



Lioness in Ngorongoro, Tanzania | Photo by Elisabetta Corrà

## **How Do We Experience Wilderness? The Extraordinary versus Intensity Elisabetta Corrà**

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*How do we experience wilderness? Axel Honneth suggested that love is a foundation for discussing how good societies work and conflict is the other side of love. Individuals discover each other by comparison, opposition and open collision. In the absence of love, the Other is reduced to a commodity. We detect this attitude in the use of faunas, sometimes in wilderness too. But the real experience of wild is an opportunity of crossing, exploring, mixing. Intensity and not consumption is the measure of reality and it's needed to acknowledge the status of the other species in the chain of life.*

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How can we experience wilderness? Studying the relevance of conflicts in the modern society, the German philosopher [Axel Honneth](#) has suggested that love ([in Hegel's meaning](#)) can be a solid foundation for discussing how good societies work. In a network of effective relations conflict is needed. Individuals discover each other by comparison, opposition, and open collision. Conflict is not an obstacle to the peaceful coexistence but a step in the building process of the entire social system.

The acknowledgement, Honneth explains, is to recognize that our own identity is shaped by the nature of other individuals. Acknowledgement is a respectful way to live together because it does not switch off the power of the Other in a flat comfort zone, but pushes everyone to pay attention to the complexity of the social environment. But, in our vision of wilderness, can we still accept conflict?

In Honneth's view *love* is crucial: good relations imply the choice to move into a new territory. A failed attitude to love –with the inevitable conflicts it instigates– leads to failed ethics. In the absence of desire of discovery, the Other's rights disappear. The Other is reduced to a commodity. This is what today we see in the general use of faunas. Sometimes, unfortunately, also in the protected areas we like to call *wilderness*.

Recently [africageographic.com](http://africageographic.com) has published two photos that explains this situation best. In the first one, [two male lions hunt a kudu](#) among cars at Kruger NP, South Africa, while tourists enthusiastically film the scene (Photo: Carolyn Dunford). In the second, [a Burrard-Lucas photo](#), a majestic maned lion lies in the grass: it's early in the morning and the adult male sniffs the foggy air of a new day in Zambia.

Kruger's sequence expresses the taste for the extraordinary (worth being posted on FB), Zambia's picture communicates an overwhelming intensity. What is the difference? The extraordinary seeks something beyond reality. Intensity forces us to experience reality in Honneth's meaning. Reality is not a property but a landscape.

In the anthropocentric civilization the extraordinary is an escape from boring that tends to make a gadget of the living Planet. A gadget is like the last iPhone: you can always replace it with a new model. But an animal is someone we meet in his own range. So the experience of reality is an opportunity of crossing, exploring, mixing. Nevertheless, in our technological world intensity is a sort of "castaway emotion". The dominant mindset prescribes a limitless fulfilment with exceptional events and objects (a lion jumping out on the street) with no space for unexpected beauty. This is the reason why the crisis of intensity is a crisis of our capacity to recognise the reality.

Wilderness cannot be a market place for social networks. To really experience wild places, you have to come into a untamed country to meet vibrant animals and not glamorous beasts. The fact is that the extraordinary responds to a consumerist way of thinking, while intensity reflects a cognitive stance: allowing the world to "contaminate" us with its discrepancies and faults. In order to come into wilderness –where species are not domesticated– saying "yes I do!" to intensity is needed.

As [Giorgio Agamben](#) explains, what is not-daily-life is the measure of the substantial *aporia* that carves the Planet and ourselves. And it's through this *aporia* –evolutionary speaking, the far origin of who we are– that we can open the door to animal presence. This kind of intensity is the perfect opposite to consumerism. It enhances the phylogenetic diversity of wilderness by seeking out a net of stories: animals, plants, lands. And us.

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Elisabetta Corrà is a free-lance journalist specializing in extinction and biodiversity. Corrà currently reports for the Italian newspaper *La Stampa*. Corrà holds a degree in Classical Phylology and published her first book *Un giorno a Gerusalemme* in 2009.

Corrà is particularly interested in the eco-cultural pattern of extinction events and evolutionary identity versus cultural identity. This is the starting point of a wide Conservation journalism project called [Tracking Extinction Legacy](#). The first chapter, from Thailand and Vietnam, is called *Tracking Extinction Bushmeat* was [published in June by La Stampa](#). The second chapter – *Tracking Extinction Lions* – will be a long stay in Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park in South Africa/Botswana.

Corrà's research comprehends a new "ecological" approach to psychoanalysis, which you can find more about on [marcofocchi.com](http://marcofocchi.com) –a blog on the edge that works to put Jacques Lacan's thoughts "front and center" in the debate about the contemporary society. Corrà also authored *Fossil Societies – How we chose to ignore climate change*, a study about climate and psychoanalysis. Learn more about Corrà's work [here](#).

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