

## 7. Epilogue: towards a resting pulse of coexistence

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### Intentional and unintentional consequences of following wolves as method

How do you, as a reader, feel about living with wolves at the end of this book? On the whole, much of it revolved around the conflicts with and about wolves. The affects that accompany them excite, agitate, sometimes disturb, and often overlay more subliminal affects in the public perception that could also show wolves in a different light beyond the conflicts. As the guiding principle of my research was to 'follow the wolves', this ethnography inevitably had to take up and address what the wolves pointed out to me. Due to the great challenges of following wolves (see Chapter 2), I have certainly missed some aspects, and I feel similar to the speaker from the Ministry of the Environment (see Chapter 6), who had to admit that we really do not know what the wolves are doing most of the time. So this book can only shed some light on some aspects of life with wolves and has to leave a lot in the dark. And that's a good thing, because the 'transparent wolf' would be just as suspicious to me as the 'transparent human'.

The picture of wolves drawn here is therefore more conflict-laden than it should be.<sup>1</sup> For example, the wolf critics got a whole chapter, while the wolf friends did not. But this was necessary, because the accusations against wolves are serious, the emotions are intense, and the potential for conflict is high. Understanding how and why wolves can create such charged atmospheres is therefore a priority. At the same time, these charged atmospheres provide an

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1 This seems to be an inevitable side effect of following Donna Haraway's dictum of 'staying with the trouble', see *Making kin in the Chthulucene* (= Experimental futures Technological lives, scientific arts, anthropological voices), Durham/London: Duke University Press 2016.

opportunity to show that they are never created by wolves alone. Wolves get entangled and become part of socio-cultural processes and negotiations in a society that we might call 'more-than-human', despite the fact that animals rarely appear in public discourse as agents in their own right. Hopefully this book has shown how different groups of human actors, as well as a variety of domestic and wild animals, are entangled in wolf atmospheres and that it is precisely the interplay in this affective arrangement that makes atmospheres so powerful. As a result, we can now take a different, anthropologically informed critical look at 'wolf-critical' atmospheres.

In this book I have also tried to take a look at the wolves beyond the conflicts. Chapter 2, for example, begins as an 'animals-only' story, with humans only appearing in the last part of the chapter. In this way, the chapter offers a first approach to a quasi-wolf perspective, showing what else wolves do when they are not in conflict with humans, but also how a spontaneous encounter with humans in their everyday lives can very quickly become the seed of a conflict (I could have mentioned that the encounter described here was not the only one in the area and that there were also deterrent actions by the very rudimentary wolf management at the time). The etho-ethnological perspective adopted here has precisely this advantage: it makes us think of wolves as agents with the power to act and have an impact in a very concrete way, and it encourages us to question our anthropocentric view where necessary.

### **The 'resting pulse of coexistence' and the 'queasy sometimes-feeling'**

There has been a shift in the scientific literature on wolves over the last twenty years or so towards an emphasis on coexistence rather than conflict. Constructively, this work reflects a desire to prevent science itself from creating or exacerbating conflict by treating the wolf exclusively in the context of conflict. Instead, the perspective is shifted to what is being sought: successful coexistence in the future. Something similar can be observed with the return of wolves to Germany: Wolf managers and supporters are keen to emphasise the possibility of (peaceful) coexistence, while wolf critics and the media focus on the conflicts. In the three years of my research, the conflictual version of living with wolves seemed to dominate – I explained why with the concept of affect management in Chapter 6. From an anthropological point of view, it makes little sense to try to redress this 'imbalance' (i.e. overly one-sided and insufficiently

complex views) simply on principle, or even to replace the concept of conflict with that of coexistence by purely rhetorical means.

The question is rather: How did this imbalance, this hardening of public discourse towards conflict rather than coexistence, come about? Apart from the many reasons that I hope have become clear in the course of this book, it is important to remember that the return of wolves to Germany is not a singular event, but a process that has been going on for more than twenty years and is far from complete. Wolves have not repopulated the country all at once, but year by year and region by region. In each new region, the wolf can cause excitement, livestock owners are usually unprepared, knowledge about wolves is low, uncertainty is high, and wolf critics stir up the mood. Because of this lack of preparation, the likelihood of wolf attacks is quite high, and so many of the conditions are in place that initially often lead to a state of permanent affective excitement in the region. It is therefore not surprising that the public discourse as a whole is under *sustained affective fire*, fed as it is by so many small regional conflicts, at least one of which is always boiling over somewhere. The picture that emerges is of a conflict-ridden, never-quiet coexistence with wolves suggesting that successful coexistence is impossible now and in the future. However, this is an unlikely scenario as we can expect habituation effects to develop, including a habituation in how we deal with wolf-related affects. We should therefore ask: What is the *resting pulse of coexistence with wolves* once they have arrived properly and their presence is no longer perceived as new and alien?

I would like to answer this question and thereby conclude this book with a brief look at a small town that has had twenty years of experience with wolves. Neustadt, in the municipality of Spreetal in Saxony, is located right next to the military training area Oberlausitz, where the female wolf GW0006f and the male wolf GW001m founded the second pack in Germany in 2005: the Neustadt Pack (now called the Neustadt/Spreenberg Pack).<sup>2</sup> The female settled in the area as early as 2002 and attracted the attention of the Neustadt residents by regularly appearing on the outskirts of the village during the mating season and howling through the nights in vain search of a mate. In the absence of a male wolf, she eventually mated with a male dog and produced Germany's first wolf hybrids. However, two of the pups died early, while the others were caught in

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2 The first years in and around Neustadt are described in detail in Stoepel, Beatrix: Expeditionen ins Tierreich: Wölfe in Deutschland, Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe 2004.

elaborate driven hunts using arrays of flags to direct the wolves. It was not until male wolf GW001m arrived from Poland the following year that a litter of pure wolf offspring was born.

Throughout the 1990s, individual wolves passed through the region from time to time, but these were the first to settle. Their arrival caused a great deal of excitement in and around Neustadt. In the region, it was mainly the hunters who mobilised against the wolves. There were not many livestock owners in the municipality (apart from people with chickens in their backyards, a shepherd, and a cattle farmer), but anger quickly ignited when the first sheep were killed. The shepherd eventually calmed down though as he quickly learnt to deal with the wolves' presence with new herd protection measures and the support of the Society for the Protection of Wolves, local wolf friends, and two biologists who had come to Neustadt to study the wolf population. But for some, the dual presence of wolves and wolf friends was a double thorn in the flesh. Two women from Neustadt remember the early years:

[Resident 1]: It really boiled over at the beginning. It was really bad; it had been really bad for many years. And because of the fact that they were so active here, [the two wolf researchers] from LUPUS ...

[Interviewer]: Did it then boil up here like this because LUPUS was active here?

[Resident 2]: They were the buffers. They were seen as the bad guys ...

[Resident 1]: They were the foster parents of the wolves ...

[Resident 2]: They introduced them here ...

[Resident 1]: That's just how it was presented [...]. Yes, the two LUPUS women received quite a few threats [...].

[Interviewer]: Did you get the impression that it was really about the wolf? Or was it about something else and the wolf was just an excuse?

[Resident 1]: No, no ... it really was about the wolf.

[Resident 2]: Otherwise, there wouldn't have been these discussions. It was really ... it was about that.

[Resident 1]: Yes, yes, it was about the wolf, that the wolf is here as a competitor [...].

[Resident 2]: And as a danger [to humans] ...

[Resident 1]: As a danger ... yes, the fear of it. But the fear was also stirred up a lot, a lot by the hunters. They wanted to get those who had nothing to do with hunting on board.

As in Rosenthal many years later, hunters were the driving force against the wolves. According to my interviewees in Neustadt, one in particular, the chairman of the association *Sicherheit und Artenschutz* (Security and Species Protection), which was founded near Kamenz in 2004 (and later also became active in Rosenthal), was always stirring things up and trying to win over the entire population of the region to his cause—sometimes with success.

So, while the local hunters were increasingly agitating against the wolf and the wolf researchers of the newly founded LUPUS Institute in the first few years, a completely different development started in parallel, which made Neustadt *the* wolf town of Germany (unnoticed by most Neustadt residents themselves). From the beginning, the wolf attracted scientists and journalists from Germany and abroad who wanted to learn more about the first wolves in Saxony from the Neustadt researchers. Then began the official wolf monitoring training courses, which have attracted participants from all over Germany every year since. The courses were developed and run in collaboration with one of Germany's leading animal trackers. His seminars attracted more and more interested people to Neustadt and Lusatia, and since then courses on tracking, environmental education, and much more have been held there several times a year in his wilderness school. Many course participants return here again and again, sometimes with their families, to learn more about wolves and the other wildlife in Lusatia. Two local nature guides (one from Neustadt, the other from nearby Hoyerswerda) have also been involved in wolf issues from the beginning, supporting the researchers' work and still offering walks in the wolf area and wolf seminars. Considering that tourism in this coal region would be an important economic factor for the post-coal era, it is surprising that the small-scale wolf tourism has gone unnoticed, even by the mayor of the municipality.

As the owner of the local guesthouse explained to me, this is probably because the wolf tourists tend to have little contact with the people of Neustadt

and are 'very focused' on the wolves and their nature hobbies. The only time they attract attention is when they walk barefoot through the town or when whole groups (of trackers) meet under the bridge to find otter or beaver tracks in the wet sediment, much to the amazement of the people of Neustadt. More conspicuous is the local nature guide who moved here many years ago and built a camp with log cabins and a campsite on the River Spree. His house and his 'wild garden' look very different from the neat houses and front gardens that you usually find in Neustadt. The 'wolf people' are sometimes 'unpleasantly' conspicuous in this sense; they have a reputation for not wanting to 'fit in' and integrate properly (and of course the locals know exactly who the handful of Green Party voters are who are now—unfortunately—present in their otherwise more conservative community).

But over the years, people have got used to both wolf friends and wolves. The hunters still don't like the wolf, but they keep their anger largely to themselves. The out-of-town hunting guests, who came to Neustadt less frequently for a few years, are now coming more often again. There haven't been any wolf kills for a long time (there is almost no animal husbandry, apart from chickens, and the fight against hawks and foxes is more important here), although Neustadt is currently surrounded by three packs (the Neustadt/Spremberg Pack, the Mulkwitz Pack, and the Milkel Pack). Most of the people of Neustadt have never seen a wolf. Wolves are simply too unimportant to the everyday lives of the people here, and those who do not spend their nights out in the woods do not have much chance of seeing them.

It could be said that life with wolves in Neustadt and the surrounding area is no longer so triggered by the great highs and lows of public affects, atmospheres, and moods that were the subject of this book. The resting pulse of coexistence is by and large low—albeit with a discontented grumble from the hunting community. Wolves raise this resting pulse mainly in a certain affective mode: as a *queasy feeling*. By this I mean an unpleasant emerging feeling of diffuse anxiety that is not yet fully formed. This queasy feeling pulls you out of a world that feels familiar and draws your attention to something potentially threatening. Here is a brief example from the life of a woman in Neustadt:

When I had my children, we didn't behave any differently. We told them, 'please go into the forest' instead of saying, 'stay at home'. But they don't go of their own accord [...], they're so scared, they're afraid someone might come. They are more afraid of people, that something might happen. Children are so sensitised to this nowadays. They don't go into the forest because

they think they might meet a stranger. But that they are afraid of wolves ... Although I have to say, I usually say, you don't have to be afraid and it's not all that bad. But once we went into the woods to get a Christmas tree [...] in the direction of the military training area [...], and we went there, the children were still quite small, and we spotted wolf tracks [...] and there were quite a few of them, so we made sure that we got the tree and went home. We didn't know how old they [the tracks] were, if the wolves were still there or if they were from a few days ago [...]. And the children, too, they noticed it immediately, 'Carry me!' I had to pick up the little one, and the big one, my husband had to carry him and the tree. But yes, it was a bit strange. You know it's nonsense, but somehow ...

We can see how even wolf tracks in the snow can fill you with an uneasy sense of foreboding and a desire to escape the situation. So one could say that a queasy feeling is somehow part of living with a large predator like the wolf. However, this does not mean that there is a constant queasy atmosphere in wolf country and that the queasy feeling is a constant companion in the lives of the people who live there. Rather, this queasy feeling is a *sometimes-feeling* that usually lies dormant in the background and only stirs up under certain conditions. The wolf-specific queasy feeling is also just one manifestation of a general feeling that has very different addressees. People may feel queasy in the forests not only because there are wolves there, but also because the forest is generally regarded a place of queasiness in Germany's cultural memory.<sup>3</sup> Encounters in the forest with potentially dangerous 'strangers' can also cause queasiness, as can encounters with large dogs on the loose, or with wild boars. The occasional queasy feeling seems to be part of life—including life with wolves. So one of the central questions that needs to be answered about the coexistence with wolves is: How much queasiness can we tolerate as a society? How much queasiness are we willing and able to allow on the fringes of our lifeworld—knowing full well that we are not necessarily entitled to a life free of queasiness?

### **Coexistence with affect-guided thinking, sensibility and resilience**

These questions once again illustrate one of the central concerns of this book, which is to show that affects (including the queasy ones) are not simply

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3 See Lehmann, Albrecht: *Von Menschen und Bäumen: Die Deutschen und ihr Wald*, Reinbek: Rowohlt 1999.

'there' and should not be taken for granted. Affects are not only dynamic and therefore in a constant state of change, but they can also be worked with and shaped—both on a social and on an individual level. Successful coexistence does not depend solely on technological solutions (e.g. herd protection), but is above all a form of relationship building. This also includes how we actively deal with affects. *How we are affected by wolves does not follow any natural law but can be modulated by cultural and individual forms of sensitivity and affect regulation. How much we allow ourselves to be affected by wolves, how sensitive we are to their affective impacts, and under what conditions we try to control our affects (to show composure, not to lose our composure or to face the queasy with courage) will be revealed, developed, and negotiated in the coming years through our coexistence with wolves.*

Is this book then another appeal to take affects (a.k.a. concerns and worries) seriously? Or a counter-appeal from science to always return to rationality and reason? It is neither. The main purpose of this book is to overcome the speechlessness that has paralysed our discourse on wolves and affects for years, and to present a conceptual apparatus with the help of which one can think constructively not only *about* affects (from a seemingly neutral, objective, and unaffected distance), but *with* affects. Such *affect-guided thinking* requires attention to affective dynamics—in oneself and in others—but without passively letting them wash over one. *What is required is an active, reflexive attitude, one that allows itself to be guided by affects without being driven by them.* This attitude does not require sympathy [*Verständnis* in German] for those affected but an understanding [*Verstehen*] of how they affect and are affected by each other: Affect-guided thinking should make the affects themselves explicit, their arrangement-like connections visible, and their meanings comprehensible to the actors affected by them. This facilitates new discussions that can transcend the conventional dichotomy of rationality vs emotion instead of reproducing it along established lines.

This book has shown why affects are everywhere in the debate; why they nevertheless lead a shadowy existence; how the cultural value of rationality hinders a constructive approach to affects; in what manifestations affects occur; that affects are unfinished, processual, ambivalent; how individual affects are part of larger structures; how affects are felt both subjectively and intersubjectively and can themselves become an object to be processed; how affects are socio-culturally conditioned and what conditions intensify or diminish affects.

It is my hope that the path I propose here can contribute to a successful coexistence with wolves in two ways. It can help us to reflect carefully on and refine our sensitivity to the affective dynamics of coexistence, so that we as

a society become more adaptable to the new realities in times of the Anthropocene. For old, outdated notions of separate worlds of humans and animals, or culture and nature, with each living side by side in their respective allotted spheres, have proved obsolete. Whether we like it or not, the lifeworlds of humans and wild animals are becoming more and more entangled. Whether songbirds and moles in the garden, pigeons and raccoons on the roofs, ducks and nutrias in the rivers, wild boars in the playgrounds, red deer in the cornfields, or even wolves roaming through the suburbs of big cities and through villages: Our society is and has always been a more-than-human society, human life has always been a living-together with animals and other living beings. Sharing this society not only with beloved pets or useful farm animals, but also with wild animals that can sometimes become unpleasant, demands a lot of us humans: on the one hand, a *sensibility* for the right closeness and distance of this diverse coexistence and the coordination of our life rhythms; on the other hand, a *resilience* that enables us to let affects bounce off us from time to time, and that puts a stop to our sensibility when it degenerates into unhelpful irritability. For a successful coexistence with wolves in a more-than-human society, we must learn to distinguish when an increased sensitisation or when a desensitisation to wolf affects is the best response.

