Multispecies Organizing in the Anthropocene : A Deer in the Limelight

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Résumé :

Dans cet article, j'explore le travail politique qui survient lorsque les efforts humains pour organiser l'espace interfèrent avec la façon dont d'autres espèces habitent et organisent ce même espace. De tels phénomènes, déjà présents dans de nombreuses organisations, devraient devenir plus fréquents et plus intenses en raison des perturbations associées à l'Anthropocène. S'appuyant sur une approche posthumaniste influencée par les travaux de Donna Haraway et Vinciane Despret, cet article examine une controverse liée à la décision d'une administration municipale d'abattre les cerfs d'un parc urbain. En s'engageant dans cette situation, les acteurs de la controverse négocient et construisent des formes spécifiques d'organisation et de gestion des relations multi-espèces, sur lesquelles ils s'appuient pour déterminer qui sera autorisé à faire partie du collectif, et sous quelles conditions. A partir de l'analyse de cette situation, j'identifie deux modes de composition des relations multi-espèces mis en avant par les acteurs, à savoir l'attachement et le détachement. Je discute également de la façon dont les institutions et les pratiques politiques, en raison de leur ancrage dans une tradition moderniste anthropocentrique, peuvent être mal adaptées aux défis posés par les controverses multi-espèces.

Mots-clés : controverses ; posthumanisme ; Anthropocène ; organisation multiespèces

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1. INTRODUCTION

Controversies involving animals and organizations appear to be increasingly common and contentious. For example, in just the past few years, the province of Québec has seen controversies over woodland caribou, chorus frogs, white-tailed deer, and horse-drawn carriages, all of which involved discussions on how relationships between species should be organized and managed. These situations have real—and sometimes dire—consequences for some of the beings affected, besides presenting significant challenges for the organizations experiencing them. The emergence of such controversies, and the phenomena that underpin them, can be linked to the growing disruptions associated with the Anthropocene.

Recent literature in management and organization studies (MOS) testifies to a growing concern with the new reality that is the Anthropocene, and with its profound implications for organizations and for organizational activities. Indeed, as Wright et al. (2018) argue, "the Anthropocene is the crucial issue for organizational scholars to engage with in order to not only understand on-going anthropogenic problems but also help create alternative forms of organizing based on realistic Earth–human relations (p. 455)". The authors point out that, as the illusion of a separation between humans and nature dissipates, the latter's immense power to intrude becomes disconcertingly apparent. This is what seems to be at stake in many controversies involving animals and organizations.

Controversies are effervescent moments when ways of living together are negotiated and transformed (Lemieux, 2007; Venturini, 2010). As pointed out by Venturini (2010), "nothing can attain a collective existence without being the result of collective work and controversies are the settings where this work is more visible (p. 263)". As such, controversies offer a unique opportunity to explore how multispecies politics are realized, and how we collectively manage to compose and organize multispecies worlds. In this paper, I aim to explore this topic further, as I am specifically interested in how various conceptions of "living well together" come into play in the construction of multispecies worlds.

To do so, I draw on a posthumanist mode of attention and engagement, inspired in particular from the ideas of Vinciane Despret (2002, 2014, 2019; Despret & Porcher, 2007; Despret & Stengers, 2011) and Donna Haraway (2003, 2008, 2016b). By viewing organized spaces as multispecies communities where more-than-human organizings intertwine, this perspective shifts the focus away from humans alone, allowing us to think about the composition of the collective in a less anthropocentric way.

Empirically, this paper draws from an inquiry into the controversy surrounding the management of an urban park and the multispecies community that inhabits it. The controversy emerged when elected officials decided to cull the majority of the deer that live there, arguing that their overpopulation posed challenges regarding the conservation of the natural environment of the park. Throughout this uncertain situation, the participants—human and non-human—have to learn and enact forms of multispecies politics by taking hold of the concrete problems posed by the organization of a multispecies community.

In the subsequent sections, I first situate this study amidst recent research on multispecies politics. I then describe the approach employed in my inquiry. Following this, I offer an outline of the controversy and the multispecies community in which it emerges. I proceed with an analysis of the situation, and conclude by discussing my findings in relation to existing literature, highlighting some novel contributions.

2. MULTISPECIES POLITICS

In recent years, more studies in MOS have begun incorporating animals into their focus (Labatut et al., 2016; Lennerfors & Sköld, 2018; Sayers et al., 2019; Tallberg & Hamilton, 2022b). Some of these studies examine multispecies politics, underscoring how human-animal encounters prompt negotiations of a common world that are not bound by assumed separations between "nature" and the "social" (Bear & Holloway, 2019; Charles & Wolkowitz, 2019; O'Doherty, 2016; Sage et al., 2014, 2016). As these studies have shown, situations that require organizing, directing and managing a multispecies collective pose unique organizational challenges.

The most obvious of these challenges is that animals, contrary to their classical depiction in managerial literature (Santos & Eisenhardt, 2005), are not merely passive, but are actively entangled in numerous organizational processes. For example, in their research on construction projects, Sage et al. (2016) noted that the entanglement of "moor frogs organizing" or "badgers

organizing" along with "human organizing" compels us to rethink the notion that animal agencies can simply be ignored, erased or managed. In particular, they pinpointed three practices through which animals are involved in organizing, and which troubles the implementation of human designs.

A second challenge highlighted by this literature is the inherent indeterminacy of animals, who don't easily lend themselves to representation. Unlike other political actors, the ability of animals to express their perspective on the composition of the common world, as well as their very interest in the political issues that humans might want to engage them in, can be significantly limited. Even when spokespersons take on the task of speaking for them and representing them in political forums, these envoys face significant translation challenges, as well as the practical impossibility of producing entirely reliable versions about them.

For example, O'Doherty (2016) shows how a cat residing on the premises of an airport became entangled with numerous humans working at the airport. Yet, these entanglements proved very challenging to interpret when deciding if a proposition for building a new "penthouse" for the cat was genuine, or merely a form of parody. As O'Doherty states, "feline politics conjures a dimension in organization in which one is never very clear what might happen next and—whether serious or frivolous—actions and behaviours remain unpredictable and undecidable (p. 426)". Sage and al. (2016) show that even when formal processes are established, such as environmental impact assessments, animals often defy the experts and their facts about them. The authors cite an example where the representatives of badgers negotiated the construction of an artificial sett and the distribution of food to entice the badgers to relocate outside the boundaries of a pipeline construction project. Evidently dissatisfied with their representation, the badgers remained firmly in place. This forced the project team to bore a tunnel under the original badger sett, leading to additional delays and costs.

A third challenge highlighted by this literature is that encounters between human and animal organizings are highly charged with ethical implications (Sage et al., 2014, p. 773). These ethical concerns can manifest at a relatively abstract level, such as questioning whether a specific mode of interaction with animals is right or wrong. However, these concerns often take shape in more practical terms, and in particular in the definition of the concrete and material conditions of coexistence. As such, these studies provide a nuanced perspective on how ethical issues materialize in these multispecies collective.

In what may seem like a mundane example, Charles & Wolkowitz (2019) describe how therapy dogs visiting a university campus must adhere to certain rules of conduct. They must be quiet, well-behaved, their bodily needs perfectly managed, and they must remain segregated from other areas. In this instance, the "canine" way of being is thus heavily controlled and constrained in favour of the needs of humans, thus enacting a specific form of asymmetry between species. The shape taken by ethical relationships between species is especially evident in the sociomaterial arrangements that emerge in the spaces shared by different species. For instance, following their study of transitions from conventional cow milking to robotic milking systems, Holloway et al. (2014) note that "ethical relations on dairy farms are unsettled by the intervention of a radically different technology (p. 186)".

In summary, by examining encounters between human and animal organizings, these studies underscore the important functions of multispecies politics, as well as the complications it can bring about. Collectively, this body of work shows that multispecies politics cannot be conceived or negotiated without "the animals", and that these "animals" cannot be easily defined, characterized, represented, or managed. It thus appears relevant and important to better understand how various conceptions of "living well together" come into play in the construction of multispecies worlds.

3. A POSTHUMANIST MODE OF ATTENTION AND ENGAGEMENT

As pointed out by several authors (Haraway, 2016b; Lestel et al., 2006; Stengers, 2019; Tsing, 2015; van Dooren, 2022) human and non-human communities do not exist in separate domains. The so-called human communities all involve, to varying degrees, the activities of non-human species, just as non-human communities are affected by human activities. We can think of such shared spaces as constituting *multispecies communities* (van Dooren, 2022). These multispecies communities form "open-ended gatherings" of ways of living (Tsing, 2015, p. 23), comprised of multiple and heterogeneous relationships between individuals belonging to different species. Multispecies communities are always "in the making," and subject to both endogenous and exogenous dynamics (Tsing, 2015). These changes in relational patterns all involve forms of political dynamics, as species somehow negotiate their ways of living together in a shared world.

Multispecies controversies arise when humans are involved in arbitrating multispecies communities, and when different actors disagree on the appropriate course of action. They refer

to situations that involve arbitrations between different species and their ways of being in the world. As such, they raise not only scientific and technical questions but also, more importantly, political and ethical ones (van Dooren, 2022) that can be summed up by the problem: with whom do we want to live and how? (Despret, 2007, p. 150). While the actors involved in the controversy collectively tackle this problem and its subsidiaries, what is being constructed is a way of living together, and a tentative definition of what it means to be "worlding well" (van Dooren, 2022, p. 32) in this multispecies community.

The study of controversies, which mostly stems from science and technology studies, offers insights into the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of the social (Venturini, 2010, p. 264). Bruno Latour (2004, 2005a, 2005b), in particular, has been a passionate proponent of this approach. According to Venturini (2010), who drew upon his experience as a teaching assistant to Latour, documenting social controversies relies on "methodological minimalism" (Venturini, p. 259). Latour's directive in this regard is, quite succinctly, to "just look at controversies and tell what you see" (Venturini, 2010, p. 259). There is thus no "methodology" to the study of controversies; no research question to frame the inquiry, and no established protocols, directives or guidelines for data collection, coding or analysis. The inquiry, in this way, "*does not begin with the cogito* of pre-existing, formalized, systematized, instrumental methodologies commonly used in social science inquiry (Gherardi, 2019b, p. 45)".

Nevertheless, Latour's injunction to dive into controversies does not mean that "anything goes," or that inquiry should dispense with theories. As highlighted by Amis and Silk (2008), in posthumanist research, "quality then becomes *internalized* within the underlying research philosophy (p. 458)." In other words, notions of validity and, more generally, of quality, are constructed through the theoretical and empirical engagement of the researcher.

Indeed, a deep engagement with a theoretical corpus produces a way of being (Kuecker, 2020) that is then enacted in research, and which I describe here as a *mode of attention and engagement.* The latter could be described as an open-ended assemblage of "virtues" that are at the same time ethical, ontological and epistemological. These "virtues" come into play not by prescribing techniques, methods, or strategies, but rather by serving as resources for the researcher in the various decisions they have to make throughout the research process. They continuously prompt the researcher to question the ways in which they can enact these virtues, from the initial stages of "paying attention" to a situation, to beyond publication (Koro-Ljungberg, 2010). Enacting a mode of attention and engagement is therefore a process that is

always uncertain, responsive, and emergent, as it cannot be defined definitively, or accomplished once and for all.

The mode of attention and engagement developed in this research is rooted in the works of Donna Haraway (2008, 2016b, 2018) and Vinciane Despret (2002, 2014, 2017, 2019; Despret & Porcher, 2007; Despret & Stengers, 2011), as well as others such as Isabelle Stengers (2013, 2017, 2019), Anna Tsing (2015, 2022) and Thom Van Dooren (2022). From their works, I identified in particular four "virtues" that guided me throughout my investigation, namely curiosity, politeness, perplexity, and responsibility. The table presented in **Appendix A** briefly outlines how the four "virtues" informed my inquiry. The concept of versions, developed in particular by Despret (2014, 2017, 2019; Despret & Stengers, 2011), has also been particularly instrumental in framing this inquiry and enacting these "virtues".

For Despret, as for Stengers, there are forms of abstractions that "thin" our world, whereas others "thicken" it (Debaise & Stengers, 2021; Despret, 2019; Despret & Stengers, 2011). When a researcher presents a theory or explanation while assuming that this is the (sole) accurate representation of reality (Despret & Stengers, 2011), they contribute to this thinning of the world: "une seule logique pour l'hétérogénéité des savoirs, un seul mode d'existence pour la pluralité des êtres, un seul cosmos pour la diversité des mondes" [a single logic for the heterogeneity of knowledge, a single mode of existence for the plurality of beings, a single cosmos for the diversity of worlds] (Debaise & Stengers, 2021, p. 130). In analyzing a controversy, this reduction can manifest in various ways: relying on a single form of knowledge, making determinations on what is "truly" debated by the participants, assuming the authority to decide, either implicitly or explicitly, who is "right" and who is "wrong" in the controversy, and so on.

With the concept of "version," Despret emphasizes that there is a multiplicity of ways to take hold of a problem. In the context of this study, this means for instance that there isn't an intrinsic model or definition of a multispecies community. There is not a predetermined form to which multispecies communities should aspire. To the contrary, there is a myriad of ways to create relationships with other inhabitants of the Earth (Debaise & Stengers, 2021, p. 137). Accordingly, the purpose of an inquiry is not to overcome the plurality of versions by erecting one (either singular or composite) as the truth, but to experiment with different versions and what they make possible. In this practice, versions function as forms of theorization that

proliferates worlds and honour the emergence of an infinity of manners of existence (Despret, 2019, pp. 15–16).

As Venturini (2010) points out, the analysis of controversies is not aimed at resolving them, especially not from an external perspective. Instead, it serves to illustrate the numerous ways in which they can be closed, and the multiple forms that the composition of the common world may take. Inquiring through "versions" is precisely geared towards this ambition.

3.1. DESCRIPTION OF THE INQUIRY

In an initial round of data collection, I systematically gathered articles from national and local newspapers that covered the controversy, as well as news reports and interviews from various national and local media outlets, including radio and TV broadcasts. This round also involved consulting the recordings of Longueuil's City Council monthly meetings, where the issue had been extensively debated over the past two years. This corpus of data served as the starting point for my exploration.

From that point, the data collection took several unexpected paths. In dialogue with both the questions emerging from the situation and the concepts and ideas of the posthumanist authors that inform my approach, I unravelled numerous threads from the controversy. For instance, when an actor stated a particular "fact" about the deer, I tracked down that fact in the scientific literature and sought its presence in other forms of knowledge. This exploration allowed me to gain a better understanding of the ways of living of the beings that are part of the park's multispecies community. Therefore, the study includes articles published in scientific journals across various disciplines such as biology, ecology and ethology. Similarly, the frequent references to temporality in the controversy prompted me to explore archival sources, and in particular the archives of the local newspaper dating back to the park's establishment. This allowed me to better understand how the multispecies community has emerged, and the ways of living together that were constructed there over time.

In this second round of inquiry, I thus consulted a wide range of additional sources. I analyzed reports, development plans, planning schemes, and other relevant documents produced at the local, regional, and national levels. Additionally, various documents produced by participants to the controversy, including briefs, reports, videos, blog posts, web pages, social media pages, and legal proceedings, were also collected and analyzed.

Finally, I also continued to visit and observe the park and its surroundings. This served a dual purpose: firstly, to provide context for the controversy and enhance my understanding of the situation, and secondly, to document certain aspects of the park's configuration and inner workings that may not be made public or openly discussed by those involved in the controversy.

The study thus relies mainly on secondary sources of data. The use of secondary data is justified by the fact that controversies take place in public (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991). In this case, given the scope of the controversy, its coverage was extensive. Because it involved a government, much of the documentation was also publicly available—either directly or through the law on access to documents held by public bodies. Moreover, in the context of controversies, the collection of primary data can present both epistemological and ethical challenges, as the researcher may quickly become entangled in the controversy. This can be particularly problematic if they are instrumentalized to steer the closure of the controversy (Venturini, 2010), a risk that appeared significant in this specific controversy.

Throughout the inquiry, a first ambition was to gain a deeper insight into the emergence and dynamics of the multispecies community in Parc Michel-Chartrand. This exploration shifts the analytical focus from being solely human-centric to encompassing the multispecies community. Such an approach lends depth and complexity to the situation by documenting the multispecies organizing that take place in this community.

Secondly, by using "versions" as a guiding concept, the analysis consisted in identifying and describing the various ways of constructing this multispecies community that were put forward by participants to the controversy, that is, its modes of composition. This analysis goes beyond merely listing stakeholders and their views. Pluralism, in this context, isn't limited to the situation itself; it also encompasses the participants, who can embrace multiple modes of composition. This means that participants, whether individuals or groups, may present multiple, sometimes even contradictory, ideas about how the multispecies community should be organized and managed.

4. THE MULTISPECIES COMMUNITY OF PARC MICHEL-CHARTRAND

Following World War II, a period of intense urbanization leads to the rapid expansion of cities surrounding Montréal (Canada). In order to facilitate residential development, several agricultural lands are then purchased and expropriated. From these lands, a protected area is established in what will eventually become the suburban city of Longueuil, with the intention

of creating an urban park. While locations to the west of the future park are already undergoing development, the park and its surroundings are still primarily agricultural. As such, they are home to numerous species of animals, including white-tailed deer, which are highly prevalent in the region. The park officially opens in 1975, spanning a space of 1.85 sq km. During its early decades of operation, its primary focus is providing recreational activities that enhance the quality of life for citizens, such as cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, or leisurely walks. Since the park consists of expropriated agricultural areas, its landscape is predominantly second-growth forest, with fallow fields and wooded areas. Over time, the park is gradually developed. Some areas are cleared up, tree plantations are carried out while other trees are felled, artificial ponds are dug, paths are opened, a hill is set up for sledding, ornamental plants are cultivated, lawns are created in certain areas, etc. People who visit the park quickly note the numerous species that inhabit it. Inventories have documented the flora of over 600 species, while the park is home to over 200 bird species, 17 mammal species, and more than 9 amphibian and reptile species. In particular, the deer living or transiting through the park are easily visible to visitors, and are considered by many to be emblematic of the park.

The multispecies community of Parc Michel-Chartrand is thus not that of a wild forest that preexists its human visitors and that evolves independently from them, but neither is it the tightly controlled and simplified ecology of the plantation as described by Tsing (2015, 2022). It exhibits a form of "patchiness," where areas that are more or less left to their own devices blend with other areas that are closely managed. While the community is actively and intimately constructed *with* humans who manage and organize it by exerting various degrees of authority, it also leaves ample space for the worlding projects of other species. This creates a situation where, in this multispecies community, the projects of humans and those of other species become intricately entangled.

The space bears numerous material traces of this multispecies enmeshment, both within the park itself and in the seemingly human-dominated spaces surrounding it. Within the park, notable features include the presence of birdhouses and an interpretive nature trail that allows visitors to discover the park's tree species. Informational signage also reminds visitors of the interdiction against feeding the animals, a practice that was once widespread and still persists to some degree. With or without feeding, the animals that inhabit the park have become quite accustomed to the presence of humans. For instance, the Instagram hashtag #parcMichelChartrand reveals close pictures of the deer, which are quite tolerant of humans,

especially when compared to their skittish wild counterpart. Visitors can often get within only a few metres from the animals. This mutual "befriending" between species, in which both humans and deer participate, exemplifies the multispecies enmeshment that emerges in the park.

Around the park, residential developments also bear witness to multispecies enmeshment that extend beyond the park's boundaries. In particular, the neighbourhood features several small parks connected by trails to Parc Michel-Chartrand, including a tree-lined path that connects the park to the shores of the St. Lawrence River. Wildlife can thus move with relative ease between these green spaces, thereby permeating the neighbourhood.

While it initially underwent numerous manmade transformations, the park eventually received the designation of a "nature park" dedicated to the conservation of nature. In addition to its recreational purpose, it now serves as a means to protect and value natural habitats. According to the city's policy, adopted nearly ten years ago, new projects should promote biodiversity, and are planned according to identified ecosystems. Among recent initiatives, the "rewilding" of certain fields and the deliberate conservation of dead trees stand out as notable examples. These practices aim to provide nesting sites, food sources, and shelter for a diverse range of organisms, and thus carry on the park's mission.

Of course, simply designating an area as a nature park does not make the park more "natural" or less "artificial." For instance, the abundance of planted ash trees in the park (around 70% of the forest cover), the absence of predators such as coyotes or wolves, or the presence of lawns that provide abundant food for Canada geese, are all manifestations of humans' ongoing role in shaping the park. The ecological model advocated in the city's development plans can obviously contribute to the production of new types of multispecies communities in the park, but it does not make them appear, despite the evident care shown by park administrators for the park's ecosystem.

The ecological mission of the park is now facing substantial challenges, as its multispecies community is in turmoil. One of the most significant disturbances in the community is the felling of nearly 10,000 ash trees, decimated by the emerald ash borer, which has virtually eradicated ash trees from the city in a span of 10 years. These trees provided habitats for various species and supported diverse lifeways that now find themselves in a vulnerable position. The emergence of exotic invasive species, particularly buckthorn, phragmites and Japanese

knotweed, has also severely disrupted relational patterns. These invasive species encroach upon areas once occupied by other species, proliferating and spreading without consideration for the intricate arrangements of multispecies life (Tsing, 2022, p. 66). Driven by climate change (Dawe & Boutin, 2016) and the absence of predators, deer populations have swelled, not only within the park but throughout the region. This situation contributes to conflicts between species and the destruction of ways of life, as vulnerable and threatened slow-growing plants are devoured, and as overgrazing creates opportunities for colonization by invasive species.

In summary, the multispecies community of Parc Michel-Chartrand has organized itself in such a way that human projects and the projects of other species are now deeply enmeshed. Despite the city's aspirations, it is now particularly vulnerable to forms of proliferation associated with the Anthropocene and human management of nature (Tsing, 2022). While biodiversity and the preservation of nature are its main considerations, some species refuse the role assigned to them by proliferating, monopolizing spaces, hybridizing, parasitizing other species, etc. This clash between the city's vision and the state of the multispecies community sets the stage for new arbitrations by the city, which are certain to be accompanied by controversy.

5. THE CONTROVERSY OF THE DEER OF PARC MICHEL-CHARTRAND

On November 10, 2020, the city of Longueuil announces its intention to euthanize, in the following weeks, 15 of the 32 deer estimated to inhabit Parc Michel-Chartrand. To justify its decision, the City highlights the issue of deer overpopulation, which causes an insufficient regeneration of the forest, compromises future tree plantations, endangers the biodiversity of the park, creates damages to neighbouring properties, increases the risk of road accidents and Lyme disease transmission, as well as potentially harms the deer themselves (Ville de Longueuil, 2020).

While the culling plan receives general approval from biologists, this decision immediately triggers an outcry among the population. Petitions and protests are organized within a few days, while suggestions for alternative solutions abound : relocating the deer, introducing natural predators, sterilizing the herd, enclosing the park, allowing hunting, etc. Within just a few days, a private organization called Sauvetage Animal Rescue (SAR) submits an operational relocation plan to the city officials, declaring itself ready to bear all the costs of the operation.

The city remains steadfast in its position, but facing what it calls "the threat posed today by certain individuals aiming to thwart, or even counteract, the implementation of the deer

population control operation [Parent, S. 2020, November 23rd]"[1], it finally abandons the culling two weeks after the announcement. The mayor instead turns towards relocating the deer, and delegates the process to SAR, under the condition that the organization manages to obtain all the necessary permits from the ministry. The controversy thus fades from view for a short while.

A few months later, in the spring of 2021, the deer relocation effort comes to a halt as SAR and its partners face a complete refusal from the ethics committee responsible for issuing an animal care certificate, which is essential to obtain the relocation permit. This committee, primarily composed of veterinarians and researchers, highlights the lack of experience of the organization with deer as well as numerous gaps in the plan, resulting in an unreasonable risk of injuries and mortality to the deer (Harvey-Pinard, 2021).

Around the same time, the City creates a consultative committee whose mission is to "propose solutions for the restoration and maintenance of the ecological balance and the preservation of the natural areas of Parc Michel-Chartrand" (Ville de Longueuil, 2021). The committee consists of city officials, citizens and representatives from local organizations, and is led by a biologist from the Ministry of Forests, Wildlife, and Parks. As the possibility of relocating the deer slips away, their fate is put into the hands of the consultative committee, which begins its work in May 2021.

The committee submits its report to the municipal administration on November 22, 2021, in which it maintains that "the only viable short-term option to achieve sustainable results is to proceed […] to the reduction of the size of the herd through a method of capture and euthanasia in order to reach the park's carrying capacity (Ville de Longueuil, 2021, p. 20)." A week later, the newly elected mayor, who has been in office for less than a month, confirms that she will proceed with this solution and will promptly euthanize the majority of the 70 deer that are now believed to inhabit the park.

This time, the City remains firmly committed to its culling plan. Since the operation must take place in the fall or winter due to the deer's breeding seasons, the City plans to intervene in the fall of 2022. This new offensive marks the beginning of an increased mobilization of activists. New demonstrations are held, and opponents coordinate themselves to intervene and protest the

[1] All the direct quotes from participants have been translated from French to English by the author. A table with all the original quotations and their translation is available upon request.

decision at City Council meetings as well as in various media. These activists also organize between themselves to feed the deer to ensure their well-being and safety, in addition to actively conducting citizen inquiries into the situation. Legal proceedings are also initiated under the impetus of one of the province's most famous lawyer, who represents the organization Sauvetage Animal Rescue, and the Montreal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA).

In the year that has passed since then, the situation continued to evolve. The City now estimates the deer population to be over a hundred, and has changed its planned method for killing the deer from euthanasia to crossbow hunting in order to proceed more effectively. This change has sparked a renewed outrage among activists, who decry the cruelty of this particular method. Furthermore, the City's plan to perform its "deer population control operation" in the fall of 2022 is thwarted by the Québec Court of Appeal, which issues an order to suspend the operation until a judgment is made on the appeal for a judicial review filed by the deer defenders. This appeal, aiming to invalidate the administration's decision, is finally heard the following spring, in April 2023. After nearly a week of hearing the case, the judge reserved his judgment, and to date, no decision has been rendered in the matter.

6. MODES OF COMPOSITION OF THE MULTISPECIES COMMUNITY

From the beginning of the controversy, participants appeared to split into two factions, hinting at a polarized debate. Yet, the rapid dominance of one mode of composition seems to have stifled the emergence and unfolding of alternative versions. Over time, many who initially resisted the culling shifted their stance, whereas the staunch opponents seemed to coalesce around a particular mode of composition.

It would be interesting to consider if, had the controversy unfolded differently, other modes of composition might have emerged. In this regard, the literature in MOS has already highlighted the existence of purification tactics aimed at excluding points of view based on cosmologies, ontologies, epistemologies and world-making practices that are different from those of the majority (Jääskeläinen, 2023). Tactics aimed at invalidating alternative modes of composing the park's multispecies community were similarly observed in this controversy, making the paucity of versions somewhat unsurprising. Indeed, opponents to the culling were labelled as overly emotional, in contrast to the proponents of this solution, who would assertedly rely on reason to support their point of view. For example, a management professor and columnist

stated that those who defend the deer "are enwrapped in raw emotion and sentimentality without the slightest rational argument [Facal, J., 2023, August 3rd]." Labelling the opposing viewpoint as "sentimentality" or "having a Bambi syndrome" appears to serve the purpose of diminishing the point of view of those who are being "emotional".

Two modes of composition were prominent during the controversy. By presenting them on an equal footing, I aim to address the demand for perplexity, ensuring that each version is granted room to unfold—sometimes even erring on the side of excess when there's a tendency towards deficit ("un peu de trop quand on a tendance au trop peu") (Despret, 2002, p. 145). In the following pages, I propose to refer to these two alternative modes of composition as "detachment" and "attachment." Table 1 provides an overview of the key features of these modes of composition.

While modes of composition are not attached to actors (i.e. actors can and do mobilize different modes of composition), this controversy progressively evolved in such a way that modes of composition were highly polarized. The mode of detachment was mostly (although not exclusively) put forward by the members of the municipal administration, while the mode of attachment was generally put forward by a small, but very vocal, group of citizens who opposed the culling.

	Attachment	*Detachment*
Scale of reference	Situation	Abstract, for example an ideal model ("ecological balance") or a population (the deer, the natural parks…)
Purpose of the arbitrations	Fulfill one's responsibilities	Solve a problem through technical/managerial means
Preferred forms of knowledge	Specific and relational	Universalizing

Table 1 Modes of composition of the multispecies community in the Parc Michel-Chartrand controversy

6.1. DETACHMENT

A first mode of composition of the multispecies community, which I labelled "detachment," consists in treating the spheres of activity of the deer (and more broadly, of the park's

"ecosystem") and those of humans separately. The notion of detachment does not imply that the decisions are taken lightly or suggest indifference to the fate of the deer. It describes a way of conceptualizing relationships, particularly those between humans and other species, within this multispecies community.

According to this mode of composition, the interpretation of the situation is that Parc Michel-Chartrand is an ecosystem in peril, in no small part due to the overpopulation of deer in the park. The criterion that is most referred to in order to evaluate and qualify the state of the park is the notion of "ecological balance." For example, the consultative committee created by the administration was named "consultative committee on the ecological balance of Parc Michel-Chartrand." Furthermore, the vice-president of the executive committee explained in a session of the City Council: "Nature operates with a balance, which we call the ecological balance. It's a balance between prey and predators. And when there aren't enough predators, unfortunately, humans have to intervene because we have disrupted these ecosystems [Tabarah, J., 2021, December 14th]." Maintaining the ecological balance of the park would thus, in a certain way, guarantee the continuity of the "nature" of the park. Because the overpopulation of deer disrupts this balance, a human intervention is needed to maintain the state of the nature; otherwise, the park's ecological integrity is at risk.

Although the exact nature of the "peril" looming over the park is not explicitly stated, the threat is repeated on multiple occasions. For example, during a press conference, the vice-president of the executive committee states: "If we don't do something quickly, it's unfortunate, but we will lose the park. There won't be a park anymore" [Tabarah, J., 2022, July 20th]. The diagnosis of the situation is therefore a very general one, targeted at an entity, the park, believed to be in such a precarious state that it requires immediate (and drastic) human intervention. Humans are thus considered as external to the situation, detached from it, and called upon to assess and intervene in it.

The omnipresence of the notion of ecological balance in the debate is interesting, and seems to attest to the power of this particular conception of living together. Behind the concept of ecological balance lies a type of multispecies political ideal, where each species would occupy a defined place and function, in "balance" with other species. Humans are, in this scenario, considered to exist outside of the multispecies community. Interestingly, the concept of "ecological balance" is not itself unproblematic in its discipline of origin (Cuddington, 2001), especially as anthropogenic disruptions are increasingly present (Coulson, 2021). This political

ideal nevertheless provides criteria both for diagnosing and resolving the problems at hand. The absolute priority is to preserve the ecosystem of the park and the ways of life of the greatest number of "desirable" natural species. The criteria for exclusions and inclusions in this protected environment remain somewhat unclear, but the deer are certainly excluded due to their destructive way of worlding, which classifies them as undesirable. The idea of ecological balance also provides a logical solution to the problem, namely, reducing the number of deer. The solutions that are needed to attain this ideal arrangement of beings thus takes on a technical and managerial nature, with the objective being the regulation of the number of representatives from different species.

The choice of technical means to be implemented is also based on a form of generalization, scalability, and even standardization. This time, it is not a matter of relying on an ideal model, but rather of detaching the deer from their context. For instance, some participants put the situation into perspective in order to evaluate it on a larger scale. In other words, the discussion is no longer about the deer of this park and what should be done about them at this place and time, but becomes about an abstract population, i.e., the specificities are eluded. For example, the mayor compares the potential culling with the deer that are hunted in the province: "When you consider the fact that 50,000 deer are hunted every year in Québec, and now we're only talking about a few dozen… [Fournier, C. 2022, October 13th]". The scale of reference thus moves from a local situation and local problem (is it appropriate to kill a few dozen deer in this situation?) to a more general one (is it appropriate to kill a few dozen deer from the whole population of deer?).

In the same manner, the solutions and strategies that are chosen should be applicable to all situations where similar diagnoses (i.e. deer overpopulation) are made. In other words, they should be generalizable. For example, the mayor rejects the possibility of enclosing the park by stating: "That's not a feasible solution because it's not replicable. Are we going to start creating a zoo in Parc Michel-Chartrand, a zoo in Boisé du Tremblay, a zoo all over Québec wherever there's a deer overpopulation? […] So, sure, the situation in Parc Michel-Chartrand is important, but we also have to consider all the others [Fournier, C., 2022, January 27th". This demonstrates that the frame of reference is once again broadened. The organization of multispecies relationships is not seen as something that is created locally, but rather as general principles that can be applied to a variety of problematic situations to resolve them.

Another element that distinguishes the mode of detachment is the type of knowledge that is privileged to make the situation intelligible. Indeed, one of the recurring issues in multispecies controversies (and multispecies research more generally) is "who can claim to be the spokesperson for whom, and based on what types of evidence?" In the logic of detachment, the dedicated spokesperson are scientists (and experts informed by science), equipped with facts created in their own system of evidence. For example, when activists protest the deer count reported by the government's biologists, they take the initiative to conduct their own deer count in the park to inform decision-making. Confronted with these new numbers, the vice-president of the executive committee retorts: "The City of Longueuil will always follow the advice of the real, recognized, experts from the Québec government. We can't just trust any organization that comes up with numbers! [Tabarah, J. 2022, November 15th]."

Scientific knowledge is similarly mobilized to settle a multitude of arbitration, where its facts become a general source of authority (Stengers, 2017). Interestingly, this mobilization of scientific knowledge in this context is less the effort of scientists who have studied the park, and more that of members of the administration. For example, to support his position, the vice-president of the executive committee thus mobilizes experts and scientists: "There is an almost unanimous recommendation from experts […]. There will always be dissenting voices […] that may bring up other excessively interesting points. […] But as elected officials, we absolutely have to rely on science." [Tabarah, J., 2020, November 17th].

Science is also used to determine the appropriate method to be employed in reducing the deer population: "So, if we want to protect and save our beautiful Parc Michel-Chartrand, we have only one possibility, one logical and scientific option that presents itself to us, and in this case, it's euthanasia. [Tabarah, J., 2021, December 14th]". The forms of authority that enable decision-making come from scientists and experts. For example, in this quote from the mayor, she indicates that citizen consultation is possible, but ultimately, it is the scientists who will be called upon to make the final decision:

> it's a decision that is first based on citizen consultation, which brought together experts and scientists, so it's both a participatory decision and a decision based on science. For me, it's essential to follow science in this matter, as well as in others, […] and it will be the case for all the decisions that our administration will have to make. We will rely on science when taking a stance [Fournier, C. 2021, December 2nd].

6.2. ATTACHMENT

The second mode of composition of the multispecies community, which I refer to as "attachment," involves focusing on the specificities of the situation and its multispecies relationships, and in particular on the ties that bind humans and other species.

In contrast with the mode of detachment, the reference model here is not an abstract, ideal model of multispecies politics, but rather the situation itself, and particularly the unique relationships that have developed over time. These relationships entail that the deer of Parc Michel-Chartrand cannot be treated as "just any" deer. A citizen mentions, for example, "We shouldn't forget that the deer of Parc Michel-Chartrand, they are semi-domesticated. […] I'm not a specialist for the other parks that are wild […]. But at least in the Parc Michel-Chartrand, it's a special case. […] These are domesticated deer. [Blanchette, R., 2023, April 27th]". In the absence of a general model to which one could refer to settle the matter, this composition method therefore requires focusing on the specificities of the situation.

Particular emphasis is placed on the relationships of responsibility that have been formed over time. Some activists specifically note that the deer were there before us, and that it is "us," humans, who have confined them in this space and allowed them to proliferate. Some of these deer have chosen to remain in the park, and over time, relationships of familiarity have developed, to the extent that many of these deer now tolerate human presence. During approximately twenty years, and up to about five years ago, the city had also been feeding the deer in order to prevent them from venturing outside the park, where they could cause road collisions and where they would graze on the plants in neighbouring yards. This practice may have facilitated the deer's increased proliferation by providing a consistent food source, and it may also have contributed to their habituation to human presence, along with creating dependency ties.

In this view, the community thus has a responsibility towards the past and the role of humans in the emergence of the problematic situation. It is therefore emphasized that it is not so much the deer, but rather the humans who have been "worlding badly" in this situation. A citizen raises the point:

> it's us in the city who created this situation. People stroll around, kids go up to the deer and pet them […] and everyone takes pictures. So now the deer, they've lost their wildness. They're not like the deer we hunt, the 40,000 who run away as soon as they

> see humans. These are deer that actually trust us, that come right up to us. We're the ones who created this whole situation in the city [Grignon, R., 2022, August 23rd].

This sense of responsibility and accountability towards the state of affairs is what engages and mobilizes some of the participants to the controversy. Admittedly, mistakes were made in the composition of the multispecies community, which resulted in the deer worlding in such a way that they now crush other species' ways of living. However, this responsibility for the past only strengthens the commitment to the deer—not necessarily in order to allow them to continue to live as usual, but rather so that *from there*, things can collectively be made otherwise.

When it comes to deciding on a course of action, the issue is thus not finding technical solutions to an external problem, but rather starting from the situation itself in order to collectively transform it. Technical measures such as sterilization, fencing the park, or even relocating the deer may be included in the responses, but the relationships with the species of the park remain the starting point. For instance, in a statement, the SPCA asserts that "the city of Longueuil should lead the way by demonstrating that ethical and innovative wildlife management, based on the best possible scientific approaches, is possible (Desaulniers, n.d.)."

The forms of knowledge on which this composition mode relies are situated and specific, stemming in particular from a direct knowledge of the park, and a curiosity about "who are *these* deer, and how do *they* behave?" For instance, we can contrast the statements of some scientists that the deer are undernourished due to their number that exceed the carrying capacity of the park, with the observations of a citizen who visit the park every day: "Me, I'm the one who spent the most time with them this year. I went there every day during winter. And I can tell you, they're not skinny, they're not undernourished, and they're not suffering. They're vigorous. [Grignon, R. 2022, August 23rd]". In a short documentary they produced, these activists also show images of the deer to support these claims. Activists thus question some of the scientific facts based on their own systems of evidence, which are derived from their observations and direct knowledge of the park.

The example of the number of deer in the park is also interesting. The projections made by biologists state that there are 107 deer in the park. Meanwhile, a group of citizens who fed the deer during the winter, and thus regularly observed them, consistently tallied them at around 60. When a count was conducted by helicopter, activists retorted that "the issue with using a helicopter is that it generates noise and operates during daylight, and it can be pretty scary for

the deer. Deer are really nervous animals [Lapierre, J. 2022, November 27th]", further explaining that in a small space like the Park, it can be easy to count the same deer several times. Therefore, scientific systems of evidence are being challenged by alternative systems of evidence, which are based on the specificities of the situation.

What may be perceived in another perspective as sacrificing everyone for the benefit of the deer is seen here as acknowledging our obligation towards the deer, which cannot be evaded, even if the park is indeed facing deterioration. Therefore, the attachment construction mode involves emphasizing the existing connections between species in the community, even if they may be altered using suitable technical means.

7. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In my review of the literature on multispecies politics in management and organization studies, I identified three challenges associated with organizing and managing multispecies collectives. The first challenge pertained to the active involvement of other species in organizational processes. The situation of Parc Michel-Chartrand also reflects this, as despite the ecological vocation of the park and the city's intention to establish it as a natural space, the activities of various species thwart its plans. For instance, invasive plants take over entire sections of the park, insects lead to the demise of thousands of trees, and the rapid proliferation of deer results in overgrazing of vulnerable plants.

Despite the city's numerous attempts at managing and controlling these agencies, this case illuminates the organizational (and arguably managerial) capabilities of other species, and their resilience against our attempts at control. The contrast between this observation and the mode of composition of *detachment*, which was dominant in the controversy, is particularly interesting in that regard. On the one hand, the idea of an ecological balance supposes that nature has to be managed in order to be maintained, whether through the spontaneous intervention of natural phenomena or through human hands and their technical means. On the other hand, more-than-human species are relentlessly disorganizing, troublesome, and never easily managed (Sage et al., 2016). While managerial and teleological approaches to the organization of nature have had some relative and momentary "successes" in controlling nature—such as with plantations (Tsing, 2022)—there are growing indications that our ability to control other species (and natural phenomena more broadly) is quickly waning (Stengers, 2013; Tsing, 2022). This raises questions about the limitations of this mode of composition,

especially if it is to remain dominant. More importantly, it underscores the need to cultivate alternative versions and allow them to flourish and produce their effects. This isn't to suggest that technical and managerial means should automatically be discarded; instead, the repertoire of ways to understand and intervene in these multispecies communities should be broadened and made more complex, rather than simplified.

This idea carves out a role for MOS researchers in social transformation. Despret's concept of "version", especially within the context of controversy analysis, highlights different modes of composition and gives voice to perspectives that might otherwise be invalidated or marginalized because they don't align with certain modernity-derived conceptions (Jääskeläinen, 2023). The role of a researcher investigating a controversy certainly wouldn't be to resolve it, but rather to illuminate these different versions and prevent some of them from being suppressed. Naturally, it is ultimately up to the actors of the controversy to make choices and bear the consequences of these choices. However, the act of making visible the myriad ways to construct and address a collective problem constitutes in itself a potent political gesture.

Secondly, extent literature also showed the inherent indeterminacy of animals. Once again we find examples of that here, as the indeterminacies about "who are the deer and how do they behave". In a manner reminiscent of O'Doherty's (2016) observations regarding the construction of a penthouse for the resident cat in an airport terminal, this indeterminacy can become the focal point of power struggles. Here, different parties, drawing from their own systems of evidence, attempt to impose their own determinations regarding the nature of the deer and of the park more broadly. For example, there were disputes over the appropriate methods to count these deer, disputes around the behaviour of "deer in general" versus the behaviour of "these specific deer", etc.

Just as we cannot claim to ever fully control other species, we also cannot claim to entirely and permanently resolve the indeterminacy of the more-than-human, especially in the open-ended contexts of multispecies communities like an urban park. If adopting posthumanist research practices calls for displacing our inquiries from a sole focus on humans, it shouldn't mean granting a single form of knowledge the power to represent the beings whose presence we invoke. For instance, in this controversy, certain scientific practices (and even more so the deployment of scientific knowledge by some participants) were evidently used to silence and dismiss what was deemed as "irrational" forms of attachment (Stengers, 2013) to the deer. In this regard, the concept of "version" used in this article provides once again an interesting

alternative. To echo Tsing (2015) when she discusses the challenges of accounting for a landscape and its more-than-human inhabitants, achieving this requires tapping into a diverse array of forms of knowledge: "including our combined forms of mindfulness, myths and tales, livelihood practices, archives, scientific reports, and experiments (p. 159)".

Finally, as previously found in the literature, the politics of multispecies encounters in this case are also imbued with significant ethical considerations. This becomes especially evident when considering the concrete realities that might be brought about by the decisions proposed by participants. As the actors have shown, there is a significant distinction between agreeing that a certain number of deer should be excluded from the park—a viewpoint that many initially subscribed to, especially in the early stages of the controversy—and determining the methods of realizing this exclusion. Whether these methods include trapping the deer to euthanize them, hunting them with a crossbow, relocating them to nearby regions or wildlife sanctuaries, introducing predators, building fences, feeding / not feeding them, sterilizing the does, and so on, the ethical issues would be far from resolved simply by a decision to exclude the deer. In this situation just as in other multispecies controversies, ethical consequences are intrinsic to the arbitrations that are to be made: while inaction likely means that some ways of life will disappear, intervening will also inevitably impact beings and ways of life.

Given all the uncertainties discussed previously, and also considering the multitude of ways of life affected by the outcome of this controversy, it becomes clear that even the best utilitarian calculations or animal welfare codes cannot resolve the ethical issues of this situation. At the very least, they cannot allow for actions to be taken with the detachment stemming from the self-assured belief of doing the "right" thing (Haraway, 2008).

In this paper, I have contrasted two modes of composing the multispecies communities, which I labelled "detachment" and "attachment". While I have emphasized two modes of composition, others could probably be identified—if not in this specific controversy then certainly in other multispecies controversies. These modes not only shape how the problem is defined, but they also specify the type of information and the criteria of valuation considered relevant for decision-making, as well as suggest specific types of action that could be taken. In doing so, they provide ways to organize the multispecies community by establishing "rules of conduct", hierarchies and boundaries. Ultimately, they reflect differing perspectives on how relationships between beings should be organized so that species can "live well" together.

Each of these construction modes has distinct consequences for the community, which remain ultimately unpredictable and incalculable. These consequences, and these differences, matter. For example, the decision to cull the deer not only results in the death—and likely suffering—of these animals, but it may also need to be repeated in a few years. Conversely, choosing not to kill them may result in the disappearance of certain species from the park, and in invasive species overtaking the park. As Haraway (2008) reminds us, "ways of living and dying matter: Which historically situated practices of multispecies living and dying should flourish? There is no outside from which to answer that mandatory question; we must give the best answers we come to know how to articulate, and take action, without the god trick of self-certainty (p. 88)".

Regardless of the final outcome, it appears that the different modes of constructing the multispecies community have not had equal opportunities to fully unfold during the controversy. On one hand, the aforementioned contrast between "rationality" and "emotions" has contributed to dismissing approaches that rely on affective relationships and attachments. On the other hand, despite the contestations it has faced in recent years, science still wields significant power, including the ability to close debates when it is deemed that "science" has spoken. Although this certainly does not hold true in every case (for example Bowden et al., 2021, have shown how scientific authority yielded to popular authority in the development of climate adaptation policies), it seems to have occurred here.

In this controversy, this had the effect of shifting what was primarily an ethical and political issue (how to live well together) to what is essentially a scientific matter to be resolved (mostly by scientists) through the evidential system of scientific disciplines. It is undeniable that scientific and technical considerations play a significant role in this controversy, and I am by no means suggesting that these questions and facts should have been disregarded in the discussion. However, the relevance of scientific and technical matters does not necessarily need to elude larger political and ethical questions at hand. Rather than criticizing science, this situation prompts us to examine the power vested in certain scientists and scientific facts to settle debates that are fundamentally political in nature.

A contribution of this article thus lies in proposing, through the posthumanist analysis of multispecies controversies, a different role for scientists, and in particular for MOS researchers. The analysis of multispecies controversies first refocuses debates on the processes of political and ethical construction that take place during controversies, rather than merely focusing on their outcome. For instance, while this article does not end with the formulation of a solution

that would transcend the debate, what it does is bring to the forefront the important political questions that are at stake. In doing so, it "slows down" the controversy by momentarily suspending the authoritative power of specific ontologies, epistemologies, value systems, and so on that might otherwise close off the discussion. Similarly, the analysis of multispecies controversies also offers an opportunity to improve the visibility, and thus the importance, of beings and ways of being that are perhaps less able or interested in participating in the controversies. In doing so, it broadens the scope of possibilities regarding the organization and management of multispecies communities, surely an important endeavour as the Anthropocene compels us to rethink our ways of living (well) together.

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APPENDIX A

A POSTHUMANIST MODE OF ATTENTION AND ENGAGEMENT

This table summarizes the four main "virtues" characterizing the posthumanist mode of attention and engagement that was put into practice in the study of the Parc Michel-Chartrand controversy. The descriptions provided here are merely tentative, and are mostly for illustrative purposes.

	Description
Curiosity	The researcher should "do the *work* of paying attention" (Haraway, 2008, p. 82) and be actively seeking to know more. This curiosity must be especially turned towards other species and their entanglement in multispecies communities. Accordingly, efforts should be made to document the versions of other species, as a way to frame controversies as more than merely "human" situations.
Politeness	Practicing inquiry with politeness involves recognizing that the controversy belongs to its participants (Venturini, 2010). Accordingly, the researcher should be particularly attuned, receptive and attentive to the participants of the controversy, refraining in particular from imposing interpretive frameworks and instead remaining open to unexpected discoveries (Haraway, 2016, p. 127). Such politeness manifests as an openness that is not solely cognitive but deeply embodied.
Perplexity	In controversies dominated by seemingly self-evident versions, alternative versions still provide significant contributions. It is therefore vital to recognize these alternative versions, and to ensure they are given an opportunity to unfold. One way to do so is to strive for a "middle ground", which entails doing "a little too much" when "not enough" seems to be the rule (Despret, 2002, p. 143).
Responsibility	Recognizing the plurality of versions doesn't mean embracing relativism, where all versions are deemed equivalent, ethically or otherwise. Every version, each way of composing the world, carries its consequences. These consequences must be faced without eluding our responsibilities, but also with care and respect. There is no outside from which to answer the difficult questions posed by the composition of multispecies communities no possible self-certainty to absolve our responsibility (Haraway, 2008, p. 88).