the changing profession

# Hum/animal: All Together

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RECENTLY, NEWS OUTFITS, PUNDITS, AND ACADEMICS HAVE TAKEN TO REFERRING TO "THE GLOBAL SOUTH." IN MANY RESPECTS THE SOUTH FInally matters. As a political moniker, this term comprises the countries in Africa, Central and Latin America, and most of Asia. It designates the entities with medium or low human development, according to United Nations indexes.

In my manifesto I want to interrogate this label, one that southern studies scholars use in a different register. When speaking of the global South, we mean cultural machinations from below, and we acknowledge our brothers and sisters in what was once known as the lower South, the people living along the Gulf of Mexico and the diasporic communities in South and Central America. When the term is used outside of academic circles, it often refers to that space defined by humanity's pervasive and persistent lack. *The global South* therefore marks a negative human condition from which the term *South* can never recover. In many ways, regardless of any economic and social progress, *the South* inescapably designates a backward place where the human constantly leaches away, retreats, and sits in the wake of what Elizabeth Povinelli would call unproductive enduring (101–29). The exchange between Jon Smith and Barbara Ladd over Ladd's October 2005 *PMLA* essay on southern literary studies demonstrates that old archetypes die hard.

Even if, as Peter Schmidt observes in a review of two books published in 2008, the year of President Obama's election, we can mark "the beginnings of a profound shift in the role that former Confederate states play in U.S. politics in the twenty-first century"—North Carolina went blue for a hot minute, and then in the following gubernatorial election it went red—the South remains the stepchild of human beings' narrative of overcoming, of their will to progress. Schmidt also notes, "[Y]ou've got to include Dixie in your gaze if you don't want to be parochial and piecemeal in assessing the transnational turn contemporary cultural studies has taken" (126). If anything, the election of 2008 demonstrated a South divided against

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*PMLA* 131.1 (2016), published by the Modern Language Association of America



https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2016.131.1.167 Published online by Cambridge University Press

itself, as the red counties became redder, to paraphrase Schmidt and pundits on CNN, and blue counties cropped up in unexpected places. He adds, "Like a tectonic plate, that 'red' South is grinding against or moving away from at least several other Souths that can't be mapped very accurately by the old racial or class or regional divisions" (134). I would like to posit here that this South is actually and metaphorically new—a South that rises from below and is consistently undervalued in the contest for humanity's biopolitical hold on the planet.

In short, I am calling for a more nuanced approach to the critical category we call the global or transnational South and the political entity called the global South, as well as a sharper review of the human, which not only stands at the center of their difference but also provides its measure. How should we proceed then? Francisco Collado-Rodriguez provides a model when he assesses the minimalism of Bobbie Ann Mason's collection of short stories *Zigzagging down a Wild Trail* (2001). He writes, "[Mason] suggests the necessity to cut . . . the connection of the (post-human) self to technology in order to progress into a better and more human future in which individuals may recognize themselves again in the face of other individuals" (107). Mason's work moves in the direction I am calling for here. Minimalism points toward the body's isolation in hypermodernity, emphasizing the repetitiveness of human endeavors contoured by scripted interactions with people and things. This crisis of subjectivity is not the existential variety that leads to political impulse, or what Collado-Rodriguez calls "ethical impulse" (via Levinas). I would argue that the crisis, precipitated by the constant advent of new technologies, marks the human as not enough and the ethical moment as incomplete, a temporal gesture whose impulsivity points toward the precariousness of the human's bare life.

The word *South* in all its iterations, from our desks to the UN dais, is subtended by the problem of the temporal—otherwise known as the past, present, and future and sometimes as memory, collective and social but also personal. On the international front, the South matters to us because it is a persistent problem to be fixed, a sign of the North's failure to instruct, to manage. On the national front, the South matters because it provides an adequate geographic home for the missteps in the European "errand in the wilderness"—Indian removal, chattel slavery—on the way to that "city on a hill." As southern scholars have long pointed out, the South is to be mourned, cherished, and regretted (I am thinking here of Patricia Yaeger's *Dirt and Desire*). Simultaneously, this remembering entails romanticization and immortalization, which bring forgetting; that which needs to be forgotten must be immortalized. In that temporality, the body is kept alive while the head suffers terribly. Southern people are saturated with a history that cannot be overcome. As Larry J. Griffin and Peggy G. Hargis note, the South "visibly carries its sorrowful past on its shoulders" (43). Perhaps this remark is best exemplified by the way in which we like to throw around the term *the new South*—to convince not so much others as ourselves of the novelty of trying to forget while remembering.

But to my larger point—hum/animal: all together. I have purposefully avoided defining the human against the animal other; I am working a potentiality for togetherness that must now bear fruit. So I will end with a brief evaluation of an excerpt from Elizabeth Grosz's *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics, and Art*: "The animal is a necessary reminder of the limits of the human; its historical and ontological contingency; of the precariousness of the human as a state of being, a condition of sovereignty, or an ideal of self-regulation" (12). Replace "animal" with "southerner," and you get the truth of the awfulness of the southerner's psychic home in the American, if not the international, imaginary. To rethink the category of

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2016.131.1.167 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the human as our object is to rethink the animal as the trace of such imaginative bulwarking. If we stop focusing on human endeavor, we might be able to imagine a temporality whose constituents are not always recognizable—objects, technologies, and nonhuman beings surging around us—and it might be possible, even necessary, to imagine a South whose constitutive life comes from something other than its failure, other than a story of what people did and continue to do to one another. I am thinking here of a wonderful line in Frantz Fanon's 1952 treatise: "I came into this world anxious to uncover the meaning of things, my soul desirous to be at the origin of the world, and here I am an object among other objects" (89). Fanon speaks to the kind of worlding possible when the focus turns toward those "other objects" and perhaps away from human beings. But the best way to describe this new project would be through Toni Morrison's character Jacob Vaark, in *A Mercy*, who observes, "Where else but in this disorganized world would such an encounter be possible?" (29).

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https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2016.131.1.167 Published online by Cambridge University Press