

[HARDCOVER: US]

Humans, your animal's animal

Hannah Holmes puts mankind under the microscope and argues cross-species empathy and morality set us apart from other creatures

BY ELIZABETH LOPATTO
BLOOMBERG

What makes people different from other animals?

It's not language: That's shared by all kinds of social creatures, from prairie dogs to dolphins. It's not agriculture: Some ants also farm. It's not tools: Our primate cousins use them, and so do dolphins. Not medicine: Again, primates self-medicate.

The aim of Hannah Holmes' *The Well-Dressed Ape: A Natural History of Myself* is to remind us how integrated into the natural world we are, and she succeeds on most counts.

When scientists encounter something new, they describe its qualities: preferred food, physical traits, habitat, mating habits. Holmes cleverly applies this type of description to humans.

We begin with a tour of the body — what colors and shapes one can expect a human to come in, what the differences are between men and women. She peppers her exploration with cocktail-party-ready factoids: Pale skin is probably an adaptation to allow for more vitamin D to be produced. Our mouths are toxic, and a human bite can kill.

Though we aren't the fastest sprinters, there aren't many marathoner species besides us, Holmes says. Our strange, two-legged body is ideal for distance running, and few animals can keep going for as long as we can.

And then there is our strange trek up the food chain. We started as cat food, hunted on the savannah by tigers and lions. Once we got good with the tools, we started killing our former predators for fur. We're the apex predators now — and it might be the best anti-predator adaptation the world has yet seen.

There is, too, our propensity to guard our territory. Holmes notes that guests often indicate submission before entering an apartment: By knocking and waiting to be received, they show that they understand whose domain it is.

Our relationship with food is also worth considering. About six million children under the age of 5 die of malnutrition every year, but in developed countries, slenderness is an indicator of desirability. This might have something to do with our obsession with status, an obsession we share with most social animals.

Given all her quirky observations, I wish Holmes had resisted over-writing and trusted her material more. Sometimes, in a quest to be poetic, she writes sentences that don't even

Publication Notes



THE WELL-DRESSED APE: A NATURAL HISTORY OF MYSELF

BY HANNAH HOLMES

351 PAGES

RANDOM HOUSE

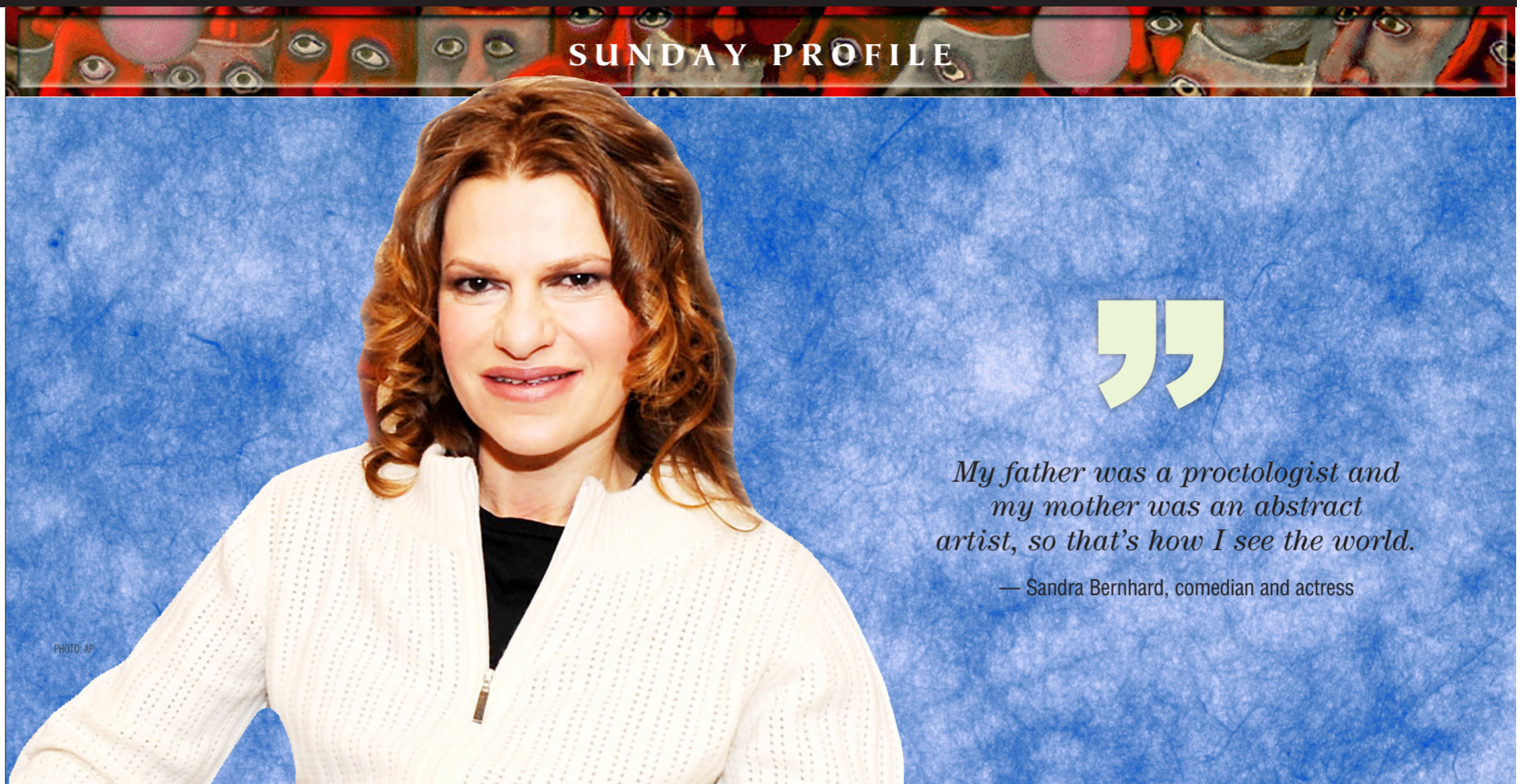
make sense: "If the jaws of our ancestors can only mumble that I'm equipped to eat anything, then I'd at least like to know how much — of whatever — I should consume today."

I think this is supposed to be a reflection on how the shape of our jaws allows us to eat omnivorously. But it just interrupts a perfectly interesting examination of the human diet.

This is particularly frustrating because Holmes' sharp observations can easily stand alone. For example, it certainly is weird that we, as a species, tend toward body modification: hair dye, makeup, tattoos, plastic surgery. It makes sense that the invisible hand of evolution is at work, and yet I hadn't considered it.

So what makes us human? While other social animals seem to show some moral tendencies, few reach the level of people. Rather than being nasty and brutish, we're remarkably empathetic — not only of each other, but toward other animals. Environmentalism is uniquely human, Holmes suggests. She notes that there are few animals that would allow their former predators — big cats like cougars — back onto their land in order to preserve the habitat.

Perhaps this seems like a politically expedient answer. I'd suggest religion, art and long-term abstract thought are also unique. Still, empathy, particularly cross-species empathy, isn't a bad contender. It's certainly a flattering one.



My father was a proctologist and my mother was an abstract artist, so that's how I see the world.

— Sandra Bernhard, comedian and actress

Sandra Bernhard: no holds barred

Sandra Bernhard dazzled in 'The King of Comedy,' befriended Madonna, berated Sarah Palin — and now she's taking her acid tongue to the UK

BY JOHN PATTERSON
THE GUARDIAN, LOS ANGELES

Sandra Bernhard shows up after a session at her gym in West Hollywood, relatively subdued, dressed for anonymity, no makeup in evidence. Her not-so-secret weapon, that angry slash of a mouth, is metaphorically holstered today. On screen it's usually highlighted, glossed in souped-up, self-satirizing shades of scarlet or vermilion. But what's most outrageous are the words it spits out.

WITH FRIENDS LIKE THIS ...

Over the last 25 years Bernhard's public persona has been diffused across stage shows, TV talk shows and guest appearances on TV series such as *Roseanne*. She was famously friends with Madonna in the late 1980s; Bernhard claimed to have slept with both Madonna and then husband Sean Penn. That friendship went south soon enough and Bernhard has remained blisteringly funny on Madonna's shortcomings ever since. Last year, the *New York Post* reported on a withering five-minute demolition prompted by a heckler asking, "Are you still friends with Madonna?" Bernhard — "in a mad, dark, five-minute freestyle" — robotically repeated the phrase, "We only got four minutes to save the world!"

Today, Bernhard is in a more reflective mood as she prepares to take *Without You I'm Nothing* to London. She says that she'll "try to add a little local color and commentary — I try to keep it as relevant as possible." Expect Sapphic reworkings of *Me and Mrs Jones* and *Fifty Ways to Leave Your Lover*, alongside sulphurously tart demolitions of celebs, divas and homophobes.

"I may not have fucked much with the past," Patti Smith once said, "but I've fucked plenty with the future." Bernhard has occasionally borrowed the line to express her own sense of being ahead of her time. She first burst on to the international scene in the early 1980s, starring as Masha in Martin Scorsese's *The King of Comedy*, a role that should have made her a star. Still in her 20s, and with

a face that startled more than it soothed, she was totally assured as the bratty, obsessive stalker who eventually kidnaps the object of her desire. But rather than making Bernhard a household name, the film established her as a woman to be feared; an antic, unsettling presence.

black culture from Flint. People in Arizona were very freaked out by people of color, otherness. It hasn't changed that much, but that also made me more compassionate." At 19, Bernhard split for Los Angeles, intent on a musical career. "But I find there's all these comedy clubs. So I started performing and eventually put songs into my act. Even though it wasn't the right atmosphere, I forced it in anyway and it really made me strong as a performer." She was surrounded by a generation of great comics: Robin Williams, Jay Leno, Arsenio Hall. Her breakthrough came when she was cast in *The Richard Pryor Show*. It only lasted four episodes, but it raised her profile. "Richard was totally cool. He was a very, very reserved kind of person, but he was not distant, he was not arrogant. He encouraged the young talent to really go for it."

Ever since, Bernhard's arrival in anyone else's project has brought with it a clear set of associations — the loudmouth with a sweet side, the ceaseless provocateur, the trouper with a fizzing brain. She may be cast as Nancy Bartlett on *Roseanne* — the first gay TV character to be played by an openly gay actor — or in a recurring guest part on *The L-Word*, but it's always Sandra Bernhard who shows up, trailing all those familiar traits.

POST-FEMINIST

She was even offered the role of Miranda in *Sex and the City*, but "the original script wasn't very good and they weren't paying much! And nobody liked that character — bitchy, unhappy, curmudgeonly. I'm not sure that show has done a lot for women." She defines her own work as post-feminist "because I'm too young to be an active part

of that first movement, in terms of fighting for basic women's rights, but I was strongly influenced by it when I was young ... Not that we haven't had to continue to work and fight — the patriarchy still rules the world. And it survives in all the other cultures, in Africa, the Middle East. I constantly remind people that there's no place that's absolutely safe for women except the Western cultures, where we're able to get away with basically anything — well, except when [former US president George W.] Bush was in office, when it was all threatened again."

Even with Bush gone, there are battles to fight. On the day US President Barack Obama was elected president, Proposition 8, outlawing gay marriage, was passed in California. Bernhard is bisexual, and has a 10-year-old daughter. How did she feel? "I wasn't devastated," she says.

"I just felt like the gay community dropped the ball on this. The Mormon church was pouring millions [of US dollars] into this fight, so why the gay community wasn't out there, I just don't understand. But when something's almost taken away from you, then you roll up your sleeves and get back to work."

Bernhard's public persona remains that of an in-your-face woman, proudly urban and cosmopolitan, contemptuous of rubes and racists. The squirming reactions to her from the super-straight and uptight always remind me of the way Little Richard — black and unashamedly flamboyant — must have appeared to suburban American parents in the mid-1950s. They didn't understand what he was saying either; they just knew in their bones that, whatever it was, they didn't like it.

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[HARDCOVER: US]

A comic book rebel's manifesto

In the late 1950s, Yoshihiro Tatsumi started a movement that changed the face of manga — and made him one of Japan's most important artists

BY DWIGHT GARNER
NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, NEW YORK

Underground comics took root in America in the 1960s and ripened with the counterculture; artists like R. Crumb, Kim Deitch and Art Spiegelman discarded the old funny-page formats and themes — beat it, *Blondie* — like so many desiccated cornhusks. In Japan, however, there had already been a comics revolution, and the man at its rowdy vanguard was Yoshihiro Tatsumi.

Tatsumi, born in 1935, came of age alongside Japan's postwar obsession with manga, serialized black-and-white comics whose characters have a distinctive iconography: big, dewy eyes; tiny mouths; piles of spiky hair. Most manga takes place in a bright alternate universe where it seems as if any problem might be resolved with a cute-off: batting eyelashes at 10 paces.

Tatsumi began drawing manga as a child, but he quickly rebelled against the form's aesthetic limitations. Manga was aimed largely at children, and its emotional and intellectual palette was circumscribed. Along with a cohort of young writers and

illustrators, Tatsumi introduced in the late 1950s a bolder form of manga he called *gekiga* — darker, more realistic, often violent. The name stuck. And he became one of Japan's most important visual artists.

Tatsumi's work, long unavailable in English, has begun to be translated and issued by the Canadian publishing house Drawn and Quarterly in an annual series of books edited by the cartoonist Adrian Tomine. Now comes the big kahuna: Tatsumi's sizable autobiography, *A Drifting Life*.

It's a book that manages to be, all at once, an insider's history of manga, a mordant cultural tour of post-Hiroshima Japan and a scrappy portrait of a struggling artist. It's a big, fat, greasy tub of salty popcorn for anyone interested (as Americans increasingly are) in the theory and practice of Japanese comics. It's among this genre's signal achievements.

Manga, like rock 'n' roll, is fundamentally a young person's game. Tatsumi, 73, was born the same year as Jerry Lee Lewis; *A Drifting Life* was 10 long years in the drafting. But no strain of composition shows in this

book's marathon 855 pages, which chronicle his career from 1945 to 1960, the period of its greatest ferment.

Tatsumi was, he explains here, a geeky comics genius from the time he was in short pants. He began to draw manga in seventh grade in Osaka. Soon published widely, he formed a groundbreaking group, the Children's Manga Association. The form's masters were like gods to him. "Stories that capture the minds of children all over Japan," his character says to himself. "How amazing it must be to be the person creating them."

If success came quickly, confidence did not. Tatsumi's family was poor. His father, a philanderer, was barely and sometimes shadily employed. Tatsumi's mother and his three siblings made do as well as they could. Drawing manga was the author's ticket to ride.

Once he was finished with school, Tatsumi began toiling in the cheesy, exploitative and highly competitive field of "rental manga." These books were grab-bag collections that printed the work of several artists; readers borrowed

Publication Notes



A DRIFTING LIFE

BY YOSHIHIRO TATSUMI

855 PAGES

DRAWN AND QUARTERLY

PUBLICATIONS

them from stores and then returned them like video rentals.

Publishing houses cranked out rental manga like so much spicy sausage. To get the work done, publishers sometimes crammed their writers and illustrators into communal apartments for days or weeks at a time. In one scene in *A Drifting Life*, a publisher delivered a watermelon to one such apartment to "keep up your morale."

Tatsumi does not deny the pleasures of this kind of quick-and-dirty work. His comics were being devoured by a wide and eager audience, and he was honing his craft. "For this 19-year-old boy with no guarantees for his future," he writes, "the only place where he felt alive was in the realm of imagination." There was "no freedom in reality," he continues, but "any kind of transformation was possible in the imaginary world."

All along, however, Tatsumi was also dreaming of something better: experimental work, "manga that isn't manga." He became obsessed with movies, both American and Japanese, and took note of their stylized visuals and their cool realism.

He wanted to produce narrative comics instead of "manga with wild characters jumping about" or "manga that concerns itself with 'humor' and 'punch lines.'"

After watching *Shane*, he was taken with the vividness of Jack Palance's cruelty. And he fell hard for Mickey Spillane's hard-boiled phrasings. Tatsumi drafted a *Gekiga Manifesto* and, along with a group of like-minded artists, started a movement that ultimately changed the face of manga.

As *A Drifting Life* progresses, it becomes clear that Tatsumi is not content merely to tell his own story — or just the story of *gekiga*. He charts Japan's small cultural milestones in the wake of the war. This book begins with a panel depicting Emperor Hirohito's surrender but soon moves on to topics like Japan's first domestically manufactured washing machine, its Miss Universe contestants, maritime disasters and taste for Coca-Cola. It's ground-level pop history.

The rap against graphic novels or memoirs is that they're a bastard form that guarantees that both the art and the writing will be second-rate. There's a speck of

truth there, to the extent that the relationship between illustration and prose, in long-form comics, is symbiotic: You wouldn't necessarily want to pry one from the other.

Tatsumi's prose has been translated from the Japanese, fluidly, by Taro Nettleton. The occasional banalities of the language are, you suspect, not the translator's fault. But I wish Nettleton hadn't continually saddled Tatsumi with long-winded verbs like "utilized" instead of simple ones like "used."

Tatsumi's art is more sophisticated, retaining the form's strange sparkle even at gloomy moments; he definitely does write manga that isn't quite manga. The genre can be a difficult one in which to portray aging. Tatsumi looks just about the same here at ages 10 and 25. A book like *A Drifting Life* is fairly easy to pick apart on a drawing-by-drawing or line-by-line basis. Don't make that mistake. Its pleasures are cumulative; the book has a rolling, rumbling grandeur. It's as if someone had taken a Haruki Murakami novel and drawn, beautifully and comprehensively, in its margins.