it was communicating something too profound for humans to understand? Surely, by not speaking the whale avoids the wounds created by the categorizations brought about by language (Martínez Benedí and Savarese 486), so can humans learn to do this too? As Cimatti states, humans as linguistic beings cannot live outside of language (43-44), so is it possible to escape its categorizing force? In the next section, I argue that the whale seems to point in this direction.

3.3. Communicating otherwise

These questions bring us back to the integral animal continuum discussed in chapter 2. If language has shown throughout *Moby-Dick* its inadequacy to express reality as mentioned above, can it truly be a demarcation line which breaks the continuum into two unmistakably separate segments? Ultimately, can it be considered the category that distinguishes humans from nonhumans? Melville's novel once again seems to reject this strict classification in favor of a much more nuanced view, one which I argue is close to the idea of a continuum as expressed by Massumi. However, before pointing out how Ishmael reinforces the idea of a human-animal continuum while reflecting on the whale's ability to communicate and create signs, I would like to briefly clarify what Massumi has to say about language and the animal continuum, in order to then verify whether it is reasonable to claim that in the twenty-first century we can read Melville's novel as pointing in this direction.

When presenting his "Six Theses on the Animal to *Be Avoided*", Massumi lists as first the above-mentioned question on the separation of human and animal according to the principle of language capabilities (91; emphasis in the original). As already stated several times in this work, the Canadian thinker denies the possibility of finding a "criterion for categorically separating the human from the animal", and in his view even language cannot be regarded as such criterion (Massumi 91). In fact, he argues that animal play already includes metacognitive and metalinguistic capabilities which prelude to the development of human language. One convincing argument that Massumi gives of this is the already-mentioned example of wolf cubs playing.[17] While nibbing each other in play, the cubs are implicitly meaning "this is not a bite". That is to say, the nib "stands for" a real bite in a fight, therefore including an element of metacognition – I know you are not biting me, but that in a fight this represents a bite (Massumi 4).

But he does not stop here:

[17] See Chapter 1 section 1.4.

> Animal play creates the conditions for language. Its metacommunicative action builds the evolutionary foundation for the metalinguistic functions that will be the hallmark of human language, and which distinguish it from a simple code. The prehuman, preverbal embodied logic of animal play is already essentially language-like. It is effectively, enactively linguistic *avant la lettre*, as humans say in French. Why then shouldn't the opposite also be the case: that human language is essentially animal, from the point of view of the ludic capacities it carries, so intimately bound up with its metalinguistic powers? Think of humor. Why not consider human language a reprise of animal play, raised to a higher power? (Massumi 8)

In taking his statement to its logic conclusion, Massumi links human language back but also *forwards* to human animality, envisaging a language that takes back the "ludic" potential of animal play and therefore possibly becomes a means of creative expression.[18] On this point, Massumi reaches a conclusion which sounds incredibly close to Cimatti's formulation of "unbecoming human" as a way of going forward towards human animality: "Language dooms, and language saves. This is why animality is beyond language, not before it" (Cimatti 175). Even if proceeding from completely different starting points,[19] and in spite of their differences, the two thinkers seem to agree on the fact that language needs to be re-thought, and that animality is what is required in order to move forward from the linguistic impasse *Moby-Dick* hints at. I argue that this same necessity is expressed in Melville's novel, in which Ishmael seems to find a possible answer to this question through the body and movements of the whale. I have identified two main cetological chapters in which this reflection takes shape, namely Chapter 86 ("The Tail") and Chapter 68 ("The Blanket").

[18] In fact. after the quoted passage Massumi goes on to refer to Deleuze and Guattari's insistence on the fact that "it is in writing that the human 'becomes-animal' most intensely" (8).
[19] As mentioned in Chapter 1, while Massumi believes language is not a valid criterion for separating humans from animals, Cimatti strongly anchors his theses on the human-animal separation operated by language.

In “The Tail”, Ishmael, who cannot be satisfied with accounting for the whale’s apparent lack of voice as the momentary whim of a “profound being”, continues to ponder the question of the whale’s ability to communicate with the surrounding world:

> The more I consider this mighty tail, the more do I deplore my inability to express it. At times there are gestures in it, which, though they would well grace the hand of man, remain wholly inexplicable. In an extensive herd, so remarkable, occasionally, are these mystic gestures, that I have heard hunters who have declared them akin to Free-Mason signs and symbols; that the whale, indeed, by these methods intelligently converses with the world. (Melville, *MD* 378–79; Ch. 86)

The change of perspective in Ishmael is very clear: here the whale is no longer a “dumb brute”, but on the contrary it is a mysterious being who “intelligently converses with the world”, or at least might possibly be doing so – this possibility is after all given as a hunter’s tale. In this passage once again, the whale cannot be fully and satisfactorily described by human language. In addition to this first layer of ambiguity, as already mentioned above the cetacean also uses its body parts in ways that are not predictable or classifiable by human standards, just like the spout seen in section 3.2 of this chapter. As the spout is used for breathing but does not have a sense of smell and therefore cannot be compared to a nose, so the tail can make gestures akin to those of human hands, but cannot exactly imitate them since the tail’s movements are described as “mystic” and “wholly inexplicable”.

Not satisfied with the simple fact that “the whale has no voice”, Ishmael seems to be looking for other signs that the whale can indeed communicate “with the world”, and that it does so in ways which denote intelligence and the ability to organize group actions (Sten 325). Interestingly, in the above-quoted passage the whale is observed making these gestures specifically when in “an extensive herd”. This fact seems to suggests that the whale is producing signs in order to communicate with the other members of the group. In addition, these signs of communication are noticed by Ishmael

while observing how the whale uses its tail, which is a body part that humans do not have and therefore cannot fully understand. The same remarks are however also indirectly but undoubtedly present in the following Chapter 87, "The Grand Armada".

As already mentioned in chapter 2 of the present work, in "The Grand Armada" the whale's ability to communicate is clearly visible in the astute way in which a pod of cetaceans is seen swimming in a circle in order to protect their nursing females, as well as in Ishmael's comment about the way in which whales have learned to protect each other by swimming in large numbers rather than small pods ever since they have started to be hunted more frequently.[20] This type of behavior, as Sten suggests, would not be possible without some form of organization, which implies communication: "[t]he construction of the protective ring suggests strategy, communication, and coordination of effort; the domestic scenes at the center suggest communication and conscious nurturing behavior as well" (325); I would also add that the decision of moving in larger herds in order to be more protected from hunters suggests the ability to find a solution to a problem. Hence, these facts described in the novel seem to prove that the individuals in the group are indeed communicating with each other.[21]

In fact, "The Tail" is not the only chapter in the novel where the whale is perceived by Ishmael as mysteriously communicating something that humans cannot understand (yet). Earlier, in Chapter 68 ("The Blanket"), Ishmael describes the skin of the whale by indicating that what is known as blubber is indeed to be considered the cetacean's outmost layer, i.e., its skin. And in describing it, he again notices something mysterious in the whale's body, which seems unintelligible to humans:

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[20] For a full quote of this passage, see section 2.4 of the present work.

[21] It is striking to observe how Melville here seems to anticipate what is now common knowledge among ethologists. That is to say, the fact that whales are now known not only to communicate in complex ways through clicks and sounds, but also to possess what can be considered a culture which is passed down to future generations. They also often give each other names, and even create songs and melodies that are repeated from one whale to another and traverse the oceans. For more on this, see Payne, and Whitehead and Rendell.

> In life, the visible surface of the Sperm Whale is not the least among the many marvels he presents. Almost invariably it is all over obliquely crossed and re-crossed with numberless straight marks in thick array, like those in the finest Italian line engravings. But these marks do not seem to be impressed upon the isinglass substance above mentioned, but seem to be seen through it, as if they were engraved upon the body itself. Nor is it all. In some instances, to the quick observant eye, those linear marks, as in a veritable engraving, but afford the ground for far other delineations. These are hieroglyphical; that is, if you call those mysterious cyphers on the walls of pyramids hieroglyphics, then that is the proper word to use in the present connexion. By my retentive memory of the hieroglyphics upon one Sperm Whale in particular, I was much struck with a plate representing the old Indian characters chiselled on the famous hieroglyphic palisades on the banks of the Upper Mississippi. (Melville, *MD* 306; Ch. 68)

In this passage whales are distinctly compared to Native Americans who, as Susan Kalter suggests, were usually considered as "savages" or "cannibals" in nineteenth century anthropology (1).[22]

However, what Melville is suggesting here is not an association of two types of "brutes", who rely only on instinct and primitive forms of communication. Quite the contrary: the connection implied by Melville's narrator is one between two equally mysterious but clearly complex and intelligent groups of beings – one nonhuman and the other human – who can produce complex sets of signs that only other intelligent beings can decipher. Or, as Kalter suggests, Melville "figuratively links Indian intelligence to animal intelligence in his treatment of two thematic formations: philosophical explanations (and their linguistic component) for material struggles and the inscription of global forms" (2). For the author of *Typee* and *Omoo*, who spent some time living among "cannibal" tribes of the South Pacific and who came into direct contact with both

[22] This is not the only instance in which whales and animals in general are connected to Native Americans. For a more comprehensive account of the link between these two groups, see Kalter and Fruscione.

colonizers and colonized, the notion of who or what is "savage" and who or what is "civilized" was developed in a much more nuanced, realistic and relativistic way compared to many of his contemporaries, and this vision is clearly visible in *Moby-Dick* as well as in much of Melville's production (some examples of how Melville re-thinks race relations and stereotypes include the above-mentioned *Typee* and *Omoo*, but also *Mardi* and *Benito Cereno*).

In light of this, the fact that the whale's body is covered in "numberless straight marks" which, to Ishmael's eyes, look similar or even identical to some mysterious human written symbols and even to a system of signs, such as the hieroglyphics, is striking. It immediately brings to mind Ishmael's comments on the secret signs that the whale's tail makes in Chapter 86.[23] Again, the narrator sees the whale as an animal who produces unintelligible signs, signs which other whales – or possibly Native people – might be able to understand and which might be a way for the cetacean to dialogue with the surrounding environment.

What is peculiar about Melville's whales, then, is that they do not simply communicate for practical purposes (as is the case in "The Grand Armada") but, as shown above, they seem to be mysteriously creating signs which Ishmael cannot read, but which 'the world' itself might understand. If in these chapters the whale's gestures and complex web of signs that mark the skin are compared to Massumi's "animal play", it is possible to see that what Ishmael is perceiving in the whale's body (be it its skin or tail) and behavior (as the movements of its tail) is similar to what Massumi reads in the nib of the wolf cub: the condition for development of language. As the animal life of the whale "surpass[es] itself" (Massumi 91) by using "signs and symbols", the animal becomes-human, i.e., it deterritorializes its animality by going beyond what is expected of it by humans, and "converse[s] with the world", creating what Massumi describes as the "real conditions for the emergence of language" (91). Just like Stubb and Moby Dick, who

[23] Clearly this image of the whale's skin is also a reference to the tattoos covering Queequeg's body, another link between whales and Native peoples.

move along the continuum, showing us their animality or supernormality, so the whales in these chapters move from being a "dumb brute" to expressing meaning in a way that denotes a remarkable resemblance to human (and particularly Native American) communication.

In this respect, Melville seems to be close to Massumi's theorization of an animal continuum (as already shown in chapter 2), where the demarcation between species is not so clear-cut. Yet, whales are also "dumb brutes" for nineteenth-century Ishmael. This apparently contradictory nature of whales brings to mind Branca Arsić's reading of whales in *Moby-Dick* as "elusive, neither-nor beings", whose "borders are so vague" as to defy clear classification (80).[24] As whales anatomy allows these cetaceans to blur the distinction between interior and exterior, between bones and brain, and between their body and the surrounding environment, so their apparent lack of voice allows them to communicate with the world in their own terms and in ways which are not familiar to or predictable by humans.

In other words, I borrow Arsić's theorization of whales in *Moby-Dick* as "ambient beings", i.e., as "beings that exceed their form and whose surrounds are their own feeling bodies" (65). But I would also like to expand on the scholar's definition and consider whales as ambient beings not only because, as she points out, they "constitute, by virtue of their nondiscreteness, the porousness and total sensitivity" which she terms "ambiental cogito" (Arsić 87); but also because their apparent muteness is in fact an alternative way of communicating with the world, one that goes beyond human language and manages to communicate with the surrounding environment, blurring once again the distinction between human language and animal communication in a continuum that includes all forms of human and animal intelligence and relations.

Accordingly, language is no longer a tenable separating line between nonhuman animals and humans. Since whales in the novel show not only the ability to communicate, to the point of hinting at a metacognitive ability that preludes to the development of

[24] For a summary of Arsić's argument, see section 1.3

language, but also go beyond this and seem to indicate to Ishmael a way of connecting and communicating with the surrounding environment that seems precluded to humans. Could this be exactly what Cimatti means when he describes human animality as the ability of humans of going beyond language, and returning to an individuality which retains its subjectivity but is no longer trapped in the dualisms of language? Could these literary whales be showing the way to go beyond the divisiveness of language, and fully embrace the animal continuum in which we humans are enclosed, but which we tend to dismiss so easily?

Conclusion: return to the body

The present work has analyzed the presence of a fluid human-animal continuum in *Moby-Dick*, as well as the consequent representation of human animality in the novel. This representation has been examined in particular through the analysis of nonhuman animals as well as through some of the novel's human characters, namely Ahab and Stubb. What has emerged is that the separation between human and nonhuman animals in Melville's text is not as clear cut as it may seem at a first reading. As a consequence, human characters enter into zones of indiscernibility with nonhuman ones, and whales indicate the possibility of going *forward* into human animality through a return to the body that is post-linguistic. This line of enquiry has developed previous contributions by Melville scholars such as Robert Zoellner, Elizabeth Schultz, Philip Armstrong, Michael Jonik, and Branca Arsić, by taking into account the theoretical proposals of Brian Massumi and Felice Cimatti among others.

Chapter 1 has built the foundations of this work by summarizing some of the key scholarship written around the question of nonhuman animals in *Moby-Dick*. In Chapter 1 it has been shown how whales are not simple allegorical representations for something else, but more interestingly they live and move in the same world of the Pequod's crew and therefore represent true, flesh-and-blood animals. Furthermore, it has been reported how the new materialist turn in Melville studies has changed the perspective with which the nonhuman world (among other things) in *Moby-Dick* is interpreted by scholars. Characters such as Ahab have started to be seen as being compenetrated by nonhuman forces, in a complex web of human and nonhuman relations that defies the Manichean dualism earlier critics had read in the novel. In addition, in Chapter 1 I have summarized the key theoretical frameworks used throughout this work to read Melville's novel through the lens of nonhuman animals and of human animality. These include Gilles Deleuze's theorization of

zones of indiscernibility between humans and animals, Massumi's formulation of an animal continuum which denies the possibility of clearly separating the human from the nonhuman, as well as Felice Cimatti's notions of language as anthropogenic machine and of his consequent speculations on the possibility of unbecoming human.

The following Chapter 2 has delved into Melville's novel to analyze examples of becoming-animal of human characters, and in particular Ahab's becoming-whale, and Stubb's re-configuration of the role and perils of the job of whale hunter. In *Moby-Dick* humans have been shown to deterritorialize their assigned roles in order to surrender to an "irresistible" becoming-animal (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 304), be it Ahab's monomaniac pursuit of a foe (which he has met once and who has triggered his unstoppable becoming), or Stubb's leisurely becoming-shark (a process which allows him to cope with the harsh reality of the whaling industry). Starting from some new materialist readings of the novel, namely Jonik's analysis of Ahab as made of inhumanities and Arsić's interpretation of whales as ambient beings, I have shown how not only are humans not completely separate from animals, and animals from humans in the novel, but also how their respective becoming generates, more subtly, zones of proximity which lock their destinies together. In Melville's novel, humans have their animality, and therefore can no longer see themselves as totally separate from other animals.

Finally, since it is not possible to discuss human animality without considering the problem of language, Chapter 3 has analyzed the question of language as it is posed in *Moby-Dick* through the nonhuman whale, and how it relates to the notion of animal continuum. I have shown how, in the space of a few chapters (from Chapter 81 to Chapter 87), Ishmael seems to move from a more traditional view of the whale as an animal 'other' who quintessentially cannot speak, to that of the whale as representing other ways of communicating – ways which Massumi would describe as metacognitive and which, therefore, envisage the development of a communicating system which goes beyond language. In fact, whales in the novel seem not only to communicate intelligently between themselves, but to be able to produce mysterious signs which allow them to "converse with

the world" (Melville, *MD* 379), therefore surpassing their animality as well as the possibilities of human language.

Hence, a closer reading proves that in *Moby-Dick* language does not really represent a clear-cut boundary that divides the human from the animal. Such view of language in turn reinforces the reading presented in Chapter 1, which collocates the novel's human and nonhuman characters into an integrally animal continuum, one that expands to include all forms of life. In *Moby-Dick* animals are shown exceeding their animality by conversing with the world in ways which are not predictable and not expected, thus becoming-human by escaping from the already-done and already-seen of their being animal; or even becoming-superhuman as in the case of the obliquitous, immortal Moby Dick. The white whale, as Massumi himself points out, represents a perfect example of the whale moving further along the continuum, modifying and adapting its "whaleness" to become more than an animal, but also more than a human, "as only a written whale can do" (Massumi 60).

In addition, in this work I have associated the way whales are depicted as exchanging mysterious but possibly intelligible signs to Cimatti's idea of a post-linguistic human individual, one who retains language but is no longer split into an *I* and a body, a subject and an object. In other words, a language that has been neutralized of its anthropogenic force thanks to a return to the physicality and creativity of the body. In *Moby-Dick*, the whale is clearly not human, but it is a nonhuman who, through its becoming-human, seems to show the possibility of relating to the surrounding world without the devastating consequences of a subject-object dualism. Martínez and Savarese ask "[w]hy, Melville implies, should the nonhuman have to mimic the human with its body?" (485). My view is that not only nonhumans do not have to "mimic the human" with their body in *Moby-Dick*, but that nonhuman animals, and of course primarily whales, repeatedly represent an alternative way of experiencing the world through their body, and they do so primarily by moving along the animal continuum.

In short, I have tried to show how *Moby-Dick* can be read as implicitly articulating answers regarding our twenty-first century concerns related to the nonhuman world in which we live, and particularly related to our human relationship to nonhuman animals and

more importantly to our own animality. I share Cimatti's view that it is by changing the way of living and seeing our human animality that we humans can free ourselves from the categories (such as subject-object, human-animal, black-white) that have been causing much havoc and destruction. And Melville's novel, as read in this work, seems to subtly but insistently point in this direction: humans and animals in the novel are placed in a fluid continuum, and although their interactions prompted by nineteenth-century industrialization are destructive and deadly, they faintly seem to show a way forward – a return to the body which would acknowledge humans' position in the continuum and would bring them towards Cimatti's post-linguistic individuals.

Whether this reading holds true when analyzing other works by Melville concerned with the nonhuman world remains to be explored. As an example, the role of plants, trees, and other botanical elements in *Pierre* has been explored recently (Martínez Benedí and Savarese; Nurmi; Zettsu); however, whether plants and trees can be said to enter into a continuum with humans in the novel remains to be investigated. Another example is the "The Encantadas", a collection of sketches about the Galápagos Islands in which nonhuman animals, albeit being apparently of human origin, take center stage (Hofmann). Again, whether these animals enter into a continuum with humanity remains to be discussed. Nevertheless, I believe *Moby-Dick* to be a powerful example of how Melville's work is still relevant and alive today, and of how it still helps us to reflect on how to find our place as humans in a nonhuman world, almost two centuries after its publication.

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