

Dr. Lynn Turner - Berlin 2019

Abstract: 'Raising animals': two powers of horror between the cellar and the kennel in *The Woman*'

'Have you fed the dogs yet?' This anxious phrase along with their agitated barking frequently reminds the viewer that somewhere there are dogs, close to yet never stepping inside the large country house in which Lucky McKee's 2011 horror film *The Woman* is set. This house or *The House* - following the definite article of the film's title - invites a spatial analysis of the gendered logics of domestication, of metaphysics as a gendered *oikos*, not least since the film's plot centers upon a patriarch-lawyer capturing a 'feral' woman, imprisoning her in the cellar and framing her as the family civilization project. Crucially, the film is also shadowed by 'the animal,' the concept of which remains troublingly static in this otherwise astonishing story of revenge. The spatial and conceptual parallel between the cellar and the kennel substantially structures *The Woman*. From these classically uncanny spaces, two beings return to light. The Woman, named an 'animal' is finally freed from the cellar (and narrative expectation served). But the film saves its biggest scare for the penultimate revelation of just what has been going on in the kennel for all this time: the family's anophthalmic eldest daughter has been raised as a beast. Her release however, channels not the transcendence of a recuperative humanity but a pethood that raises questions about the alternative presented by and as the newly feminized family in the concluding scene.

McKee's film explicitly and admirably works to expose and condemn domestic violence against women. Recent work by feminist philosopher Kelly Oliver brings the 'question of the animal' in Derrida's critical sense to bear upon the Kristevan concept of abjection as foundational to the human subject: Oliver shows how both the feminine and the animal are abjected in Kristeva's view. Developing Oliver's insights, this paper investigates the domestic scene as one that differentiates between humans and non-humans according to tight conceptual prescription. While the film offers a thrilling, if bloody, figure of retribution against violence against women, the elevation of women to center stage is bolstered by their maintenance of a family pet.

My titular invocation of 'raising animals' conveys several senses. Both the eponymous Woman and the anophthalmic daughter were raised by animals (the former by wolves in the woods, the latter by a brutalized Alsatian and brutalizing father and son): these upbringings result in different outcomes. 'Raising animals' also asks what happens to ethics when we pay attention to

the animal question *with* the woman question, given that political emancipation classically demands the repression of animality.