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**The Oestrus Complex:**

**soliciting the sexual contract of whale song**

Writing against the elevation of the narrow field of language by psychoanalysis in light of the wider category of the trace, Derrida alights on what Lacan determines as the capacity to pretend. In Derrida’s account, Lacan does permit animals some complexity in communication by virtue of the ability to pretend in the specific circumstances of seduction and combat. But he refuses them the redoubled capacity of pretending to pretend, or to lie, or bear witness to a lie. This mendacious capacity is pivotal – in Lacan’s account – for language, and is characterized as the possession of humans alone. Embedded in the logic that fundamentally splits nature and culture, seduction and combat are excused as need and thus as natural in contradistinction to the lie as the convenor of culture and of the signifier.

Such a theoretical legacy might be thought too academic for ethological research. However, drawing on a range of sources that muse on the phenomena of whale song, I will examine the repetitious rationale for such songs, consonant with Lacan’s account: (male) whales sing in order to attract a mate. Even Philip Hoare has suggested that male humpbacks produce specifically penetrating bass tones in song in order to stimulate oestrus in females, their higher notes would be effectively produced by default as they run out of breath. The apparent absence of females in visible thrall to the song would then be beside the point, since sound travels faster in water than in air and these whales are among the loudest beings on the planet.

In ‘soliciting’ the alleged sexual contract of whale song, I follow Derrida’s insistence on the Latin sense of a shaking loose of the whole. Such a solicitation affects not only this reduction of song to seduction, but the whole framework that constrains animals to the conceptual trap called ‘the animal’.

**Bio:**

Lynn Turner writes on deconstruction and animals, feminism, film, sexuality, voice, psychoanalysis and science fiction. Her books include *The Animal Question in Deconstruction* (edited, EUP, 2013); *Visual Cultures As… Recollection* (co-authored, Sternberg, 2013); *The Edinburgh Companion to Animal Studies* (co-edited with Undine Sellbach and Ron Broglio, EUP, 2017). Recent book chapters can be found in *European Posthumanism* (2016); *Animal Life and the Moving Image* (2015); *Desire in Ashes* (2015) and *Introducing Criticism in the 21st Century* (2015). She is Senior Lecturer in Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths, University of London.