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# Becoming More-than-Human: Realizing Earthly Eudaimonia to (E)coflourish through an Entangled Ethos

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**Abstract:** Organisms across the biosphere are experiencing extinction rates so dire that scientists have marked the Anthropocene as the sixth mass extinction in the planet's history. Accordingly, plants and animals, by and large, are not flourishing on this deathly planet. Yet, perhaps it is possible for these more-than-humans to thrive—to realize *eudaimonia*, an ancient Greek concept meaning to flourish by living well—when humans reimagine their relationships with the natural world. In this study, I augment critical animal and media studies with creative cultural studies to arrive at creative/critical animal and media studies. Through this framework, I utilize rhetorical criticism to analyze how the documentary *My Octopus Teacher* reimagines interspecies relations to offer alternative pathways for *earthly eudaimonia*, a life approach centered on (e)coflourishing. I find the octopus, through its *entangled ethos*, teaches the human sensitized compassion with a significant result: the more-than-human octopus transfers her animality to the human who evolves to become more-than-human as well. I offer two arguments: first, contemplating earthly eudaimonia through an entangled ethos creates a space for ecological reflection; this space invites audiences to approach the more-than-human world with sensitized compassion and animality; second, analyzing the documentary through a creative/critical animal and media studies lens offers a unique perspective that foregrounds exploring imaginaries for peaceful, earthly coexistence while maintaining a critical focus against speciesism.

**Keywords:** creative/critical animal and media studies; rhetoric; environmental communication; eudaimonia; ethos; more-than-human; sensitized compassion; sixth mass extinction



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## 1. Introduction

The planet Earth is drenched in death, as animals and plants experience extinction rates so dire that scientists have marked this event as the sixth mass extinction in the planet's history. These organisms—or more-than-humans (Abram 1996)—are dying off precipitously due to the Anthropocene, a name to describe the “practices of dispossession and genocide, coupled with a literal transformation of the environment, that have [continually] been at work for the last five hundred years” (Davis and Todd 2017, p. 761). The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES 2019), the successor to the 2005 Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, explains the sixth mass extinction in startling detail:

An average of around 25 per cent of species in assessed animal and plant groups are threatened, suggesting that around 1 million species already face extinction, many within decades, unless action is taken to reduce the intensity of drivers of biodiversity loss. Without such action, there will be a further acceleration in the global rate of species extinction, which is already at least tens to hundreds of times higher than it has averaged over the past 10 million years. (pp. XV–XVI)

Humans are creating a world of ashes. In this time of enormous death across the planet's breadth, humans must explore alternative ways of coexisting with more-than-human beings.

One response to the Anthropocene and the sixth mass extinction is compassionate conservation, a movement in conservation biology centered on the wellbeing of more-than-human animals. Compassionate conservation holds peaceful coexistence as a core tenant (Wallach et al. 2018), an ethic that “emphasizes the need to reflect on human actions” (Hayward et al. 2019, p. 764) that impact wildlife<sup>1</sup> so that nonhuman animals and “humans can *coflourish*” (emphasis added, Wallach et al. 2018, p. 1260). Engaging with conservation biology may seem unprecedented in communication studies, yet the field has done so before. Cox (2007), in the inaugural issue of *Environmental Communication: A Journal of Nature and Culture*, argues the field of environmental communication should follow conservation biology to also become defined as a crisis discipline. To continue environmental communication’s conversation with conservation biology, I answer compassionate conservation with a care-oriented disciplinary approach (Pezzullo 2017). I do so by drawing attention to how rhetorical scholar Barnett (2021) advances a concept synonymous with peaceful coexistence termed “earthly coexistence.” For Barnett, earthly coexistence is a commitment to “dwelling peacefully upon the earth and working with our more-than-human cohabitants in ways that are mutually beneficial” (p. 368). Earthly coexistence recognizes ecological interconnectedness as unescapable—and, Barnett declares, rhetoric scholars must consequently take notice. Therefore, “perhaps [a] shockingly capacious notion of rhetoric” (p. 369) is necessitated, one “that embraces—or at least attempts to account for—what exceeds the human” (p. 370). Yet, communication, rhetorical, and media studies have traditionally marginalized scholarship that engages with ecological concerns (Pezzullo 2016; Almiron et al. 2018). If the communication studies field is to advance peaceful, earthly coexistence, then we require a framework that breaks with tradition by sending critical inquiries into the communication and representation of more-than-human animals. A promising avenue for this approach can be found in critical animal and media studies.

Critical animal and media studies (CAMS) is a burgeoning subdiscipline that combines critical animal studies (Best et al. 2007) with critical media studies (Ott and Mack 2014) to analytically critique “The media’s role in manufacturing human consent for the oppression and exploitation of nonhumans” (Almiron and Cole 2015, p. 3). CAMS productively attends to the media representations that constitute the human power relations that thread throughout Earth’s ecologies to dominate more-than-human animals. However, as Freeman (2015) notes, CAMS is primarily concerned with how “the mass media participate in maintaining a speciesist culture” (p. 265). Therefore, CAMS may not be well equipped to analyze how media resists speciesism to benefit animals by authentically and compassionately representing peaceful, earthly coexistence.

Perhaps augmenting CAMS with a creative perspective would allow it be more responsive to how media represents *coflourishing* between more-than-human animals and humans during the sixth mass extinction. DeLuca (2019a) proposes a shift from *critical* cultural studies to *creative* cultural studies, which moves “from critique and judgment to understanding and creativity” (p. 177). Rather than critiquing, the work now “imagines new ways of understanding the world” (p. 177). This move supports the inquiry into peaceful, earthly coexistence to answer Bekoff’s (2013) question: “How can we build and maintain clear and unobstructed corridors of compassion and coexistence” (xxi)? Exploring media and their animal representations from a creative lens would open space for this crucial work. However, just as detractors of compassionate conservation argue that it is nigh impossible to do no harm to animals (Hayward et al. 2019), assuming media should escape a critical inquiry due to their best intentions would be idealistic. Therefore, I argue for *creative/critical* animal and media studies (C/CAMS) to maintain a critical perspective as support for exploring alternative pathways for peaceful, earthly coexistence in media. C/CAMS offers an opportunity to analyze how media composes *coflourishing* relationships between more-than-human animals and humans in the Anthropocene, while remaining aware of how those reimaginaries may contribute to speciesism.

In this study, I perform a C/CAMS-informed rhetorical analysis of the documentary *My Octopus Teacher* to explicate how it offers an alternative vision for peaceful, earthly

coexistence through its representation of a more-than-human octopus transferring her animality to a human so that he too becomes more-than-human. I analyze the film through two Aristotelian concepts. First, I engage with *eudaimonia*, a classical Greek ethic concerned with the condition of flourishing. I converge Wallach et al.'s (2018) concept of peaceful coflourishing with Barnett's (2021) earthly coexistence to arrive at *earthly eudaimonia*, or how more-than-human animals and humans (e)coflourish for peaceful, earthly coexistence. Second, I leverage the lens of *ethos*, or one's character as constituted by their actions. I integrate ethos with Gruen's (2013) urging for an empathy attendant to the unique differences in animals to establish *entangled ethos*. When employed by a human, entangled ethos refers to how a particular kind of character emerges through compassionate ecological relations. For a nonhuman animal, entangled ethos is the character that arises when they concatenate with their ecology. In my analysis, I find the documentary's co-protagonist, an embattled filmmaker who I term as "the human," to become transformed by the octopus's ethotic teachings: the human learns sensitized compassion to become delicately concerned with the suffering of more-than-human animals; this informs his capacity to participate in earthly eudaimonia to (e)coflourish; then the human becomes animalized by attaining a deep connection to nature—in other words, the more-than-human octopus transfers her animalized ethos to the human, who then evolves to become more-than-human as well. I offer two arguments: first, contemplating earthly eudaimonia through an entangled ethos creates a space for ecological reflection; this space invites audiences to approach the more-than-human world with sensitized compassion and animality; second, analyzing the documentary through a creative/critical animal and media studies lens offers a unique perspective that foregrounds exploring imaginaries for peaceful, earthly coexistence, while maintaining a critical focus against speciesism.

I first leverage a critical focus to explicate the literature on more-than-human animals, media, and Aristotelian concepts to build a framework for C/CAMS. Then I analyze the documentary through primarily a creative lens to explore its mediated representations of the octopus and human. I finish with the rhetorical implications of my analysis, the use of C/CAMS as a methodology, and practical recommendations for media communicators.

## 2. More-than-Humans Abound in Media

With the creative/critical stance of C/CAMS in mind, I strategically choose how I refer to animals in this study to deploy a lens that disrupts anthropocentric power relations while providing possible pathways for earthly eudaimonia. Abram (1996) comprehensively names the (non)beings in nature, including nonhuman animals and plants, as well as the abiotic elements that co-constitute ecosystems—like rain, wind, and the tides—as *more-than-human*. The more-than-human term, then, productively encapsulates all of nature in a single expression to honor and emphasize ecological interconnectivity. The more-than-human term has gained significant traction in communication studies, with rhetorical scholar Endres (2020) declaring that it has become a fundamental assumption in the field of environmental rhetoric. They continue, noting how the more-than-human term "simultaneously recognizes that humans are animals and acknowledges that it is not just humans who are capable of communication, intersubjective relationships, and agency" (p. 317). Significant to peaceful, earthly coexistence, Endres concludes that the more-than-human term provides a "pathway toward radically reimagining of our relationship with the environment and a form of hope in the Anthropocene" (p. 327). The more-than-human term, then, creatively decenters anthropocentrism to resist "hierarchical speciesistic thinking that [humans are] 'higher, better, or more valuable' than other animals" (Bekoff 2013, p. 15). Considering these affordances, I refer to nonhuman animals as more-than-humans throughout this study.

Media studies is a discipline that explores how humans use media to communicate worldviews through representation. As a rhetoric, media functions suavisly to influence and mold audiences. Critical media studies explores these persuasive acts to analyze "the media's role in constructing and maintaining particular relationships of power"

(Ott and Mack 2014, p. 17). CAMS broadens these moralistic concerns to include nonhuman animals, an understudied foci in critical media studies (Almiron et al. 2018). Indeed, media studies has much to offer the critical inquiry into more-than-human animals. As Barnett and DeLuca (2019) write, “Media are the sites of all the unfolding dramas of human and more-than-human life,” that “give shape to the world as we know it” by revealing “the world and position us as actors within it” (p. 103). Media, then, composes worlds anew through representations that open or close the possibilities for relational transformations.

Documentaries are a medium that engages with environmental issues to shape the world toward particular outcomes. Nature documentaries project human perspectives, values, and desires upon the natural world through capturing footage of more-than-human beings to compose narratives both entertaining and salient to human audiences. Pierson (2005) names three primary occidental perspectives through which documentaries engage with nature: first, nature as a laboratory for scientific advancement; second, nature as threatened by human-caused degradation and depredation; third, as a sacred realm deserving protection and offering enlightenment (p. 707). However, nature documentaries are often critiqued for perpetuating human supremacy and speciesism. As Freeman and Jarvis (2013) advocate, documentaries must “actively cultivate ecological responsibility and newfound respect toward animals as fellow sentient beings” (p. 265) if they are to serve the natural world. Moreover, Barnett (2016) finds in his analysis of the 1995 documentary named *Safe*, documentaries can “productively immerses audiences in sensorial spaces and times that can (at least temporarily) generate ecological modes of attention and attunement” (p. 209). Thus, nature documentaries can perhaps answer Freeman and Jarvis’s (2013) call for mediated representation that persuades audiences toward ecological modes of living.

### 3. Creative/Critical Animals and Media Studies

Formally introduced in the book *Critical Animal Media Studies* (Almiron et al. 2015), CAMS is a field concerned with interrogating how more-than-human animals are exploited and oppressed through their media representations. Drawing on critical animal studies and its revelatory response to the speciesism found in animal studies (Best et al. 2007) and critical/cultural studies and its attention to power relations (Ott and Mack 2014), scholars in CAMS are committed to engaging critical media studies in conversations on the ethical treatment of more-than-human animals and how media constitutes and perpetuates speciesistic ideologies (Almiron and Cole 2015). CAMS scholars explore how media harm more-than-human animals through varying angles, including Cole’s (2015) analysis of rhetorics that legitimate the human domination of animals by ignoring the ethical implications of consuming their flesh; Cudworth and Jensen (2015) tracing how a TV program about animal companionship offers insight into the disruption of the normative power dynamics found within interspecies relations; and Malamud (2015) interrogating how visual culture inimically captures attention with mediated animals to obstruct the plight of these more-than-humans in the real world. Yet, as Merskin (2015) clarifies, even as CAMS critiques speciesism to decenter anthropocentrism, it does not “deny human disadvantages” (p. 15). Freeman (2015) agrees, noting that CAMS is committed “to promoting justice for *all* living beings” (p. 266). CAMS is therefore attentive to animal and human interrelations as it recognizes the interconnected consequences of speciesism (Plec 2015). The critical perspective in CAMS can serve as a productive foundation for exploring peaceful, earthly coexistence.

Creative cultural studies (CCS) is a field that prioritizes creating new understandings of the world over critiquing injurious power dynamics. Boldly established by DeLuca (2019a), creative cultural studies is a response to “Proliferating ecocides, rampant overpopulation, and excessive consumerism [which] all present daunting challenges that exceed the grasp of” a critical methodology (DeLuca 2019b, p. 337). Poignantly outlining what this new field could be, DeLuca (2019a) writes:

Imagine a Cultural Studies dominated not by critique but creativity, not reason and rationality but feeling and affect, not ideology but experience, not subjects

but assemblages, not moralism but understanding, not lonely humans but the pandemonium of things. (p. 171)

DeLuca continues, offering a transformative agenda, “As scholars, our task is not to judge an already given, static world and find it false and lacking, but to encounter and explore a ceaselessly changing, creative, eventful pluriverse” (p. 176). The need for this creative turn is as startlingly as it is sobering. Contemplating visual media studies at large and DeLuca’s commitments to creativity, Hariman and Lucaites (2019) remark, “The only ‘rational’ response” to exigent catastrophe “might be an even larger commitment to ‘irrational’ hope: to look desperately but positively for the means for ‘possible new worlds’” (p. 345). CCS offers an alternative to critique, one that is primed to address the calamitous consequences of the Anthropocene.

Drawing on Nietzsche, Whitehead, and Deleuze and Guattari, DeLuca (2019a) creates a methodology predicated on understanding and creativity. CCS compels scholars to “trace connections, focusing on relationships between things (which include non-human actants), understanding agency as distributed, and tending to affective forces” (p. 177). These methods provide a framework for analysis that is generative, lively, and responsive to DeLuca’s (1999) “irrational hope” that change is possible in this time of massive ecological death. Additionally, applying these methods constitutes an act of creation itself, producing scholarship that pushes academic boundaries by tracing novel possibilities for relating to more-than-human nature. Rather than relying on skepticism, CCS is additively open to the messiness of a constantly changing world.

C/CAMS is a convergence of CAMS and CCS intended to serve a significant purpose: to analyze the reimagining of more-than-human animals and human relationships in the media while maintaining a critical perspective “to advocate for a cultural shift toward justice for animals” (Freeman 2015, p. 265). CAMS forms the bedrock of C/CAMS because, as Brunner (2019) compels, “Critique must lead to creation, which offers avenues to hope” (352). Creativity, then, is informed by critique. We cannot necessarily compose ecocentric futures if we are unable to critically distinguish among imaginaries that may in fact legitimate speciesism. Additionally, while CAMS and CCS may part in their methodologies, both share similar commitments. Like CAMS, CCS is positioned to address ecocide through centering on the more-than-human. To that end, DeLuca (2019a) constructs CCS to support nonhuman “animal and plant studies” (p. 189) through “an orientation that accounts for the more than human, this earth *teeming with the pandemonium of things*” (emphasis in original, p. 171). These two methodologies find synergy through their mutual devotion to more-than-human animals. Altogether, C/CAMS is attendant to critique through its orientation to crisis (Cox 2007), yet also to creativity via its commitment to care (Pezzullo 2017).

C/CAMS is attentive to how more-than-human animals become media through human design. Adams (2013) contends that “Animals function as media when humans use them to convey information to other humans” (p. 20), and, I would add, as agencies that facilitate nonhuman animal and human interaction. Animals can be impressed with human meaning making for suasive purposes, in other words. However, as Adams notes, humans using nonhuman animals as media can be critiqued as a form of anthropomorphism. Indeed, the title of the documentary speaks of its commitment to anthropomorphism: *My Octopus Teacher*. Yet, I analyze this instance of attributing human characteristics to nonhuman animals deliberately; I do so through Schutten and Shaffer’s (2019) “strategic anthropomorphism,” which they describe as an “alternative form of civic action” (p. 4) that emphasizes animal–human similarities to “connect humans to more-than-humans” (p. 9). Strategic anthropomorphism offers a lens to understand how media represents nonhuman animals as media to communicate alternative pathways for earthly eudaimonia. I must note, however, that despite adopting Adams (2013) animal as media theory, I do not agree that more-than-human animals, by virtue of being “ambiguous entities” (p. 29) in Adams’ words, are stripped of their agency when represented as media. As I will argue below, while “animals do not speak the same languages as humans” (p. 29)—and therefore are unable to linguistically “challenge the human use of them as evidence” (p. 29)—they still

have the capacity to energetically exhibit forces that are persuasive to humans (even if that persuasion becomes reduced to the parts humans think we understand). Parrish (2021), striking for a middle ground in this conversation with Adams (2013), underscores how nonhuman animals' "interactions can hold agency, or, like humans, sometimes they are unwitting pawns in the games of other agents" (Parrish 2021, p. 305). With this midpoint in mind, it is productive to draw on Endres (2020), who reminds us that, "There are multiple forms of rhetorical agency within the more-than-human world" (p. 317). One of which, as I detail below, can be found in internatural communication (Plec 2013).

#### 4. More-than-Human Communication

Within communication studies are scholars who break from tradition by questioning how more-than-human animals participate in the mysteries of communication. Kennedy (1992) is credited with first making this move in his seminal article "A Hoot in the Dark", where he radically redefines rhetoric as the "the energy inherent in communication" (p. 2) and therefore prior to symbolic acts. Kennedy further specifies that rhetoric is "the emotional energy [that] impels the speaker to speak, the physical energy expended in the utterance, the energy level coded in the message, and the energy experienced by the recipient in decoding the message" (p. 2). In this recasting, Kennedy decenters symbolic language as the prime locus of communication to recognize that rhetoric is inherent in the very expression of life. More-than-human animals are not only rhetorically capable, but rhetorically empowered. The natural world now has a voice and can therefore form "speaking, deciding assemblies" (Peterson et al. 2007, p. 78) to participate in the conversations that determine its death and wellbeing.

Yet, conversations are constituted by a reciprocal interplay between interlocutors. Recognizing the need to account for interrelations that include diverse entities, Plec (2013) conceptualizes internatural communication, a term for "The exchange of intentional energy between humans and other animals" (p. 6). Internatural communication provides a space to translate more-than-human communication to offer insight into ecological co-constitution. Through internatural communication, scholars have explored how popular media captures the embodied expression of animals to subtly advance speciesist and racist ideologies (Plec 2015); orcas engage in protest rhetorics through internatural activism (Burford and Schutten 2017; Schutten 2021), and the rehoming of salmon creates a biorhetoric that compels reflection on ecological degradation (Plec et al. 2017). Internatural communication offers a lens to explore how animal communication interacts with the human world to produce saliency and meaning.

By expanding the boundaries of what constitutes communication, internatural communication acts as a lens to productively disrupt dominant concepts in communication studies. Augmenting Kennedy's (1992) rhetoric-as-energy perspective, Seegert (2014) eschews symbolism to define "rhetoric as the relational force of signals interacting with the world" (p. 160). From this perspective, rhetoric is affective, or the "capacity to affect and be affected" by being "moved by sameness and difference . . . by the many bodies (human and nonhuman, animate and inanimate, living and dead, natural and artificial) with which we share the world" (Barnett and DeLuca 2019, p. 102). In sum, rhetoric emerges in ecologies where energy impels the acts that send relational signals forcing through concatenating networks.

#### 5. Earthly Eudaimonia

*Eudaimonia* is an Aristotelian concept, one fiercely debated throughout history due its ethereal characterization by the Greek scholar. Aristotle (2009) develops eudaimonia in his Nicomachean Ethics, and the term is commonly translated as "happiness." However, the happiness Aristotle describes is not strictly an emotional or mental state. Rather, eudaimonia is perhaps more precisely understood as an experience. So, after widespread contention with eudaimonia's interpretation as happiness, Brown (2009) notes that scholars generally agree that "flourishing" is a more accurate translation (p. x). As an ethic,

eudaimonia is concerned with how humans flourish through living their best life. Yet, scholars have noted the ambiguity of Aristotle's explication of eudaimonia. The ancient Greek first articulates that happiness is achieved through actions, but at the end of the book, he shifts to this ethic as realized through contemplation. Ackrill (2001) argues that one solution is to consider the former in service to the latter: "right actions are right precisely in virtue of their making possible or in some way promoting theōria [contemplation]" (p. 180). I take eudaimonia as both the in-the-moment acts and the meditations that reflect afterwards. Eudaimonia, then, emerges as a rhetoric through (inter)action and is later leveraged as a rhetorical appeal by deliberating on what constitutes right action.

Aristotle's account for eudaimonia is limited for two reasons; however. He describes eudaimonia as not achievable outside the human experience, and also as benefiting the individual rather than those connected in relationship. First, Aristotle (2009) excludes nonhuman animals from eudaimonia because while they are alive, animals are "obedient to reason" and are not capable of "possessing reason and exercising thought" (p. 11) as humans do. Yet, animal cognition philosophers like Andrews (2020) challenge these anthropocentric notions, contending that animals participate in rational decision-making unique to that more-than-human mind. I dispense with Aristotle's anthropocentrism and locate eudaimonia as a flourishing existence achievable by nonhuman animals through their conscious decisions. Second, Aristotle explicates eudaimonia as self-oriented through centering on how an individual secures pleasant moments, lives self-sufficiently, and exhibits moral excellence (Murphy et al. 2014). I disagree with Aristotle's self-serving approach to Eudaimonia, since individuals are always enmeshed in living networks. Flourishing is limited when the surrounding life is deteriorating—a point being made duly evident in the sixth mass extinction. As Plec et al. (2017) stress, "the happiness and flourishing requisite of [eudaimonia] must be anchored in relationships, including those with the more-than-human world" (p. 255). Therefore, I understand eudaimonia as consciously realized through "a life of harmony and balance" (Murphy et al. 2014, p. 74), but only with other beings so that they too may flourish. Eudaimonia is now an ethic of the ecological good where one (e)coflourishes within ecological constraints so that other beings may also thrive. I term this variant *earthly eudaimonia*.

Earthly eudaimonia is a rhetorical appeal to live an ecologically attuned mode of life, one that emerges through right (inter)action and leveraged later through deliberating on that action. Locating a vision for a resistant lifestyle in the tiny homes movement, Colombini (2019) describes a eudaimonic rhetorical appeal as a "countervailing mode of life that facilitates well-being and thus is desirable on its own terms" (p. 459). As an appeal, eudaimonic rhetorics operate contrastively to oppose other ways of life deemed harmful to well-being. A eudaimonic rhetorical appeal, then, is itself a critique against dominant ideologies and the inimical modes of life those belief systems sanction. Additionally, earthly eudaimonia broadens Plec et al.'s (2017) salmonid eudaimonia where "the flourishing of salmon and the flourishing of humans" (p. 248) are entangled to include the flourishing of all the beings interrelating in an ecology. An earthly eudaimonia, then, is a rhetoric that emerges when life thrives—and also when ecologies degrade and die. Earthly eudaimonia as a rhetorical appeal provides a framework for understanding how eudaimonia is persuasively leveraged to constitute alternative modes of peaceful, earthly coexistence.

## 6. Entangled Ethos

Ethos—one's character and credibility—is a rhetorical concept parsed and debated by scholars since introduced by Aristotle (2015) in his book entitled *Rhetoric*. Famously declared by the ancient Greek scholar as the "the most effective means of persuasion" (p. 8), ethos manifests through three traits found in the speaker's speech and comportment: good sense, good moral character, and goodwill towards the audience. However, ethos as conceived by Aristotle is limited as it reinforces a logocentric approach to rhetoric. As Wisse (1989) explains "The way Aristotle presents ethos . . . is rational in so far . . . as the hearer can rationally decide for himself whether he thinks the speaker is reliable or nor

[sic] (p. 33). To find an ethos more suited to more-than-human animals' rhetorics, we must momentarily look past the Greeks to their successors: the Romans.

The Roman's account of rhetoric, particularly in the work of Cicero, conceives ethos as an emotional expression of one's character. While Aristotle and his Greek contemporaries viewed ethos and pathos as distinct from one another, "the Roman critics came to view [ethos and pathos] as different degrees of the same thing" (Kennedy 1972, p. 101). The Romans considered ethos and pathos to be counterparts, or two sides of the same persuasive currency. Kennedy (1972) further delineates this Roman perspective: whereas "ethos is gentle and mild and demonstrates the speaker's moral character; pathos consists of strong emotions like anger, hate, fear, envy, or pity" (p. 505). Considering rhetoric as a force with varying degrees of intensities, ethos is a moderate "emotion [which] arises from the character of the speaker" (p. 101), and pathos is a force of passionate intensity. Ethos, then, is extra-rational, or affective, as it operates on the level of being. This account for ethos is productive for more-than-human animal rhetorics because it forgoes the anthropocentric requirement for language. Now ethos transpires not only by discursive signification, but also relationally through asignifying physical encounters.

A productive ethos for animal communication can be found by merging elements from both the Greek's and Roman's conceptions of one's character while emphasizing its physicality. While the Romans viewed ethos as fluid through its connection to pathos, they also found it immutable. May (1988) explains that "The Romans believed . . . character does not evolve or develop, but rather is bestowed or inherited by nature" (p. 6). Yet, the Romans had a practical reason for this rigidity: legal records in those ancient times bound one's persona to their family name (Baumlin 1994). Conversely, Baumlin (1994) finds Aristotle admitting to ethos as amenable to "an active construction of character" (p. xv) when the Greek describes it as capable of shifting or changing depending on one's actions. The Aristotelian ethos, then, is flexible in its emergence. Additionally, ethos is not purely a phenomenon produced by language, as it also arises through physicalities that more-than-human animals can utilize. In addition to speech, ethos also includes the rhetor's "habits, strengths, weaknesses, virtues and vices" (p. xii) and their "physical presence and appearance . . . gestures, inflections, and accents of style" (p. xvi). Ethos, then, comprises characteristics that are physically demonstrated in the moment and do not require language for their conveyance.

In this study, I combine the Roman conception of ethos as a fluid intensity with the Aristotelian notion that one's character is malleable, all through an approach that recognizes that ethos materially emerges in relationships. I name this dual approach an *entangled ethos* in response to Gruen's (2013) call for an empathy that, as an ethic, becomes entangled by valuing the unique differences of more-than-humans. Entangled ethos emphasizes how ethos contextually evolves, emerging through the transmitted affects, emotions, and feelings living creatures experience in relationship to other beings or objects. Entangled ethos is attendant to ecologies as it dynamically develops from concatenating relationships.

Rhetorical scholars have noted how animals leverage ethos to shape their relationships and conditions. As Parrish (2013) explains, "Human and nonhuman animals can understand the effects of reputation, and will set out to cultivate a particular ethos as it suits them in a rhetorical situation" (p. 85). For example, Kennedy (1992) proposed that among animals, "ethos is likely to reflect hierarchy or 'pecking order' in the society; in many groups, especially of mammals, certain members have greater authority than others" (p. 15). Animals are well aware of how to utilize their character to achieve beneficial outcomes—to flourish, in other words.

Of particular importance to this study is how octopi employ ethos to thrive and influence humans. An octopus' intelligence and learning capacities make it well suited to cleverly utilize ethos. Through mimicry, the more-than-human "octopus . . . can easily take the appearance of anything she touches" and thereby "shape ethos in subtle and varying degrees" (Parrish 2021, p. 85). Octopi shape their ethos to engage in internatural communication. Additionally, octopi and their ethos have swayed humans since time immemorial by



inspiring advancements in the arts and sciences (Nakajima et al. 2018). Greek and Roman art, for example, drew upon the octopus' character through representations designed to shape symbolic cultural codes. Octopi are fascinatingly adroit users of ethos.

### 7. (E)coflourishing through the More-than-Human Evolution

*My Octopus Teacher* is a 2020 Netflix Original Documentary that explores the interrelations between humans and the wild to advocate for a caring mode of relating to the natural world. The documentary follows Craig Foster, a fatigued filmmaker, and his attempt to find purpose through seeking connection with nature. The human disconnects from his family to plunge into the ocean where he meets an octopus. Astounded by the clever cephalopod, the human documents the octopus as she teaches him ecologic lessons. He emerges from the kelp forests with an eco-centric perspective that transforms his interspecies and familial relationships. The film has won numerous awards, including an Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature and the Golden Panda Award from Wildscreen. Critics have contributed to *My Octopus Teacher's* widespread acclaim. Travers (2021) lauds the documentary as a “dazzling, deep-dive into interspecies communication” (para. 9), while Stefansky (2020) styles the film as an emotional “examination of where humans place ourselves in relation to the natural world, why we often feel as though we are separate from it, and what happens to us when we realize that divide is a myth” (para. 5). The film offers a compelling reimagining of internatural communication that has resonated with Western culture.

Throughout the analysis, I refer to Foster as “the human” to decenter anthropocentrism by leveling his reference with that of the octopus's. This analysis, then, not only serves the creative focus for C/CAMS by exploring alternative pathways for earthly coexistence, but also my critical commitment, through deprivileging the human perspective in an ecologic context. CAMS scholar Merskin (2015) poses two compelling questions that guide this C/CAMS analysis: “how do representations of animals . . . impact the lives of real animals? And what can we learn about ourselves by looking through the lens with which we look at other animals” (p. 12)? Lastly, the human narrates the footage of his past experiences while seated at a table in his home to provide a reflective perspective on the events represented in the film.

#### 7.1. Separation, Descent, and Encounter

The documentary begins by answering “the why”—why a human would seek an ecological education on flourishing from an octopus. The human provides two reasons. First, he narrates how he suffered a deep disconnection from nature that he could not otherwise resolve, and second, he describes experiencing a severe bout of burnout from becoming overtaxed with film work. First, the human had unsuccessfully sought to connect to nature in the past. He recounts an earlier experience where he participated in a documentary about aboriginal hunters in the central Kalahari. He remarks that the hunters “were probably some of the best trackers in the world” (Ehrlich and Reed 2020). Yet, not even these expert hunters could teach the human how to bridge the gap he so keenly felt. He laments that the hunters “were inside of the natural world. And I could feel I was outside. And I had this deep longing to be inside that world”. The human sought a pathway to the natural world, but it would not become available until he experienced a culminating personal crisis.

Second, the human, exhausted from film work, experiences an internal breakdown so profound he becomes bereft of purpose and disconnected from his family—with ramifications for his initial ethos. The human describes how his life had become an “absolute hell” (Ehrlich and Reed 2020) from overworking. Consequently, he says, “I hadn't slept properly for months. My family was suffering. And I was getting sick from all the pressure.” The results were twofold. The stress became so intense that the human developed an aversion to his film work. He expresses “Your great purpose in life is now . . . just in pieces.” His connections with his family also suffered: “I just couldn't, in that state, be a good father to

my son.” The human needed an answer to this internal dilemma and realized he required “a radical change . . . And the only way I knew how to do it was to be in this ocean.” The human begins spending an inordinate amount of time away from his family as he explores the sea. Initially, the human’s disconnection from his family impairs his ethos. His credibility and goodwill are cast in a negative light by his documented admission and actions to willingly disconnect from his family. It is through this fraught ethos that the human encounters the octopus.

Delicate and gentle music plays as the human, swimming underwater, comes upon a strange, novel sight in the kelp forest. He spies a collection of shells held together by something unseen. Then, an octopus suddenly glides out from her cover. The music swells as the human comments, “It’s a hard thing to explain, but sometimes you just get a feeling . . . there’s something to this creature that’s very unusual. There’s something to learn here” (Ehrlich and Reed 2020). The human is bedazzled by the experience of an intelligence beneath the waves. A creature so mysterious, yet so clever, must have something to teach. While the human does not yet fully comprehend what he will learn, he notices a glimpse of (e)coflourishing in the octopus’s entangled ethos—her character, in other words, that emerges through relating to the kelp forest ecology. The experience slightly alleviates the human’s burnout and he begins documenting the cephalopod to learn a different approach to life.

### 7.2. Ecological Attunement

The human documents the octopus extensively to learn his first lesson: how to become attuned to an ecology. Previously, the human found himself fundamentally disconnected from nature. Now he follows the octopus into the natural world through experiencing her entangled ethos. The more-than-human octopus is shown following the human as he documents her. But then the human bumbles by dropping a camera lens, frightening the octopus. With her trust in the human broken, the octopus abandons her den. To locate the octopus, the human realizes he must become more entangled in the kelp forest ecosystem than ever. “I had to learn what octopus tracks looked like . . . What’s the difference between octopus tracks and heart urchin tracks and fish tracks? . . . I needed to learn everything. And then you have to start thinking . . . like an octopus” (Ehrlich and Reed 2020). In his search, the human learns not only more about the octopus, but of the many more-than-human animals interrelating throughout the ecology. The more enmeshed the human becomes, the greater his ecological attunement. After an arduous week of underwater tracking, the human’s persistence pays off:

Finally . . . there she was. It’s like . . . a human friend, like, waving and saying, “Hi, I’m excited to see you”. And I could feel it, like from one minute to the next, “Okay . . . I trust you, human. *And now you can come into my octopus world.*” (emphasis added)

The more-than-human octopus invites the human into the wild through her entangled ethos and the human attunes to the web of relations that comprise the kelp forest ecology. As the human learns ecological attunement, his ethos entangles with the more-than-human world to provide insight into how this ecosystem flourishes.

By becoming enmeshed within the entangled ethos of the octopus, the human experiences an epiphany about the kelp forest ecosystem. His revelation closes the divide between himself and nature:

And it hit me how she was teaching me so much . . . People ask, “Why are you going to the same place every day?” But that’s when you see the subtle differences. *And that’s when you get to know the wild.* So when these thousands of threads going off from the octopus to all the other animals, predator and prey, and then this incredible forest . . . just nurturing all of this. And now I know how the helmet shell is connected to the urchin and how the octopus is connected to the helmet shell. (emphasis added, Ehrlich and Reed 2020)

The octopus's entangled ethos reveals the ecosystem's earthly eudaimonia: the kelp forest "nurtures" the creatures within so that they may flourish amongst one another. Earthly eudaimonia is present not through how one organism flourishes somehow separate from the others, but how the web of creatures (e)coflourish by interrelating. Now that the human has learned ecological attunement, he is ready for the next lesson.

### 7.3. Sensitized Compassion

The human, through becoming ecologically attuned, is now ready to learn from the octopus sensitized compassion—a delicate concern for the plight of animals. After forming an intense bond with the octopus, the human witnesses as she faces death at the jaws of a predator. A more-than-human pyjama shark latches onto the octopus and death rolls, tearing off one of her eight arms. A tense moment transpires where the octopus is in danger of predation—but then the mollusk cleverly escapes into a deep crack and then limps back to her den. The human monitors the octopus throughout the week and is uncertain she will survive. Emotionally entangled with the octopus, the human contemplates "I felt very vulnerable. As if somehow what happened to her had happened to me in some strange way" (Ehrlich and Reed 2020). The octopus's eye is shown in a close-up image while the human voices his now-realized sensitized compassion:

And then this almost felt, psychologically, like I was . . . going through a type of dismembering. You start thinking about your own death and your own vulnerability, worried about your family, your child. I hadn't been a person that was overly sentimental towards animals before. *I realized I was changing. She was teaching me to become sensitized to the other.* Especially wild creatures. (emphasis added)

Through his unfolding relationship with the more-than-human octopus, the human attains the capacity for sensitized compassion. The human's ethos becomes entangled through compassionate relations with the more-than-human world. In doing so, the human recovers from his burnout to regain relational capacity for his family. However, he also extends that compassion to animals by becoming capable of sensitively caring for wild animals as he would a loved one. His ethos, once fraught, is repaired by entangling with the more-than-human world.

The human's sensitized compassion continues to develop throughout the film to inform his engagement with earthly eudaimonia. Near the documentary's end, a succession of scenes emphasize his sympathetic concern for animals while accompanied with a gentle piano melody: the human holds a baby octopus in the palm of his hand, and a variety of unborn sea creatures wiggle and wobble in their eggs. The human narrates:

She'd made me realize just how precious wild places are . . . You slowly start to care about all the animals, even the tiniest little animals. You realize that every one is very important. To sense how vulnerable these wild animals' lives are, and actually, then how vulnerable all our lives on this planet are. (Ehrlich and Reed 2020)

As the human's sensitized compassion for nonhuman animals grow, so too does his capacity to (e)coflourish with more-than-humans through peacefully, earthly coexistence. He can now participate in earthly eudaimonia: to (e)coflourish with a range of more-than-human beings. Thus, a rhetorical appeal emerges on a mode of life centered on the concern for nonhuman animals. Through this eudaimonic rhetoric, the film invites the audience to (e)coflourish by becoming sensitive to the predicament more-than-human animals face in a world dominated by human activity. In this vision for (e)coexistence, nonhuman animals are no longer pushed to the margins, but instead are central to worldly concerns. The human—and perhaps the audience—are now ready for a significant evolution.

### 7.4. A More-than-Human Evolution

By becoming sensitively compassionate to more-than-humans, the human is primed for a transformative evolution that is the octopus's final lesson: the human adopts the more-

than-human octopus's ethotic animality to also become more-than-human. The human reflects on this change as orchestral music swells in a scene depicting the octopus touching the human's hand:

My relationship with the sea forest and its creatures deepens . . . week after month after year after year. You're in touch with this wild place, and it's speaking to you. Its language is visible. I fell in love with [the octopus] but also with that amazing wildness that she represented and . . . and how that changed me. *What she taught me was to feel . . . that you're part of this place, not a visitor.* (emphasis added, Ehrlich and Reed 2020)

By representing the octopus as a more-than-human, the film creates a space to cherish and respect animals. Now, by evolving the human to a more-than-human status, the documentary animalizes the human so that he joins nonhuman animals in their lively goodness. He can participate in earthly eudaimonia not as separate to more-than-human animals, but as one himself. The audience, through the sense of care that arises from the film's representations, are also invited to become-more-than human. While the audience may not grasp the deep connection to nature perhaps necessary to become more-than-human, the aspiration is made tangible. This desire is eudaimonic in nature, meaning the audience is invited to live a mode of life where they too are animalized, while being sensitively compassionate to nonhuman animals amidst their human-caused challenges. The audience is offered this animalized earthly eudaimonia through an entangled ethos, or the ethics that emerges when one's actions are considered in the context of other living beings.

After becoming more-than-human, the human in turn evolves his child to a more-than-human ethotic status by teaching sensitized compassion and habituating him to the natural world. A scene transpires where the human crouches and points while his son pays close attention—and then a smile of wonder dawns on both their faces. The human emphatically narrates, "One of the most exciting things ever in my life, taking my son, walking along the shore and just showing him the . . . wonders of nature and the details and the intricacies" (Ehrlich and Reed 2020). The human teaches the child about the ecological interconnections to prepare the child to learn sensitized compassion. The film presents the child walking along the beach, drenched in sunlight:

He's like a little marine biologist now. He knows so much. And very powerful swimmer. And as he gets older, he seems to want to do it more and more. To see that develop, a strong sense of himself . . . an incredible confidence, but the most important thing, a gentleness.

The child gains "a gentleness"—a sensitized compassion—to care for more-than-human animals through the lessons taught to him by his father. Yet, the child realizes a deep connection with nature to become more-than-human not solely through his father's teachings. A scene shows the child contemplating the natural world through play as the human reflects, "And I think that's the thing that thousands of hours in nature can teach a child." The child evolves to also become more-than-human through spending an exceptional amount of time maturing in a wild place. Now the child can (e)coflourish with his fellow more-than-humans through realizing earthly eudaimonia. By stripping the encumbrance of adulthood from sensitized compassion and animality, the audience is further invited to participate in this alternative mode of existence. The result is a final appeal for earthly eudaimonia, persuasive through its innocent simplicity.

## 8. Conclusions

*My Octopus Teacher* represents a unique attempt by media to reimagine (e)coflourishing during a time of immense ecological death. I must note, however, that while I primarily used a creative lens to analyze *My Octopus Teacher*, the film is not without its critiques—many of which are indeed valid. Critics, for example, have pointed out how the human may represent "the archetypal white lover [who] is enthralled as much by his own love as by his love object" (Lewis 2021, para. 3). Another critique could be how the human intensely

surveilles the octopus with little thought to her privacy as she experiences her most intimate moments, including parenthood and her eventual death (see Mills 2010). Yet, the purpose of the analysis was to move past a full critique, to instead seek understanding with less judgment. Not because critique is insufficient, but to explore alternative modes of coexisting with more-than-human creatures at a time so harrowing that Special Issues like this one are needed to address the incessant, planetary-scaled death of more-than-human beings.

In this study, I find four implications related to C/CAMS and the study of more-than-human animal representations by media. First, contemplating earthly eudaimonia through an entangled ethos creates a space for ecological reflection; this space invites audiences to approach the more-than-human world with sensitized compassion and animality. Through representing the human as transformed to a more-than-human, the documentary invites audiences to become delicately concerned with the natural world and to rediscover their own animality through considering the concatenations and commonalities humans share with animals. As Freeman and Jarvis (2013) urge, “Media narratives need to place humans in an interconnected web to avoid a dichotomous ‘us and them’ perspective” which “should foster further respect for fellow animals as persons/ individuals” (p. 265). In the sixth mass extinction, it is imperative that media productively create these spaces for reflection to shape the world in ways that mitigate the enormous death rates. Media, then, can aid in the transition to (e)coflourish with more-than-human animals in the Anthropocene.

Second, this paper reimagines interspecies relations from a rhetorical perspective under the C/CAMS methodology to itself advance earthly eudaimonia. I attempt to honor Cox’s tenant that environmental communication scholars have a duty “to enhance the ability of society to respond appropriately to environmental signals relevant to the well-being of both human civilization and natural biological systems” (emphasis in original, Cox 2007, p. 16). I do so in tandem with Pezzullo’s (2017) care approach to environmental commination that is “devoted to unearthing human and nonhuman interconnections, interdependence, biodiversity, and system limits” (p. 1). Guided by these two insights, I “put rhetoric to work for earthly coexistence” (emphasis in original, Barnett 2021, p. 368) to illuminate how it is possible to realize earthly eudaimonia by (e)coflourishing through an entangled ethos during the sixth mass extinction. When these eudaimonic approaches are highlighted, scholarship can emphasize and perhaps also shape the world to align with a vision for (e)coflourishing with more-than-human animals through an active, ongoing expression of sensitized compassion and shared animality. The work of C/CAMS then, is to offer these creative visions—supported by a critical perspective—to advance ethical interspecies relations to mitigate the sixth mass extinction.

Third, C/CAMS offers a methodology that is attentive to both the creative and critical demands of scholarship that explores more-than-human communication. While this study primarily leverages a creative lens to analyze an instance of mediated representation, the critical component is necessary to explicate the literature that tends towards speciesism and the marginalization of animal and ecological concerns (Pezullo 2016; Almiron et al. 2018). In other words, the literature must be critically explicated to ensure the theoretical frameworks deployed can serve analyses that explore the composition of new worlds. DeLuca (2019a) would agree with this perspective. He states that critique must “include the important supplement of creating” (p. 174), which he demonstrates by wielding a critical lens to create space for CCS. Overall, I find a critical perspective is necessary before scholars can begin exploring creativity. C/CAMS, then, is a methodology comprised of intersecting components that are salient throughout the process of producing analytical scholarship.

Fourth, media communicators can use C/CAMS as a framework to guide their work to support animals in the sixth mass extinction. Communicators should create new possibilities for (e)coflourishing while being critical to avoid speciesism. This work can be accomplished in several ways. First, communicators should “[Decenter] humanity to embrace a truly egalitarian view” of more-than-human nature (Almiron et al. 2018, p. 376). Nonhuman animal concerns should eclipse humans affairs. If strategic anthropomorphism

(Schutten and Shaffer 2019) is used towards those ends, deliberate care must be taken to ensure interspecies relations are fostered while resisting speciesism. Second, media should denormalize nonhuman animal exploitation and oppression (see Nibert 2015) by cultivating respect and care for more-than-human animals through their mediated representations. Yet, this work can be accomplished creatively to offer audiences fresh perspectives that replace speciesistic ones. Third, media should explore “new possibilities for questioning, feeling, thinking, and becoming in a world composed of a pandemonium of things” (DeLuca 2019a, p. 190) to offer innovative imaginaries for peaceful, earthly coexistence. Media can provide alternative modes of existence to shape the world, even if only gradually.

Above all else, scholars and media communicators must heed Bekoff (2013), a compassionate conservationist, to understand that “Compassion is the glue that holds ecosystems and webs of nature together” (p. xix). As we intervene in the Anthropocene to relieve animals from the deathly pressures resulting in the sixth mass extinction, we must hold onto sensitized compassion to not only create and sustain earthly eudaimonia, but to do so without becoming unnecessarily impeded by speciesism.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> When describing nonhuman animals as “wild” or “wildlife”, I mean those in nature or who are free-living (non-domesticated). I do not mean “wild” in a derogatory sense.

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