In this comic, I aim to unpack human-animal relationships through themes of body and space and provide an example of why the comics form is especially useful when understanding these topics. In this comic, I aim to explore questions like: Why is the comics form pertinent to understanding human-animal relationships today? How are animal bodies and identities considered living beings during the COVID-19 crisis? How are their bodies constructed and dismantled in spaces that have been created and defined by the COVID-19 crisis? This graphic submission aims to add a new intervention into the comics realm, explores how the comics form must be a considered approach in animal rights and spatial academia and offers a new lens in understanding how we can use comics as a method to approach body, space, and the COVID-19 crisis.
Introduction

While extensive research has been done by environmental (Sustain and Nussbaum 2004) and interdisciplinary academics (Wolfe 2013) on the animal body in moments of crisis, there is little analysis and exploration of this topic in the comics form. I first became involved in this piece when I read about the mink cull in Denmark during the winter of 2020 in response to a possible COVID variant circulating in fur farms (Gorman, 2020). I was invested in trying to understand this odd space that minks themselves took up in this moment; already considered resources and “destined” to die for their fur, they were then selectively slaughtered, which resulted in a large public outcry. Yet, I questioned if their identity and value changed. This led me to reflect on other animal species and their experience during the pandemic, and what that means for human-animal relationships today. As a visual thinker, I felt that a comic was the only way to explore this concept.

The purpose of all of my comics is to question and create an uncomfortable contrast between humanity, our past and present episteme, and the complex world of animals. Through stylistic choices like minimal colors, intricate textural illustrations, and non-traditional comic layouts, I hope the reader can achieve multiple interpretations of this topic and not come away with answers, but a curiosity that can propel them to explore more. I use the word “crisis” instead of “pandemic” to encompass the complexity of the outcomes that have been caused by COVID-19 and to think beyond the virus itself. The comics form offers the ability for scholarship and theory to unfold and layer beyond textual analysis; with the use of both text and image, comics not only explore topics but reposition them to cultivate new meanings. Through engaging in the comics form (both as a maker and scholar), I argue that comics offer a unique perspective to consider body and space, especially regarding human-animal relationships in our current moment in time. In this comic, I explore questions like: Why is the comics form pertinent to understanding human-animal relationships today? How are animal bodies and identities considered living beings during the COVID-19 crisis? How are their bodies constructed and dismantled in spaces that have been created and defined by the COVID-19 crisis?
SNAKES & THINGS
A COMICS EXPLORATION OF SPECIES
THROUGH THE COVID-19 CRISIS
BY GINA MATTEO
"I can be anything you imagine in the comics form!"
CE N'EST PAS UN SERPENT
(MAGRITTE, 1929.)

PIECE BY PIECE
A COMIC RELAYS INFORMATION.
IT IS UP TO THE READER TO
ARRANGE THE PIECES TOGETHER.

IMAGE AND TEXT
CREATE MEANING.
SOMETIMES, WHAT IS ON THE SURFACE IS NOT
THE COMPLETE AND TOTAL DEPTH. IMAGES
CAN JUST BE IMAGES. TEXT CAN JUST BE TEXT.
BUT WHAT HAPPENS WHEN BOTH IMAGE AND
TEXT ARE PUT TOGETHER, JUXAPPOSED AND
FEEDING OFF OF ONE ANOTHER? WHAT
MEANINGS ARE CREATED, WHAT IS THEN
THRUXT INTO EXISTENCE AND IS THEN ALIVE?
When the Covid crisis occurred, things were on the surface, it was hard to see meaning in chaos; to look critically at events and experiences, I wanted to consider the meaning of beings that were deemed unimportant.

To consider the cyclicality of living beings and their continuous experience of Covid alongside humans, I explore this through comics. As the comics form allows for a continuous interpretation, animals, just as humans, experienced the pandemic on a vast, cyclical scale.

Temptation to see things in another position, redefined and uncovered—we only owe it to our mother nature, to question how we define a life, a life in a crisis.
A MESS OF TENTACLES

AND A TWISTED MIND, IT WAS THROUGH OVER-LOOKING AND INTERSECTING UNCOMFORTABLE REALITIES THAT I FOUND THE REALITY OF ANIMALS DURING A WORLDLY, COMMUNAL CRISIS EVENT.

IT WAS SIMPLE

IN A CRISIS STATE, THE RIGHTS OF THOSE ON THE FRINGES, THE MARGINS ARE NOT ONLY RENDERED OBSOLETE BUT TREMENDOUSLY FORGOTTEN UPON.
A PURGATORY

KNOWN?

NEITHER HERE NOR THERE, A SPACE TO EXIST IN THAT ISN'T ACTUALLY A SPACE. AN ANIMAL'S POSITION IN A CRISIS OF CRITICAL IMPORTANCE.

TO SERVICE

TO AID IN THE DISCOVERY OF A CURE, AS ESCAPE FROM THE PANDEMIC, THIS SERVICE, WHILE THE ANIMAL BODY IS REVISED AND HELD TO A HIGH IMPORTANCE, IT REMAINS ONLY VALUED AS A RESOURCE. AND, AS A RESOURCE, RIGHTS AND CONSENT ARE ABSENT, THE ANIMAL BODY INHIBITS A SPACE OF CONTRADICTION, VALUED, EXPLOITED, AND CONTROLLED, ALL IN THE SAME MOMENT

(SWIF, 13).

SUSPENDED

IN A SPACE WHERE EXPECTATION MEANS POKING AND PRODDING, DISECTING AND VIOLATING, LEAVING THE BODY PLAYED AND REVEALED,

A SHARED PLAGHT

THAT IS NOT EQUAL, THE ANIMAL BODY AND ITS FATE IS PRE-DETERMINED WHEN A CRISIS UNFOLDS, A TIME WHEN THOSE ALIEN TO SOCIETY BECOME EVEN MORE EVIDENT.
In the Abyss
The continuous fall that seemingly lasts for an eternity as the crisis is prolonged. Terrific. The agony of being restless. Circumvents the animal's service value. To have purpose but to be without form.

A Crisis Within a Crisis.

On a plane that is already defined. Unable to move in the direction it wants. Up, down, indecipherable. Unavoidable. Denied.
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