



HDK-VALAND - ACADEMY OF ART AND DESIGN

BECOMING UNSETTLED: TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION AND THE 1865 ASKIM WHALE CALF

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INTRODUCTION

“Adoption introduces the idea that we are partly invented, consisting of myth as well as genes, stories as well as DNA,” says Jackie Kay, Scotland’s former Poet Laureate and a transracial adoptee.¹ As I’ve long mirrored myself in the Western narrative of separation, between nature and culture, whiteness and racialized animality, this quote resonates with me. In the documentary *Den inre skogen* (*The Inner Forest*, my translation), this separation is framed as a loss “Man” has forgotten but continues to suffer from.² The unproblematic notion of Man as a universal understanding of the Human is a concept I will critically engage with in this essay, from my position as a transracial adoptee. As an adoptee, I too don’t know what I’ve forgotten, only that there is an aching sense of separation. This identification is fraught, as romanticizing nature and forgetfulness obscures colonial violence. It reflects the ambivalent position of transracial adoptees, caught between the dominant gendered white position of the Human or Man and the subordinated position of those racialized and animalized as distant from whiteness and humanity.³ Donna Haraway’s analysis of taxidermy, where the death of nature signifies the rebirth of Man,⁴ provides one framework for investigating the romanticized separation between Man and nature in relation to colonial domination, with transracial adoption and a whale calf killed in 1865 at its center.

After some hesitation, they mustered their courage, approached the massive creature by boat...stabbing the whale in the neck, eye, and belly, as one of them climbed onto its back.

¹ Jackie Kay, “Jackie Kay: Trumpet,” February 2018, in *World Book Club*, produced by BBC World Service, podcast, MP3 audio, 50:00,

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/7v50zF4SWZAmo9O58tpXti?si=7900d39581a84ff7>.

² K Special, *Den inre skogen* (*My translation: The Inner Forest*), SVT Play, 2019, documentary, 59:00, <https://www.svtplay.se/video/24541825/den-inre-skogen>.

³ This includes first families, whose children were stolen, who know exactly what they’ve lost and cannot forget. “Adoption International: A Global Scandal,” ARTE.tv Documentary, November 16, 2024, 1:31:25,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D7nNKMjF2Qs&ab_channel=ARTE.tvDocumentary.

⁴ Donna Haraway, “Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936,” *Social Text* 12, no 11, (1984): 25.

*Enormous streams of blood colored the water, yet the creature was not fully killed until 3 p.m. on Monday.*⁵

In 2019, I began exploring the connections between colonial legacies—such as the 1865 whale calf, killed, taxidermied, and still on display at Gothenburg’s Natural History Museum—and white normativity through a novel I started writing, *Djur som har rymt* (*Animals Who Have Escaped*). The novel reflects on two separations from the past while exploring the current, soon-to-end relationship between a non-white adoptee and an immigrant passing as white, who sympathizes with Sweden’s right-wing party.

*Swimming butterfly strokes, he breaks the water like a whale... So I tell him about the young calf... We often talk about violence... “It’s interesting,” he says, wondering if I think there is racism against whites. “No” I say, talking about colonialism. He talks about evolution and human nature, “Man always defends his group and his resources..”*⁶

My former teacher, writer, and poet Jesper Brygger, gave me insight into how transformation as a means of survival is at the core of *Animals Who Have Escape*.⁷ This understanding has led me to more consciously explore the novel's themes⁸ in relation to transracial adoption

⁵ Kristian Wedel, “Ur GP-arkivet 1865: Malmska valen strandar i Askimsviken” (*My translation: From the GP Archive 1865: The Malmska Whale Strands in Askim Bay*), *The Gothenburg Post*, November 10, 2017,

<https://www.gp.se/livsstil/varldens-gang/ur-gp-arkivet-1865-malmska-valen-strandar-i-askimsviken.b605da72-6b65-4a3f-bb1e-06a0ba2e68f2>.

⁶ Marie Bergqvist, *Djur som har rymt* (*My translation: Animals Who Have Escaped*), 2019–ongoing.

⁷ Jesper Brygger, text dialogue, Angered Writers' School, 2020: “I can't help but think of the image of the small creatures we once were, and the metamorphosis that had to take place for us to survive.” As his comment was on point but could evoke associations with natural evolution, I have been thinking more consciously about transformation ever since.

⁸ Tobias Hübinette, *Att skriva om svenskheten: Studier i de svenska rasrelationerna speglade genom den icke-vita svenska litteraturen* (*My translation: Writing About Swedishness: Studies in Swedish Racial Relations Reflected Through Non-White Swedish Literature*) (Malmö: Arx Förlag AB, 2019). For instance, transracial adoptees are perceived as class and racial traitors by other Swedes not passing as white, highlighting the complex intersections of

through various artistic forms, revealing how deeply adoption embodies the colonial links between emotion and politics—what my teacher, spatial theorist and artistic researcher Cathryn Klasto, identifies as the "emo-political."⁹ My acquired knowledge has enabled me to more clearly express that I am engaged in forced man-made transformations shaped by colonial and patriarchal forces, as seen in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, where the scientist reshapes life and death through his monster/child.¹⁰

Abandoned children, like Frankenstein's monster, trapped in non-human bodies,¹¹ and ancient myths where women transform into animals or nature to survive male domination, often undergo changes only in their outward form.¹² In contrast, literary scholar Sabina Ivenäs has shown how transracial adoptees in Scandinavia identify as white as a consequence of imposed whiteness, a process of being reborn as white despite a contrasting outward appearance.¹³ This internal transformation reflects Jackie Kay's idea that transracial adoptees are shaped by (dominant) stories, which similarly apply to the whale calf, as existing

race, ethnicity, class, and Swedishness. The Swedish title can be interpreted both as "Writing About Swedishness" and "Rewriting Swedishness.

⁹ Cathryn Klasto, "Spatializing an Expanded Field of Citational Practice: (Learning from the Anthrenus Verbasci and the Tinea Pellionella)," *Parse Journal* 17, no. 6 (2023): 9.

¹⁰ Mara Lee, *Främlingsfigurer. En bok om kärlek och hat – känslor som formar bilden av den Andre* (My Translation: *Figures of Strangeness: A Book about Love and Hate – Emotions that Shape the Image of the Other*) (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers förlag, 2021), 1-271. Lee argues that the monster is made alien, in part, through its Asian characteristics.

¹¹ Rebecca Solnit, *Det avlägsnet nära* (Göteborg: Daidalos AB, 2014), 21–22; original edition *The Faraway Nearby* (2013). I use Frankenstein's monster as an analogy for abandoned children in non-human bodies (even though his birth marks the beginning of his consciousness and thus cannot be considered a mere outward transformation), drawing on Solnit's discussion of children in animal bodies in relation to transformation and separation in fairy tales.

¹² Catherine Malabou, *Olyckans ontologi* (Stockholm: Tankekraft Förlag, 2019), originally published as *Ontologie de l'accident* (French); *The Ontology of Misfortune* (English translation).

¹³ Sabina Ivenäs, "White Like Me: Whiteness in Scandinavian Transnational Adoption Literature." *Scandinavian studies* 89, no. 2, (2017): 262.

literature constructs it through mythology and the human-animal divide,¹⁴ thereby romanticizing the nature-culture separation and obscuring colonial power structures. In contrast, while taxidermy research explores colonial dimensions,¹⁵ no previous studies have connected taxidermy to transracial adoption. This essay seeks to bridge that gap by exploring the intersection of these two fields, aiming to deconstruct the ideology of the human. It draws primarily on philosopher Madison Wang's deconstruction of the human in relation to lynch law and human trophies;¹⁶ philosopher Adriana Cavarero's analysis of how Western philosophy erases individual experiences by subsuming them under the concept of the universal Man/Human;¹⁷ and gender scholar Rosi Braidotti's concept of the nomad, which highlights how identity emerges from multiple dislocations.¹⁸ Few studies address the politics of death in adoption,¹⁹ and none explore transformation in

¹⁴ Cecilia Grönberg, and Jonas (J) Magnusson, *Leviatan från Göteborg, Paracetologiska digressioner: Malmska valen, Göteborgsvitsen, Jona-komplexet och Moby Dick (My translation. The Leviathan from Gothenburg, Paracetological Digressions: The Malmska Whale, the Gothenburg Joke, the Jonah Complex, and Moby Dick)*. (Göteborg: Glänta Produktion, 2002).

¹⁵ Haraway, "Teddy Bear Patriarchy," (1984); Madison Wang. "The Necropolitics of Lynch Law and Human Trophies," Master's thesis, San Francisco State University, 2024, 41 <https://scholarworks.calstate.edu/downloads/x920g505k>.

¹⁶ Wang, "The Necropolitics of Lynch Law and Human Trophies," 3.

¹⁷ Elvira Roncalli, "Narrating the Self through the Other: On the thought of Adriana Cavarero", Carroll University: Faculty Publications, (2015): 3-5 <https://scholars.carroll.edu/handle/20.500.12647/3605>.

¹⁸ Rosi Braidotti, *NOMADIC THEORY: THE PORTABLE ROSI BRAIDOTTI* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 255.

¹⁹ Silvia Posocco, "Harvesting Life, Mining Death: Adoption, Surrogacy, and Forensics Across Borders." *CATALYST, feminism, theory, technoscience* 8, no. 1 (2022): 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.28968/cftt.v8i1.3507>; Silvia Posocco, "On the queer necropolitics of transnational adoption in Guatemala," in *Queer necropolitics*, edited by Jinthana Haritaworn, Adi Kuntsman, and Silvia Posocco, 72–89. Abingdon Oxon: Routledge, 2014. <https://web-p-ebshost-com.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxIYmtfXzY5NDI4NI9fQU41?sid=ea5d4d49-57c8-4feb-9437-67841d642630@redis&vid=0&format=EB&rid=1>.

this context. In this essay, by connecting transracial adoption to the killing and taxidermy of the 1865 whale calf, I address this limited research while exploring how the death of nature becomes the rebirth of Man, especially in relation to race and animality. In doing so, I examine the intersections of death, transformation, and survival, posing the following research questions:

How can necropolitics and becoming be applied to compare transracial adoption and the killing and taxidermy of the whale calf?

How can vocality and narration serve as artistic methods to activate this enquiry?

Necropolitics, as defined by philosopher Achille Mbembe, examines the power of death over life,²⁰ while Braidotti's concept of becoming, centers on constant transformation.²¹

Additionally, the postcolonial perspectives on adoption offered by scholars Sabina Ivenäs, Tobias Hübinette, and Richard Wyver inform this analysis. As text, body, and voice are central to my practice, I aim to use Cavarero's concepts of vocality²² and narration²³ to explore artistic methods that can activate this inquiry, challenging Sweden's colorblindness and denial of racial violence.

²⁰ Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 11–40.

<https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-15-1-11>.

²¹ Braidotti, *NOMADIC THEORY*, 23.

²² Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice* trans. Paul A. Kottman (California: Stanford University Press, 2005); Fred Evans, "Adriana Cavarero and the Primary of Voice," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 32, no. 3 (2018): 475-487; Sara Burgess, "For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 39, no. 2 (2006): 166-169; Simone Bianca Schmidt, "The Tip of Two Tongues: The Dialectics of the Voice in Art" (PhD diss., Monash University, 2016): 239.

²³ Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives*, trans. Paul A. Kottman (London and New York: Routledge, 2000); Roncalli, "Narrating the Self through the Other," (2015).

TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION

transraciality and colorblind Sweden

“Transraciality entails identifying with a race one was not biologically born into. In adoption contexts, transraciality often places a child across racial boundaries, typically from non-white to white families.”²⁴ Transracial adoption often overlaps with transnational adoption, as many children are relocated from former colonies to colonizing nations. For this reason, I use the term transnational/racial when referencing transnational adoption literature. However, since my focus is on the intersection of race and animality, I concentrate on the transracial aspect, specifically in Sweden, the country with the highest rate of adoption per capita.²⁵

Richard Wyver’s article “Almost the Same, but not Quite: Mimicry, Mockery and Menace in Swedish Transnational/-racial Adoption Narratives,” describes Sweden as a nation with a strong pro-adoption discourse, national post-racial myths, and a colorblind ideology.²⁶

Consequently, Tobias Hübinette notes that even the right-wing Sweden Democrats have adopted colorblindness, including transracial adoptees in their 21st-century definition of Swedishness.²⁷ This colorblind approach means that Sweden neither acknowledges race in discourse nor in law.²⁸ The absence of language masks the privilege of whiteness and complicates the challenges faced by transracial adoptees, whose original ethnicity is erased and replaced with Swedishness—yet we remain racially othered. Sabina Ivenäs argues that

²⁴ Tobias Hübinette, “Transgressing Race: An Introduction to the Concept of Transraciality Reflected through Transracial Experiences and Fantasies.” *Kvinder, Køn og Forskning* 20, no. 3/4 (2011): 51.

²⁵ Hübinette, *Adopted*, 152.

²⁶ Richey Wyver, “Almost the Same, but not Quite: Mimicry, Mockery and Menace in Swedish Transnational/-racial Adoption Narratives,” *borderland* 17, no. 2 (2018): 4, View article.

²⁷ Tobias Hübinette, “Non-white Adoptees and a New Relationship Between Race and Swedishness,” In *Race in Sweden*, ed. Tobias Hübinette, Catrin Lundström, and Peter Wikström (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2023), 110.

²⁸ Tobias Hübinette & Carina Tigervall, “To be Non-white in a Colour-Blind Society: Conversations with Adoptees and Adoptive Parents in Sweden on Everyday Racism,” *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 30, No. 4, (2009): 335.

Scandinavian adoptees experience a colonial dynamic with their country of citizenship, creating split or hybrid identities through the imposition of the dominant culture via imitation.²⁹ Wyver explores this in Sweden, applying Homi Bhabha's concept of mimicry, where the colonized resemble the colonizer—"almost the same, but never quite" (white). This leads to constant identity negotiation, and to isolation due to racism.³⁰ In this way, colonial power is operating in the adoptive country, a connection I will explore through Mbembe's concept of death worlds when addressing adoptee suicides.

transracial adoption and necropolitics

I argue that transracial adoption can be linked to the killing of nature, specifically the whale calf, through the lens of Achille Mbembe's necropolitical theory. Mbembe asserts that autonomy depends on a fabricated separation between reason and affect, where humans assert subjectivity by dominating nature and distancing themselves from animals.³¹ Since "animality and nature have been integral to the production of racial difference,"³² autonomy becomes a mechanism for white sovereignty to dominate racialized others, who are animalized in this framework. In "The Necropolitics of Lynch Law and Human Trophies," Madison Wang, building on Mbembe, explains how white sovereignty, rooted in ideas of progress and rationality, transforms human life into tools until it violates the prohibition against killing. This makes it necropolitical, as it connects subjectivity with the power over life and death.³³ Necropolitical power operates in what Mbembe defines as "death worlds," new and unique social conditions where vast populations exist as living dead, marked by constant exposure to death due to conflict, or settings like refugee camps and impoverished ghettos, akin to slavery or the colony.³⁴ In the death worlds, individuals are reduced to their biological existence, "bare life" without any legal or social inclusion, allowing killing without consequence. In *On the Queer Necropolitics of Transnational Adoption in Guatemala*, Posocco argues that the politics of bare life is shaped by racial power dynamics, making it inherently racialized.

²⁹ Ivenäs, "White Like Me," 251.

³⁰ Wyver, "Almost the Same, but not Quite," 3.

³¹ Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 13.

³² Suwadip Sinha, Amit R. Baishya, "Introduction, in *POSTCOLONIAL ANIMALITIES*, ed. Suwadip Sinha and Amit R. Baishya, (New York: Routledge, 2020), 5.

³³ Wang, "Necropolitics of Lynch Law," 11-14.

³⁴ Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 38.

According to Posocco, adoptees who are not deemed fit for adoption due to age or health dwell in zones of indistinction—spaces of marginality where bare life is located, and the boundaries between citizen and outlaw, life and death, are blurred. As a result, transracial adoption reshapes the concept of race and sexuality, extending beyond mere identity.³⁵ One proponent of a utopian view on transnational/racial adoption, focusing on identity, is adoptive parent and scholar Margaret Homans. She argues it challenges traditional kinship structures and questions the boundaries of humanity,³⁶ but overlooks the political power structures that govern it. Posocco captures this tension by highlighting how transnational adoption is seen as creating new forms of kinship and social bonds, while also raising concerns about exploitation, appropriation, and the commodification of marginalized bodies moved through unequal transnational exchanges.³⁷ As the displacement of impoverished children from the Global South to the Global North is tied to the legacies of war, conflict, colonialism, and imperialism, transnational/racial adoption connects to Mbembe's concept of "death worlds", by exploiting death to create life through the movement of children. This process is rooted in nation-state projects like Guatemala's *mestizaje*, which aimed to create postcolonial states through racial and cultural mixing.³⁸ This colonial legacy is also linked to Sweden's 1960s race debate on transnational/racial adoption and the narrative of white saviors, where the adoptee in turn was seen as saving the white Swede from recognizing race simply by being non-white. This belief led to the implementation of colorblind policies.³⁹

Wang describes trophy-taking as non-ingestive consumption, where a body becomes a possession, repeatedly consumed—from killing to its transformation into a trophy—reinforcing sovereignty through a fictionalized enemy. She connects the trophy-taking of animals to that of racialized others, showing how war, hunting, and expeditions reinforced necropolitical power and empire-building: "The proper objects of trophy-taking practices have historically been structured by species and racial hierarchies,

³⁵ Posocco, "On the queer necropolitics," 73-79.

³⁶ Margaret Homans, "Jackie Kay's Trumpet: Transnational and Transracial Adoption, Transgender Identity, and Fictions of Transformation," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 39, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 123, Project MUSE.

³⁷ Posocco, "On the queer necropolitics," 72.

³⁸ Posocco, "Harvesting Life, Mining Death," 5-6.

³⁹ Hübinette, *Adopterad (Adopted)* 2021, my transl.

with exotic and game animals being the most acceptable and white humans the least.”⁴⁰ I connect this colonial legacy of hunting and specimen collection⁴¹ to the illegal hunt for children, facilitated by colonial administrative staff.⁴² In “Harvesting Life, Mining Death: Adoption, Surrogacy, and Forensics Across Borders,” Posocco links transnational/racial adoption to the retreat of the welfare state and privatization of care, noting how children’s disappearances result from “predatory behaviors” by foreigners.⁴³ By linking necropolitics to the predatory behaviors involved, I position transnational/racial adoptees within Wang’s concept of racialized others as ‘animal quarry,’ targeted for social and cultural consumption. An example of this consumption in the adoptive country can be seen in Wyver’s reference to Kerstin Weigl’s *Långtansbarnen* (*The children of longing*), where a white Swedish woman adopting children from East Asia remarks: “I love those pictures. I need pictures to keep the fantasy going, to have faith that the child can become real. ‘Child porn,’ says Sigge. He smiles at my hunger.”⁴⁴ This desire to consume the racialized other clearly illustrates the emo-political dynamics in transnational/racial adoption, as Posocco describes it—both a form of intimate reproductive labor and a key racializing technology, relying on racialized bodies to sustain fantasies of nationhood and class formation.⁴⁵ In Sweden, transracial adoption supports nation-building through a postcolonial strategy of racial and cultural mixing, driven by colorblindness.⁴⁶

Transnational/racial adoption can thus be linked to the killing of nature/the whale calf, through its racializing and animalizing power dynamics that govern bare life, all of which are hidden by the benevolence of colorblindness and an exclusive focus on identity.

⁴⁰ Wang, “Necropolitics of Lynch Law,” 28-32.

⁴¹ Thorsen, *ELEPHANTS ARE NOT PICKED FROM TREES*, 236.

⁴² “Adoption International: A Global Scandal.” ARTE.tv Documentary, November 16, 2024, 1:31:25,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D7nNKMjF2Qs&ab_channel=ARTE.tvDocumentary.

⁴³ Posocco, “Harvesting Life, Mining Death,” 4-6.

⁴⁴ Wyver, “Almost the Same, but not Quite,” 5, my transl.

⁴⁵ Posocco, “Harvesting Life, Mining Death,” 7-8.

⁴⁶ Tobias Hübinette, *Adopterad: en bok om Sveriges sista rasdebatt* (My translation: *Adopted: A Book About Sweden's Last Racial Debate*) (Stockholm: Verbal Förlag, 2021).

THE WHALE CALF

a wounded and slain body

In her influential 1984 text on taxidermy, Donna Haraway observes the conflicting emotions of scientific naturalist, hunter, and taxidermist Carl Akeley regarding the killing of a gorilla by a member of his hunting party, likening his words to those Victor Frankenstein might have spoken had he succeeded in his hunt.

*He was a magnificent creature with the face of an amiable giant who would do no harm.*⁴⁷

These words evoke for me the image of the killed whale lying at Lindholmen (Image 1).



Image 1: Wedel, “From the GP archive 1865”, (2017).

“What place is given to life, death, and the human body—particularly the wounded or slain body?”⁴⁸ Mbembe asks, and I expand the question to include the non-human.

Necropower, thrives in states of emergency, where the sovereign gains security from the deaths of those stripped of political rights through racialized animality. In “survival mode,” the sovereign's sense of safety is reinforced with each enemy killed. Therefore, sovereignty is

⁴⁷ Haraway, “Teddy Bear Patriarchy,” 28.

⁴⁸ Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” 12.

not only about the right to kill but also the emotional satisfaction and security it offers.⁴⁹ The fusion of emotions and politics (emo-political) is thus key to understanding necropolitics, seen in the fishermen's enjoyment of the whale calf's suffering, mirroring the domination of racialized others. If sovereignty requires separating from animals by killing them, then the whale calf's death is a necropolitical act. Animals, stripped of culture and reduced to mere biological existence, embody bare life and can be killed without violating laws.⁵⁰ Whales, reduced to the living dead, exist within death worlds. In this context, Mbembe's state of emergency is not war or crisis, but the exception of being non-human.

As previously noted in relation to transnational/racial adoption, Wang's concept of trophy-taking involves transforming a body into a possession, consumed repeatedly. This mirrors the historical process of whale hunting, which was industrialized in the late 19th century, around the time the whale calf was killed.⁵¹ Between 1880 and 1930, as live and dead animals became commodities,⁵² the whale calf's life and death, like that of the transracial adoptee, was shaped by dislocations driven by colonialism and capitalism. This, in turn, transformed the whale from life into a trophy, paralleling the adoptee's forced transformation—from life to death, as we will see in cases of adoptees who commit suicide in the adoptive country, and from death to life, as we are often moved from impoverished, conflict-ridden zones in the Global South to the Global North.

the natural history museum of Gothenburg

The Natural History Museum of Gothenburg, shares a history of unethical colonial collecting practices with other Western museums. Established in 1833, it houses around 10 million animals, most killed during colonialism.⁵³ In 1923, the museum moved to Slottskogen, separating cultural and natural history, part of a broader trend of colonizers returning with taxidermy specimens.⁵⁴ At Angered Writers' School, we read Herredjuret (*The Master Animal*) by Mattias Hagberg, focusing on hunter and taxidermist David Sjölander, who shot

⁴⁹ Wang, "The Necropolitics of Lynch Law," 10-12.

⁵⁰ Posocco, "On the queer necropolitics," 74.

⁵¹ Grönberg and Magnusson, *The Leviathan from Gothenburg*, my transl, 100.

⁵² Thorsen, *ELEPHANTS ARE NOT PICKED FROM TREES*, 238.

⁵³ Thorsen, *ELEPHANTS ARE NOT PICKED FROM TREES*, 235.

⁵⁴ Thorsen, *ELEPHANTS ARE NOT PICKED FROM TREES*, 11-20.

the elephant now displayed at the museum.⁵⁵ The novel mirrors the historical fixation on the whale calf by August Malm, the taxidermist after whom the “Malmska valen” (the Malmska whale) is named.⁵⁶ When I expressed frustration with the gendered colonial fantasies, my teacher, writer, and poet Elise Ingvarsson pointed out that while the characters in Hagberg's work are certain of their humanity, mine are uncertain of *what* they are.⁵⁷ This relates to Adriana Cavarero's idea of Man as the universal “who,” reducing the othered to mere “whats,”⁵⁸ a concept that will be revisited under the methods section on vocal narration.

vision of death

Haraway links hunting and taxidermy, tied to the American Museum of Natural History, to the destabilization of colonial and patriarchal power in the 1980s. She argues that taxidermy idealizes nature, presenting colonized people and animals through realist aesthetics that erase the violence behind the scenes,⁵⁹ as seen in the killing of the whale. In *Elephants Are Not Picked from Trees*, Liv Emma Thorsen also describes how the transformation of animals from life to death is an act of removal, stripping cultural meaning and presenting them as “pure nature,” while concealing their handcrafted nature to maintain the museum's non-violent credibility.⁶⁰ Haraway describes how taxidermy embodies a fatal desire for wholesome representation, functioning as a politics of reproduction that creates a communion between (pure) nature and culture, rooted in a utopian past. Restoring this constructed origin is viewed as a means to save the future, tying the museum's politics to genetic hygiene. It transforms the white boy into “Man” by eliminating the constructed racialized and animalized other. This

⁵⁵ Mattias Hagberg, *Herredjuret (My translation. The Master Animal)*. Stockholm: Atlas, 2018.

⁵⁶ I believe Malm used an old taxidermy technique that involved creating a mannequin of the whale and draping it with the animal's skin. In contrast, Sjölander employed the same method used by the taxidermist Carl Akeley, as referenced by Haraway in her mention of Frankenstein. Grönberg and Magnusson, *The Leviathan from Gothenburg*, my transl., 20; Thorsen, *ELEPHANTS ARE NOT PICKED FROM TREES*, 30–31.

⁵⁷ Elise Ingvarsson, text dialouge, Angered Writers' School, 2020.

⁵⁸ Roncalli, “Narrating the Self through the Other”, 4.

⁵⁹ This realist aesthetic is described as a “peephole into the jungle where peace may be witnessed.” Haraway, “Teddybear Patriarchy,” 34.

⁶⁰ Thorsen, *ANIMALS ARE NOT PICKED FROM TREES*: 27-28.

process, in turn, strengthens the sovereign's power and security, as it is through the work of death—the actual death of the animal and its representation—that a new vision (of death) becomes possible.⁶¹ This communion is a necropolitical construction of a state of human emergency, one that operates under the logic of survival while stripping fictionalized enemies of their rights. In this process, the colonized, (analogous to transracial adoptees), are reduced to children in need of saving, with necropower operating both literally—killing the “inferior”—and metaphorically, destroying a culture to “save” its people.⁶²

Wang extends Mbembe’s necropolitics from emergency to everyday life, showing how trophy-taking, linked to scientific naturalism, normalized killing as a means of asserting sovereignty.⁶³ The whale’s transformation into a trophy at the Natural History Museum of Gothenburg thus lets the public revisit the moment when the fishermen asserted control over the whale, embedding necropolitical power into daily life while obscuring its colonial dynamics.

⁶¹ Haraway, “Teddybear Patriarchy,” 20-25.

⁶² Wang “The Necropolitics of Lynch Law,” 15.

⁶³ Wang “The Necropolitics of Lynch Law,” 34-35.

ARTISTIC ENQUIRY - BECOMING UNSETTLED (THEORIES APPLIED)

my loneliness is killing me

Loneliness and isolation are central to understanding the alarming suicide rates among transracial adoptees in Sweden,⁶⁴ who represent the demographic group with the highest rates of suicide attempts.⁶⁵ Despite this well-known fact, there is a lack of institutional support for transracial adoptees.⁶⁶ To explore this lack, I turn to Lauren Berlant's concept of slow death, which, like taxidermy, expands necropolitics into the everyday, as discussed by Tony Sandset in "The Necropolitics of COVID-19." Slow death examines; "The slow and steady violence and death zones created daily rely on an affective mode of expecting and accepting that certain people and communities will suffer and die."⁶⁷ Applying the concept of slow death, I claim that transracial adoptees, as a fragmented community, are expected to endure suffering and death, as the necropolitical framework anticipates our unsettlement and even our death—our un-becoming. These suicides should therefore be understood as an outcome of a

⁶⁴ Anders Hjern and Bo Vinnerljung, "Forskningsrapport - Hälsa och sociala livsvillkor hos internationellt adopterade i vuxen ålder" ("Research Report - Health and Social Life Conditions of Internationally Adopted Individuals in Adulthood"), Myndigheten för familjerätt och föräldraskapsstöd (Swedish Agency for Family Law and Parental Support), May 31, 2023, my translation.

<https://www.mfof.se/internationella-adoptioner/forskning-och-kunskap/forskningsrapport---halsa-och-sociala-livsvillkor-hos-internationellt-adopterade-i-vuxen-alder.html>.

⁶⁵ Tobias Hübinette, "Utlandsadopterade är fortsatt den grupp i samhället som drabbas allra mest av psykisk ohälsa och självmord" ("International adoptees continue to be the group in society most affected by mental health issues and suicide"), Wordpress, May 29, 2023, my translation, <https://tobiashubinette.wordpress.com/category/sjalvmord/>.

⁶⁶ Mattias Strand and Natte Hilleberg, "Transnationellt adopterade i vården: erfarenheter, behov och rekommendationer" (my translation: "Transnationally Adopted Individuals in Healthcare: Experiences, Needs, and Recommendations") (lecture, TAR Transnationellt Adopterades Riksorganisation, Transnational Adoptees' National Association, Zoom, November 21, 2024).

⁶⁷ Tony Sandset, "The Necropolitics of COVID-19: Race, Class, and Slow Death in an Ongoing Pandemic," *Global Public Health* 16, no. 8-9 (September 2021): 1415. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17441692.2021.1906927>.

colonial legacy operating within the framework of necropolitics, which upholds the work of death.⁶⁸ Interestingly, none of the articles I've read on transnational/racial adoption and necropolitics address suicide. This is notable given Mbembe's observation that, under necropower, death and freedom are deeply intertwined, blurring the lines between resistance, sacrifice, and suicide.⁶⁹ In light of this, I argue that the lack of institutional support for transracial adoptees highlights how racialized life exists as bare life, excluded from societal protection.⁷⁰ Furthermore, Posocco draws on the theory of bare life in relation to social exclusion or social death, which examines depersonalization through both exclusion and inclusion in slavery—a form of segregated proximity—leading to exceptional violence and death.⁷¹ I aim to expand Posocco's framing of transnational/racial adoption as producing bare life in the country of origin to include the adoptive country. This expansion draws on the previously discussed necropolitical concept of death worlds, defined as a new and unique social condition where populations face extreme exclusion, conflict, or war, living in constant exposure to death.⁷² In light of this, I argue that, surging in the 1970s and 1980s,⁷³ transnational/racial adoption created a new colonial condition in which adoptees face extreme exclusion from both their birth culture and adoptive countries through the colonial strategy of mimicry (imposed whiteness) as a form of social exclusion/death. Characterized by a dangerous, segregated proximity, mimicry as social death transforming into literal death sheds light on the deaths of transnational/racial adoptees.

⁶⁸ Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 11-14.

⁶⁹ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*: 38-40.

⁷⁰ In contrast, non-European refugee immigrants, despite facing challenges, do not have higher suicide rates, likely due to community support, whereas transracial adoptees, isolated by their proximity to whiteness, lack this personal support. Hübinette, Tobias. "De utlandsadopterade mår fortsatt sämre än majoritetsinvånarna och invandrarna" ("International adoptees continue to fare worse than the majority population and immigrants"). Wordpress, November 15, 2022. My translation.

<https://tobiashubINETTE.wordpress.com/category/sjalvmord/>.

⁷¹ Posocco references the work of Orlando Patterson to support this claim. Posocco, "On the queer necropolitics," 81.

⁷² Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 38.

⁷³ "Adoption International," ARTE.tv Documentary, 2024.

Consequently, in the video essay I presented at Kulturhuset Bergsjön (Image 2), I compared the fishermen blinding the whale to Sweden’s colorblindness, where, like the fishermen, the Swedish state ignores racism, blinding adoptees to their complex experiences.

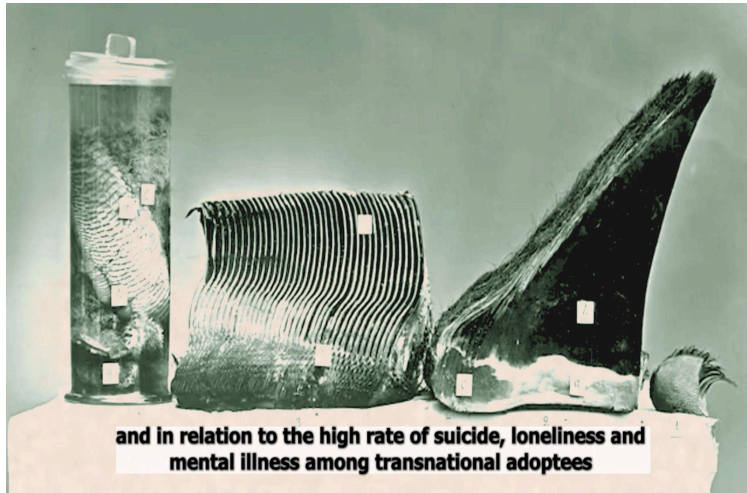


Image 2: Marie Bergqvist, Still from *I used to run like a horse not a girl*, Video Essay, Kulturhuset Bergsjön (2023) 18:59 min.

As transnational/racial adoption may be banned in Sweden by 2025, and given the country’s racially and culturally mixed population, future generations will likely forget this practice,⁷⁴ transforming it into a past violence, much like the whale calf—disconnected from the present.

transracial adoption and taxidermy

Lisa Wool-Rim Sjöblom describes transnational/racial adoption as an act of erasure in her graphic novel *Palimpsest*, comparing it to a manuscript where the original text is erased and replaced, much like how a child is taken in as one's own.⁷⁵ The taxidermized animals, reshaped to appear as pure nature, mirror the experiences of adoptees, who are similarly reshaped—often through falsified or absent documentation—to fit into a dominant narrative. In both cases, the violence inflicted upon them is concealed, rendering them acts of erasure, as well as acts of reproduction as a new identity is given to both the animal and the adoptee. What also connects these practices is the “white savior” narrative, as illustrated in Haraway's analysis of how the white man saves humanity by killing the racialized beast in the fiction of taxidermy, and in how transracial adoption has historically been justified by a narrative of

⁷⁴ Tobias Hübinette, *Zoom Talk at Kulturhuset Bergsjön*, May 22, 2024.

⁷⁵ Lisa Wool-Rim Sjöblom, *Palimpsest* (Stockholm: Galago Ordfront, 2016).

benevolence. Furthermore, the earlier notion that adoptees were seen as helping Swedes become non-racist in the 1960s simply by being non-white reflects how they, as some of the first racialized others in a previously racially homogenous country,⁷⁶ came to embody bare, racialized life. It reflects how the adoptee is forced to transform and be transformed, similar to taxidermied animals, whose deaths serve to elevate the white boy into patriarchal manhood. Both the whale and the adoptee thus serve as symbols of a dominant narrative, echoing Jackie Kay's idea (see introduction) that adoption creates identities from both myth and genetics. Similarly, taxidermied animals can be seen as composed of both DNA and the stories that define them.

Just as Wang connects racism and speciesism to lynching and trophy-taking, which construct humanity through sovereignty, whiteness, and morality,⁷⁷ I argue that transracial adoption and taxidermy similarly shape humanity through these same frameworks. Operating as necropolitical practices, they erase racialized and animalized bare life while redistributing life and death. They blur the boundaries between intimacy and violence, safety and desire, the emotional and the political, while engaging with identities of nationhood, parenthood, Swedishness, humanity, and whiteness. Like Wang, I therefore also reject the idea of the human as a refuge or the concept of the posthuman, which suggests that animality is a fall from human identity, when animality and nature have played a central role in constructing racial difference.⁷⁸

becoming unsettled

In *Nomadic Theory*, Rosi Braidotti defines “the figure of the nomad” as a subject in constant transformation, resisting stable identity.⁷⁹ Rather than serving as a universal posthuman metaphor, the nomad is context-specific and autobiographical, emphasizing the emo-political dynamics of identity emerging from multiple dislocations.⁸⁰ This framework ties identity to

⁷⁶ Hübinette, *Adopterad (Adopted)* 2021, my transl.

⁷⁷ Wang “The Necropolitics of Lynch Law, 3.

⁷⁸ Sinha and Baishya, “Introduction,” in *Postcolonial Animalities*, 5.

⁷⁹ Braidotti. *NOMADIC THEORY*, 209.

⁸⁰ Braidotti. *NOMADIC THEORY*, 246-255; Grenz, Sabine. “Book Review: Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory and

the hypermobility of capitalism, which, instead of dismantling existing power structures, often reinforces otherness.⁸¹ Braidotti contrasts modern subjectivity, rooted in sameness, with a rhizomatic view of difference as a transformative force rather than an abnormality. She explains that minorities, including animals, are “stripped of their old genderized, racialized, normalized straitjackets and relocated into patterns of different becomings,” allowing them to become agents of change.⁸² Meanwhile, dominant powers persist in replicating old hierarchies. Through deterritorialization, this relocation of difference grants the nomadic subject the agency to challenge capitalism's reinforcement of otherness, transforming difference from a negative liability into a force that destabilizes the center of sameness.⁸³

The transracial adoptee and the whale calf are shaped by physical, cultural, and social dislocations rooted in colonial legacies and capitalism, which reinforce their otherness. This makes Braidotti's theories of “the nomad” and “becoming” particularly relevant. However, her notion of identity agency reflects what Mbembe describes as the romanticized modern subject—the “master and controlling author” of their own meaning, with the capacity for self-understanding and self-representation.⁸⁴ Furthermore, Braidotti's utopian vision of difference and her emphasis on self-representation contrast with the lack of agency among transracial adoptees in Sweden, who are unable to challenge capitalism's reinforcement of their otherness through mimicry. As we have seen, this leads to our becoming unsettled through social death, and, sadly, often to our literal deaths—our un-becoming. Therefore, although Braidotti's theory is rooted in the displacement caused by capitalism, I argue that her emphasis on an affirmative desire to become,⁸⁵ overlooks the structural coercion behind these transformations, which lies at the core of my analysis focusing on enforced becoming.

Will Sweden continue talking to itself, ignoring the voices of transracial adoptees? Or the sounds of the whale calf that haunts me—will it rest in death, will we? Let us now move beyond the vision shaped by the craft of taxidermy and the white gaze, and instead, listen.

Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Braidotti.” *European Journal of Women's Studies* 22, no. 3 (2015): 359. SAGE Publications.

⁸¹ Braidotti. *NOMADIC THEORY*, 27.

⁸² Braidotti. *NOMADIC THEORY*, 21.

⁸³ Grenz, “Book Review: Nomadic Subjects,” 359.

⁸⁴ Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” 13.

⁸⁵ Braidotti. *NOMADIC THEORY*, 20-21, 29-30.

VOCAL NARRATION - you tell me therefore I become

“I am Scheherazade.”

“Who?”

“I tell him about the king who executes his chosen bride each night.”⁸⁶

In *Animals Who Have Escaped*, Maja tells the object of her desire that she is Scheherazade, the character from *One Thousand and One Nights* who saves her life and others by telling stories to the king, ultimately transforming him.⁸⁷ This quote illustrates my understanding of Adriana Cavarero's concept of vocality and narration—what I call vocal narration—as a gendered oral tradition,⁸⁸ focused on telling oneself and others into existence, tied to death, becoming, and survival. Through her physical, embodied voice, Scheherazade contrasts the dislocated, disembodied, rational voice that Cavarero critiques in Western philosophy,⁸⁹ a voice that separates Man, (presented in the introduction and unpacked here) from his environment, experience, and other beings.⁹⁰ Grounded in displacement, philosophy, claims to *save* the particular *who* by subsuming it under the universal “what”, an act of erasure that replaces the concrete uniqueness of individuals with abstract, fictitious entities.⁹¹

The dislocation and erasure framed as acts of salvation in philosophy parallel those in transracial adoption and taxidermy, both of which are presented as redemptive acts (representing the white savior) while masking their violent erasure. The whale calf and the transracial adoptee are paradoxically reimagined as fictitious representations of “bare nature,” serving as an alibi for Humanity or Swedish non-racist identity. Adoption is often viewed in fictional terms—either as a way to challenge humanity’s boundaries (as previously discussed) or as a process where adoptees are seen as navigating multiple identities, sometimes labeled

⁸⁶ Bergqvist, *Animals Who Have Escaped*, 2019–ongoing. My transl.

⁸⁷ Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, 123-124.

⁸⁸ I associate this gendered oral tradition and its links to *becoming* and *survival* with the feminist consciousness-raising groups of the 1960s.

⁸⁹ Schmidt, “The Tip of Two Tongues,” 172-187.

⁹⁰ Burgess, “For More than One Voice,” 166.

⁹¹ Roncalli, “Narrating the Self through the Other,” 4.

as race or class traitors,⁹² or as individuals who feel they have reinvented themselves.⁹³ This fictional lens positions my characters as individuals who view themselves as stories, within the broader context of adoptee discourse, recognizing their identities as constructs shaped by a larger narrative.

In contrast to philosophy's abstract, isolated world, vocal narration is grounded in embodiment and reciprocity, revealing “who” someone is. It is the only form that truly honors the plurality of humanity.⁹⁴ Cavarero thus links the unique “who” to the embodied dimension of voice and the abstract, isolated “what” to its semantic dimension.⁹⁵ Both are essential for becoming a narratable self, as embodied by a mother and child, whose interaction through speech's semantic and sonorous aspects fuels its energy.⁹⁶ Vocal narration is a space of resonance that *emerges* and *disappears* through dialogue between two embodied individuals who share an intimate relationship. This means we only truly exist when we appear before another, a necessary other. While Cavarero emphasizes human uniqueness, scholar Simone Bianca Schmidt, in *The Voice of Art*, suggests that in this space of resonance, “we move closer to what we share with all animals.”⁹⁷

Cavarero emphasizes that intimate relationships, such as female friendship, love, and family, where the pronoun “tu” is used, create a space for the unique “who” to emerge.⁹⁸ However, the level of intimacy required for narration is unclear, as Cavarero also refers to a moment in the *Odyssey* where a stranger's story in a crowded pub moves Ulysses. Cavarero states: “This desire for one’s own story is constitutive of one’s being.”⁹⁹ The desire for one's unique story is central to transracial adoption, where fabricated narratives have historically enabled child

⁹² Hübinette, *Writing About Swedishness*, (2019 My transl).

⁹³ *Unlocking the Heart of Adoption*, directed by Sheila Ganz (San Francisco: Pandora's Box Productions, 2002), DVD, 56:00. This documentary focuses on domestic adoption in the US, following filmmaker Sheila Ganz’s journey as a birthmother and sharing the stories of adoptees, birthparents, and adoptive parents.

⁹⁴ Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, 3-13.

⁹⁵ Evans, “Adriana Cavarero and the Primacy of Voice,” 477.

⁹⁶ Roncalli, “Narrating the Self through the Other,” 14-21.

⁹⁷ Schmidt, “The Tip of Two Tongues,” 193.

⁹⁸ Roncalli, “Narrating the Self through the Other,” 16-19.

⁹⁹ Roncalli, “Narrating the Self through the Other,” 9-10.

theft.¹⁰⁰ Having been separated from our initial intimate relational spaces, our experiences highlight the transient nature of genuinely being seen by another.

Cavarero uses the myth of Oedipus¹⁰¹ to show how identity is lost when the link to one's birth is broken, arguing that our uniqueness comes from being born to a specific mother, at a particular time and place.¹⁰² However, I find it difficult to reconcile her emphasis on place-specificity with her idea of relational space as a "deterritorializing force," freed from place and continuity.¹⁰³ While Cavarero resists imposing cultural identities on the unique individual,¹⁰⁴ it seems to echo the separation between the abstract subject and environment in the birth of philosophy. Due to its unique core and yet deterritorialized nature, I interpret Cavarero's concept of the self as existing between the universal, sovereign modern self, as critiqued by Mbembe, and the postmodern, fluid self embodied by Braidotti's nomadic subject. Both Braidotti and Cavarero emphasize the autobiographical and interrelational aspects of identity, seeking to free the subject from normative cultural identities.

vocal narration & becoming unsettled/un-becoming

Contrasting Braidotti's fleeting posthuman subject, I see vocal narration as an artistic method that grounds the individual, helping them take physical form through dialogue and the embodied voice. It directly engages with states of becoming unsettled—feelings of invisibility, isolation, and social death, or, as Cavarero puts it, being "dead to the world." Drawing inspiration from artist Susan Philipsz, whose disembodied singing voice evokes both connection and discomfort through its intimate sound and public projection,¹⁰⁵ I too aim to create a space that merges the public and private by emitting intimacy within the museum.

¹⁰⁰ "Adoption International," ARTE.tv Documentary, 2024.

¹⁰¹ Cavarero, *Relating Narratives*, 49-51. In Sophocles' tragic play *Oedipus Rex*, King Oedipus unknowingly marries his birth mother and kills his birth father, unaware that he is adopted.

¹⁰² Cavarero, *Relating Narratives*, 52.

¹⁰³ Burgess, "For More than One Voice," 167-169. Cavarero refers to this relational space as "the absolute local," as it lacks predefined borders or permanent structure, unlike traditional political spaces tied to nations.

¹⁰⁴ Cavarero, *For more than one voice*, 204-205.

¹⁰⁵ Schmidt, "The Tip of Two Tongues," 182-183.

The vocal narration methods I'm exploring, including an audio walk and collective singing, aim to create intimate spaces for transracial adoptees and other marginalized groups, addressing the connection between social death and literal death. Through the audio walk, I am crafting a narrative in which the character recognizes that her voice is not entirely her own; instead, it reflects both dominant and subordinated voices (such as that of the whale calf), embodying their alterity.¹⁰⁶ This speaks not only to the relational resonance of vocal narration but also to intersectionality and mimicry. For instance, postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha understands cultures as heterogeneous hybrids, constantly changing so that it is not possible to know where the colonizer ends and the colonized begins.¹⁰⁷ My character, unable to settle within human-animal distinctions, attempts to speak in this messy resonance, unsettling some listeners by making them question their own identities as well.

Like Philipsz, I aim to explore the disembodied voice and its power to transform space,¹⁰⁸ by connecting it to Sweden's colorblindness, which, similar to philosophical displacement, ignores the body and focuses only on the voice. While the racialized body remains hypervisible, much like the silent taxidermied bodies, my intention is for the disembodied voice to symbolize the erasure of both racialized and animalized bodies. This will, in turn, reveal the connection between the abstract voice and the oppressive gaze. I envision the tension between my voice and the silent whale body shifting visitors' perception of the space, invoking the transformative power of spoken words, as seen in Christianity's creation story or in fairytales where spells are cast or broken.

¹⁰⁶ The theme of the alterity of one's voice has stayed with me since 2019, when I began writing *Animals Who Have Escaped* (my transl), where one character says: "My chambers are voids where something small and hard lies and rubs. It echoes within me with memories that are not my own." This theme was further inspired while writing an essay in the spring of 2024 on Afro-American artist Kara Walker, who also reflects on the experience of discovering a voice different from the one she was searching for.

Kara Walker, "Kara Walker on the Dark Side of Imagination," filmed 2019, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, YouTube video, 2:04, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yjyctaKlt-8&ab_channel=SanFranciscoMuseumofModernArt.

¹⁰⁷ Homi K. Bhabha, "The Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse," *Screen* 11, no. 6 (1983): 18-36.

¹⁰⁸ Schmidt, "The Tip of Two Tongues," 186.

Since emotions, music, and memory are closely connected in the brain,¹⁰⁹ I believe singing plays a vital role in understanding transracial adoption. It taps into the extralinguistic dimension of the voice,¹¹⁰ connecting to preverbal times when attachments were disrupted, and we became temporarily disconnected from the world. Singing in a choir with other adoptees, then, provides another way for me to embody the method of vocal narration. Moreover, Philipsz uses existing songs, and I believe this tactic—one I also employed by setting melodies to two of poet Edith Södergran's poems and sampling nationalist romantic songs—could be seen as an example of vocal narration, resonating with the alterity of others, creating difference through repetition.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Lutz Jäncke, "Minireview: Music, Memory and Emotion," *Journal of Biology* 7, no. 21 (2008): 21.1, <https://doi.org/10.1186/jbiol82>.

¹¹⁰ Schmidt uses this term to refer to all the elements of the voice that exist beyond language. Schmidt, "The Tip of Two Tongues," 19.

¹¹¹ Schmidt, "The Tip of Two Tongues," 181.

REFLECTION

By applying the concepts of necropolitics and becoming, I have conducted a comparative analysis of transracial adoption and the killing and taxidermy of the whale calf. In this analysis, I have explored the shared mechanisms of domination, dislocation, and transformation within these practices, reflecting the enduring effects of colonial legacies that render categories like human and animal meaningless. I have also demonstrated how these practices bridge the gap between the living and the dead by engaging with the concept of the death of nature as the rebirth of Man, a concept that has long informed my artistic practice and, through writing this essay, has allowed me to deepen it. Through this process, I have been able to more clearly position myself as a transracial adoptee in relation to it, illustrating how the dominant narrative of the separation between nature and culture operates from a privileged perspective. Meanwhile, those who are othered—the subjects of domination—displaced and relocated through colonialism and the hypermobility of capitalism, are reborn through these practices of paradoxical separation and communion, not as Man, but as gendered, racialized, and animalized nature. This rebirth occurs through processes of erasure and reproduction that redistribute life and death, shaped by the dominant narratives that surround them: transracial adoptees as almost white but not quite, and the taxidermied whale calf as life without breath. As such, my intention is not to frame the whale calf, as suggested during the last two examinations, as either a metaphor or a liberating figure, but rather as a wounded and slain body that I have sought to engage with here from a postcolonial feminist perspective.

Writing this essay has been part of a process that began in the first term of this master's program, when I was advised to expand my knowledge of transracial adoption before approaching the whale calf. The structural requirements of academic writing have helped me further organize and develop my artistic enquiry, allowing me to articulate the conceptual connections behind my associations—something I struggled to express through freeform writing. I therefore appreciate how academic writing will continue to guide my future artistic explorations as it offers a compass through the complex connections I make between seemingly unrelated phenomena, such as transracial adoption and the whale calf. This process has helped me to refine my understanding of these subjects and the methods of vocal narration—rather than remixing—in the context of the museum activation. Vocality and narration enable me to find my voice among others, countering erasure and creating space for complexity to emerge, rather than being confined to a reductive politics of reproduction.

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