

# *Animalities, or The Unbearable Lightness of Being Posthuman*<sup>1</sup>

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...total humanization of the animal coincides with a total animalization of man.<sup>2</sup>

## *The Question of "the Animal"*

Jedes Gesicht ist eine unterbliebene Schnauzenbildung.<sup>3</sup>

Why the animal, now? How does the animal interpellate "us" today? If one way of understanding posthumanism is that it is the latest and arguably the most radical "postism" in a long series of postmodern articulations of the posthistorical, it might not entirely come as a surprise that the eschatological advent of the era of the posthuman is at once anticipated as transcendence into some disembodied techno-heaven and, at the same time, as the regression into pure "animality". It is the fear *and* desire of disembodiment, of dematerialisation and the spectre of virtuality that seem to drive the process of posthumanisation, but, at the same time, this brings out the animal in the cultural critic. As Dominique Babin writes in what she calls a "service manual for the posthuman" (PH1), and in the context of a chapter entitled "Post-Body" (following "Post-Death" and preceding "Post-Ego", "Post-Relation" and "Post-Reality"), in the age of human genetic engineering both the boundaries between human and superhuman, and between human and subhuman become, to use Donna Haraway's term, "leaky".<sup>4</sup> In fact, the human, as a result, might be about to split into various "subspecies" with various degrees of human-animal-machine hybridity. Some of the possible scenarios might involve humanized

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<sup>1</sup> This essay was originally written in 2006 for a volume that never got published. Even though many things have happened since, especially in the field of animal studies, I'm encouraged to share this piece by the fact that there are still very few texts that address Kundera's novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* from an animal studies perspective. My approach takes the novel as "test case" for animal studies, critical posthumanism and the (philosophical) "question of the animal" (which of course goes beyond the nevertheless important issue of "animal rights"). In its starting point it somewhat resembles Bruce Lord's brief 2003 online text "Karenin's Smile: Notes Towards Animal Rights Literary Criticism", available at: [http://bruce.bruce.nmsrv.com/karenins\\_smile.html](http://bruce.bruce.nmsrv.com/karenins_smile.html) (of which I wasn't aware at the time).

<sup>2</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 77.

<sup>3</sup> "Every face is an undeveloped snout". Peter Sloterdijk, *Das Menschentreibhaus – Stichworte zur historischen und prophetischen Anthropologie* (Weimar: Verlag und Datenbank für Geisteswissenschaften, 2001), 44 (all translations unless indicated otherwise are mine).

<sup>4</sup> Dominique Babin, *PH1 – Manuel d'usage et d'entretien du post-humain* (Paris: Flammarion, 2004).

primates used as surrogate mothers for human babies (a development that Babin refers to as “*post-singe*”, 85) or transgenic manipulations to enhance human bodies either for peaceful use (e.g. enhanced athleticism) or military purposes.<sup>5</sup>

The turn to animal studies and animality is thus a logical step for posthumanism, which is understood as either accompanying or bringing about the end of human(ist) history. In *The Open: Man and Animal*, Giorgio Agamben arrives at the question of the animal precisely via a return to the discussion of *posthistoire*, i.e. the end of man as the end of history seen as man’s return to animality.<sup>6</sup> “But what becomes of the animality of man in posthistory?” Agamben asks (12); Agamben refers to Foucault’s notion of “biopower” (“numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations”) as the fundamental governing mechanism in modernity. Under the conditions of late or postmodernity, the intensification of the use of biopower is increasingly characterised by the putting to use of our repressed (bodily) “animality” as a means of control (hence: biopolitics). In contemporary (Western) culture, the decisive political conflict which has been governing every other conflict is therefore, for Agamben, that between the animality and the humanity of man (80).

At the threshold to a posthuman, and thus by implication posthistorical, society, the difference between human and animal resurfaces in the form of a threat of its erasure:

If animal life and human life could be superimposed perfectly, then neither man nor animal – and, perhaps, not even the divine – would any longer be thinkable. For this reason, the arrival at posthistory necessarily entails the reactualization of the prehistoric threshold at which that border had been defined. Paradise calls Eden back into question. (21)

The threat that posthistory thus understood poses – and which is also a tendency clearly visible in certain *transhumanist* varieties of posthuman utopianism – is that the impossibility to clearly distinguish animal from human life leads to a situation where:

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<sup>5</sup> For the military use and, in particular, the idea of a “cyborg soldier”, see for example Chris Hables Gray, *Cyborg Citizen: Politics in the Posthuman Age* (London: Routledge, 2001), Christopher Coker, *The Future of War: The Re-enchantment of War in the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004) and Tim Blackmore, *War X: Human Extensions in Battlespace* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> Agamben, *The Open*, 6.

Man has now reached his historical *telos* and, for a humanity that has become animal again, there is nothing left but the depoliticization of human societies by means of the unconditional unfolding of the *oikonomia*, or the taking on of biological life itself as the supreme political (or rather impolitical) task. (76)

This would mean that one possibility of understanding posthumanism would be the sanctioning of biopolitics as the only possible politics by an extreme form of (technoscientific, capitalist and technocultural) vitalism in which “the only task that still seems to retain some seriousness is the assumption of the burden – and the ‘total management’ – of biological life, that is, of the very animality of man”. In short, at a time when technoscience promises avenues for overcoming human animality, the precariousness of the human animal and our relationship to animals in general become exposed.

According to Agamben, the genome, global economy, and humanitarian ideology are “the three united faces of this process in which posthistorical humanity seems to take on its own physiology as its last, impolitical mandate” (77). If there is any scope for a *critical* posthumanism here it has to lie in thinking through what Agamben calls the “anthropological machine” – as the political apparatus designed to separate human from animal and to guarantee human superiority by denying an ontological sense of “openness” to the animal. The point is not to erase the difference between animal and human but to rethink life, or “bare life”, as Agamben calls it, following Rilke, outside of this new technological biologism which seeks to “purify” humanity from its last ties with the animal through techniques of disembodiment.

The question of biological human “enhancement” forms the centre of the debate on bioethics and (the return of) eugenics. On several occasions, Peter Sloterdijk’s interventions in this debate have not failed to provoke outrage, especially in Germany (for obvious historical reasons). His *Regeln für den Menschenpark* (1999) and *Das Menschentreibhaus* (2001) are designed as a radicalisation of Heidegger’s antihumanism in the time of posthumanist bioethics. Sloterdijk’s starting point is that traditional (national bourgeois) liberal humanism has lost its cultural base in contemporary (technocultural and technoscientific capitalist mass consumer) society, and can no longer exercise its main function, namely the “domestication” of human animality. In this respect, Sloterdijk is quite close to Agamben’s analysis of contemporary culture. The failure of traditional humanist media to guarantee the humanist domestication process radicalises the question of human teleology, the destiny of man (what Sloterdijk refers to as “anthropodicy”). In today’s posthumanist world, what might still be able to sustain the domestication of (human) animality? Sloterdijk asks, when the very meaning of domestication

has become doubtful? It follows that, after humanism, there is a legitimization crisis concerning the process of humanisation (or human “domestication”). What Sloterdijk thus traces in the current transition, from humanist domestication processes to new “posthuman” possibilities opened up by bioengineering, is what one might call the history of human “breeding”, or as Sloterdijk refers to it, “anthropotechnics”, understood as the specific (and changing) ways of “making humans human” as fundamental politics of our species.

Today the realm of political anthropotechnics seems hugely extended through biotechnological possibilities, which leads to new uncertainties in the “*Menschenpark*” (the human zoo).<sup>7</sup> Sloterdijk is specifically interested in the “de-animalisation” process that becoming-human involves (in stark opposition to Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of “becoming animal”),<sup>8</sup> which is why, in *Das Menschentreibhaus* (the human greenhouse) he attempts what he calls an “onto-anthropological” analysis of the human as unfinished “product” of anthropotechnics. He traces the climatic conditions (hence the “greenhouse” reference) under which man’s separation from the animal, or his “unbecoming” animal, has taken place. He refers to a number of such conditions: the “insulation” of the prehuman tribe; the creation of an environment in which specific (bodily) functions can be separated and detached from the body, which then leads to specialisations (e.g. the human hand); a progressive infantilisation providing more time for specialised bodily development including the characteristic “cerebralisation” of the human; and, finally, techniques of transmission, which lead to the invention of media and culture. Sloterdijk thus rejects the traditional Darwinian narrative of selection in favour of what he calls the human “greenhouse effect”.

Interestingly, however, compared to many other “posthumanist” thinkers, Sloterdijk is certainly not a “zoophile”. In almost classic Heideggerian fashion, the “world poverty” of the animal and the superiority of the human species never seem never in doubt for Sloterdijk.<sup>9</sup> While Sloterdijk seems to be mainly interested in the nature and continuation of the domestication process, other posthumanist thinkers (esp. following Derrida) see the reopening of the “animal question”, which the notion of domestication as “de-animalisation” raises, under the new biotechnological regime, with much more scepticism.

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<sup>7</sup> Sloterdijk’s *Menschenpark* essay has since been translated as “Rules for the Human Zoo: A Response to the Letter on Humanism”, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 27.1 (2009):12-28.

<sup>8</sup> Gilles Deleuze’s and Felix Guattari’s “becoming animal” as a strategy of unbecoming a (liberal humanist, metaphysical) self will be discussed in more detail below.

<sup>9</sup> For example in Heidegger’s *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik: Welt, Endlichkeit, Einsamkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2004), §42.

Cary Wolfe is arguably the most important representative of critical posthumanist zoophile theory. In *Animal Rites* and *Zoontologies* he stresses the inter-relatedness between the “animal question” and the advent of posthumanism while also doing justice to the historical specificity of the current situation. He argues that in the context of posthumanisation the insistent return of the animal question is not just one “otherness” among many:

On the one hand, then, the question of the animal is embedded within the larger context of posthumanist theory generally, in which the ethical and theoretical problem of nonhuman subjectivities need not be limited to the form of the animal alone... On the other hand, the animal possesses a specificity as the object of both discursive and institutional practices, one that gives it particular power and durability in relation to other discourses of otherness.<sup>10</sup>

The institution Wolfe refers to is that of “speciesism”, which (according to Peter Singer) is coextensive with humanist anthropocentrism.<sup>11</sup> It is therefore in the interest of the human itself to tackle human speciesism. However, this goal must involve more than just campaigning for animal rights:

...we need to understand that the ethical and philosophical urgency of confronting the institution of speciesism and crafting a posthumanist theory of the subject has nothing to do with whether you like animals. We all, human and nonhuman alike, have a stake in the discourse and institution of speciesism; it is by no means limited to its overwhelmingly direct and disproportionate effects on animals.<sup>12</sup>

It is the very ambiguity the animal other plays within traditional liberal humanism, namely as both touchstone and scapegoat, that allows for the animalisation of humans as an ideological means to justify the treatment of (some) humans “as” animals (i.e. their “lawful” putting down).

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<sup>10</sup> Cary Wolfe, in Wolfe, ed., *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Thought* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 6; see also Cary Wolfe, ed., *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

<sup>11</sup>Cf. for example Singer, *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for our Treatment of Animals* (Random House: New York, 1975) and more recently “Taking Humanism Beyond Speciesism”, *Free Inquiry* 24.6 (2004): 19-22, available at <https://www.utilitarian.net/singer/by/200410--.htm>.

<sup>12</sup> Wolfe, *Animal Rites*, 7.

Following Derrida, Wolfe is thus also concerned with the symbolic and institutional structure of speciesism and its effects *within* humanism on both human and nonhuman animals. And like Derrida, he looks to articulate the “trace” or *différance* beyond and *before* the human/nonhuman distinction and *before* the question of the subject. The challenge, for Wolfe, is to evaluate posthuman technoscience and technoculture and reinscribe possibilities for other, non-specieicist, subjectivities within them. To achieve this Wolfe looks towards systems theory (mainly through Maturana, Varela, Bateson and Luhmann), first of all as a means of “disarticulation” between language and species (84), and to autopoiesis, as a means of overcoming anthropomorphism, namely through an idea of a self as processual and emergent, a “processive, recursive, antirepresentational account of the relation between material technicities, linguistic domains, and the emergence of subjectivities” (87). Wolfe’s “developmental systems theory” (this is Manuela Rossini’s phrase) might be able to overcome the humanist separation between “I” and “world” and instead rethink the entire human “being-in-the-world”, so that “human and non-human bodies are in constant exchange with each other and with their environment; they constitute each other through relationality and dynamic interaction.” Rossini embraces Wolfe’s attempt to bridge poststructuralist subjectivity and cybernetics, and sees developmental systems theory as “a branch of neo-materialism” that thinks “beyond the dead-end street of nature-versus-culture” and shifts the constructivist analytical focus on (Deleuzian) becoming rather than on “stable” ontology.<sup>13</sup>

In sum, zoophile forms of posthumanist theory aim to erode the category of “species”, and thereby ally themselves to other “materialist” forms of political criticism, notably feminist, postcolonial and (post)Marxist, which have been challenging categories like gender, race, and class. After liberal humanism’s inherent misogyny, racism and cultural imperialism, the ultimate attack is thus on its “speciesism” – which Joan Dunayer defines as “a failure, in attitude or practice, to accord any nonhuman being equal consideration and respect.”<sup>14</sup> This speciesism acts like a process of “ontological hygiene”<sup>15</sup> and upholds an imaginary “abyss” between the human and the nonhuman animal. It is precisely this abyss that zoophile posthumanist theories have been targeting. One key element in the ongoing deconstruction of humanism is the undermining of hierarchical binary oppositions that are normally used to guarantee the mentioned ontological hygiene practiced by humanism – a policing of boundaries through a

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<sup>13</sup> Manuela Rossini, “To the Dogs: Companion Speciesism and the New Feminist Materialism”, *Kritikos* 3 (2006): available at <http://intertheory.org/rossini>.

<sup>14</sup> Joan Dunayer, *Specieism* (Derwood: Ryce Publishing, 2004), 5.

<sup>15</sup> This is Elaine Graham’s phrase in *Representations of the Post/human: Monsters, Aliens and Others in Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 33-37.

system of rules, regulations and categorisations. Several complementary and coinciding moves are being employed in this deconstructive process:

1. questioning the “essentialism” which is supposed to guarantee the boundaries between human and animal, i.e. a demonstration of the insufficiency of any human attributes to uphold the idea of a radical difference or “abyss” between the two, whether it be language, culture, reason, consciousness, mortality, or subjectivity. Each of these criteria used for differentiation can only uphold a qualified, not a radical difference, between humans and other animals; this move is obviously based on epistemology and is used to undermine ontological truth claims (usually conducted as a critique of Heidegger’s “stubborn” resistance to granting animals access to “*Dasein*”, which arguably makes Heidegger’s radical critique of metaphysics the ultimate hiding place of essentialist humanism).

2. exploding the category of “animality” as such, or a “de-essentialisation” of the animal, through pluralisation: in fact, there is no (one category of the) animal, there are only animals (in the plural). Hiding behind the stereotypical smoke screen of an abstract category called “animal” prevents humans from doing justice to animal singularity (this is one way, Derrida’s formula “*tout autre est tout autre*” – every other is entirely other, or one could say there are only singular others – can be understood);<sup>16</sup> this obfuscation is further helped by the systematic “hiding” of the fate of individual animals behind modern rationalisation processes that could be summarised under the term “meat industry” (with all its aspects of production, processing, marketing and distribution practices) together with a parallel “disappearance of the animal” as fellow living beings, except for the “happy few” direct or mediated contacts with pet animals, zoo animals and wild life documentaries. A critique of this obfuscation is usually based on the idea of an encounter, a response and therefore responsibility. It mainly follows a Levinasian trajectory of the singularity of a face-to-face encounter but tries to push Levinas into a “teriomorphic” and “ecological” direction that he himself did not embrace (see below). It is thus an ethical stance that promotes alternative conceptualisations of the human/animal divide.

3. reconstructive repositioning, which attempts a bridging of the traditional “abyss” between categories of “the living”, for example by frequent use of phrases like “human and nonhuman animals”. However, the term “nonhuman animal” ultimately remains mired in anthropocentrism, as if animals could “naturally” be measured against a pre-existing,

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<sup>16</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Donner la mort* (Paris: Galilée, 1999), 114ff.

apparently coherent and unquestioned, category called “human”. In fact, there is neither a single experience called “humanity” nor a general condition called “animality”. If anything, one should assume a radical plurality of experiences and self-awarenesses that might be referred to as “humanities” and “animalities”. This could for example be understood as a (re)animalisation or a “becoming animal” (Deleuze and Guattari) of the human and its repositioning within a larger but also more fundamental context of “the living” (Derrida) or “bare life” (Agamben) – a move which, ultimately, would also help dissolve the dichotomy between nature and culture. This third move is thus an (eco)political move, which combines the so-called life sciences, as well as vitalist philosophical traditions, some forms of systems theory (Wolfe) and various forms of ecocriticism. These, in turn, integrate (as, for example, in Haraway’s concept of “nature-cultures”) the technical and the organic, especially within compounds like biodiversity and biosociality.

The remaining sections of this essay will try to provide some examples of how these strategies could inform a critical posthumanist reading of a literary text.

### *Dog Stories*

If I have a dog, my dog has a human; what that means concretely is at stake.<sup>17</sup>

Milan Kundera’s novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* was first published in Czech in 1984 and translated into English the same year. Maybe it is because of this date – so fatefully announced by George Orwell as coinciding with what could be seen as one possible scenario for a “posthuman(ist) state” – that readings and criticism of Kundera’s novel have tended to focus on either the political subtext (the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968) or the personal fate of the four main characters of the story (Tomas, Sabina, Franz and Tereza). Little attention has been given to what is arguably a fifth, and maybe even *the* central “character” in this novel: namely, Karenin, Tereza’s and Tomas’s dog.<sup>18</sup> The last of the seven sections of the

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<sup>17</sup> Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), 54.

<sup>18</sup> While there are of course many books and articles on Kundera and *Unbearable Lightness* I’m aware of only three articles published since 2008 that focus on the dog Karenin as a central “character” in the novel: Marie-Odile Thirouin points out the important opposition between the dog and kitsch in the novel, in “La tentation de l’anti-humanisme dans l’oeuvre de Kundera”, Thirouin and Martine Boyer-Weinmann, eds., *Désaccords parfaits: La réception paradoxale de l’oeuvre de Milan Kundera* (Grenoble: ELLUG, 2009), 291-304. More specifically linking



novel is entitled “Karenin’s Smile” and contains one of the most moving descriptions of the death of “man’s best friend”. Read at a superficial level, the account of losing Karenin might be misunderstood as just another deeply sentimental, “humanist” (read: anthropocentric) story of a thoroughly anthropomorphized (read: denatured) nonhuman animal serving as a stand-in for the “missing child” in the novel. But on a more sympathetic reading it becomes clear that there is more than mere narcissistic anthropomorphising and pathos here. There is indeed a profound metaphysical engagement with the (by now) infamous philosophical “question of the animal”. Not only do Karenin, as well as Mephisto, the mayor’s pig, play an important part in the narrative, but so do Tereza’s cows, and animals in general. The consequence is that the relationship between humanity and animality is a theme that runs throughout the novel and is openly problematised in some central passages. So intense is this questioning, I would argue, that it in fact anticipates a great deal of the so-called “animal turn” within (critical) posthumanist thought. This turn towards the “question of the animal”, or “the animal as question”, has been focusing on a peculiar ambiguity at the centre of the relationship between human and nonhuman animals.

In a time when the largely imaginary and fictive boundaries around human essence and truth are eroding fast it is maybe not surprising to find that theorisations of the human and his or her “animal others” proliferate. “The animal” is without doubt one of, if not the most, essential of all human (significant) “others”, which include God, the object, the machine, the stranger, the monster, the alien, etc. However, what is rather surprising is that posthumanist theory, which has given space to so many *animaux* (animals) and *animots* (animetaphors; Derrida’s term, see discussion below) has so far largely ignored Kundera’s novel. It is almost as if there is a reluctance to engage with a fictional text that anticipates a lot of the critical impact posthumanist zoophile theory. Kundera prompts a critical thinking of “animalities” even before the arrival of posthumanist animal studies. This essay is therefore interested in demonstrating two things: firstly, that engaging with the animal question is a necessary but also a potentially humbling step for any kind of posthumanist thinking that would like to understand itself as “critical”; and secondly, through a careful reading of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, my aim is to show that certain texts with more than an incidental investment in humanism – and it seems likely that the very notion of literature, with its insistence on the letter and its

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Karenin to ethical questions is Harry Sewall’s “Contested Epistemological and Ethical Spaces: The Place of Non-Humans in Milan Kundera’s *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* and J.M.Coetztee’s *Disgrace*”, *English Academy Review* 30.1 (2013): 76-91; and Jospeh Mai’s “Humanity’s ‘True Moral Test’: Shame, Idyll, and Animal Vulnerability in Milan Kundera’s *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*”, *Studies in the Novel* 46.1 (2014): 100-116.

modern, liberal, bourgeois, capitalist tradition and base, is somehow inescapably humanist – can reveal the potential for a critical practice bearing upon diverse aspects of posthumanist theory.

I will therefore attempt a reading of the novel alongside some of the ground-breaking zoophile theoretical texts used to promote posthumanist political agendas to show that, as Manuela Rossini aptly put it, posthumanism – or at least some aspects of its theorisation – has gone “to the dogs”.<sup>19</sup> Going to the dogs is of course not meant in a negative way here. On the contrary, it marks a development, in particular in Donna Haraway’s work, away from the centrality of the technoscientific metaphor of the cyborg – a figure that materialist technofeminists have tried to wrest away from the patriarchal symbolic order of late capitalist society in its state of accelerated “posthumanisation” – and a move towards other, maybe “earlier” figures to provide additional historical depth to the ongoing critique of liberal humanism.

Haraway, in her *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*, characterises this development thus:

...in 1985, I published “The Cyborg Manifesto” to try to make feminist sense of the implosions of contemporary technoscience. Cyborgs are “cybernetic organisms”, named in 1960 in the context of the space race, the cold war, and imperialist fantasies of technohumanism built into policy and research projects. I tried to inhabit cyborgs critically; i.e. neither in celebration nor condemnation, but in a spirit of ironic appropriation for ends never envisioned by the space warriors. Telling a story of co-habitation, co-evolution, and embodied cross-species sociality, the present manifesto asks which of two cobbled together figures – cyborgs and companion species – might more fruitfully inform livable politics and ontologies in current life worlds.<sup>20</sup>

Going to the dogs thus does not mean a rejection of the cyborg and critical cyborg writing (an ironic “inhabiting” and “appropriation” of what Rossini calls “popular (cybernetic) post-humanism”). Rather it involves a remembering of other and earlier “significant others” and an embedding of postmodern technoscience within the longer history of what Haraway refers to as “natureculture(s)”. Haraway herself hints at the fact that the technoscientific figure of the

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<sup>19</sup> Manuela Rossini, “To the Dogs: Companion Speciesism and the New Feminist Materialism”, *Kritikos* 3 (2006), available at <http://intertheory.org/rossini>.

<sup>20</sup> Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*, 4.

cyborg might be somehow dated and that her original critical appropriation might in turn have been reappropriated by what she refers to as “transhumanism”, with its driving force of technological determinism:

I appropriated cyborgs to do feminist work in Reagan’s Star Wars times of the mid-1980s. By the end of the millennium, cyborgs could no longer do the work of a proper herding dog to gather up the threads needed for critical inquiry. So I go happily to the dogs to explore the birth of the kennel to help craft tools for science studies and feminist theory in the present time, when secondary Bushes threaten to replace the old growth of more livable naturecultures in the carbon budget politics of all water-based life on earth.<sup>21</sup>

The shift from cyborg to companion species thus mirrors the historical shift from Reaganomics to George W. Bush’s neoconservatism, from technoscience to bioscience, from Star Wars to Bioterror. It seems that the turn from techno- to bio- (or indeed technobio-) opens up more profound, “earlier”, uncertainties over boundaries and significant otherness for Haraway: “I risk alienating my old doppelganger, the cyborg, in order to try to convince readers that dogs might be better guides through the thickets of technobiopolitics in the Third Millennium of the Current Era” (9-10).

To be fair, like any other “posting”, Haraway’s “post-cyborgian” move is not a simple superseding but rather a complication of the question of origin and evolution. After all, “the animal” and “the machine” have been co-haunting humanity and humanism ever since their beginnings. And already, in her “Cyborg Manifesto”, Haraway had spoken of the joint kinship between people, animals and machines, and of the fact that “by the late twentieth century in United States scientific culture, the boundary between human and animal [was] thoroughly breached”.<sup>22</sup> The “second leaky distinction” which made the cyborg figure a necessity, as Haraway declared, was that “between animal-human (organism) and machine”. The “post-cyborg” move thus makes visible, in a retroactive way, previous “leaky” distinctions within humanism: “Post-cyborg, what counts as biological kind troubles previous categories of organism. The machinic and the textual are internal to the organic and vice versa in irreversible ways.”<sup>23</sup> Hence Haraway’s privileging of concepts like “co-evolution”, “symbiosis” and “naturecultures”. As Haraway explains: “I have come to see cyborgs as junior siblings in the

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<sup>21</sup> Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*, 4-5.

<sup>22</sup> Haraway, *The Haraway Reader*, 9.

<sup>23</sup> Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*, 15.

much bigger, queer family of companion species, in which reproductive biotechnopolitics are generally a surprise, sometimes even a nice surprise”.<sup>24</sup> Human’s biosociality with dogs in particular is part of the rewriting of history in terms of the co-implication of nature and culture. In a sense, Haraway emphasizes the earlier dog-people-universe and, in turn, relativises the cyborg figure, by subsuming it within a wealth of companion species relationships. In doing so, she in fact transfers the cyborg figure’s critical potential from a purely technoscientific reading to a technobiopolitical understanding of posthuman culture. However, like “cyborg writing”, “dog writing”, for Haraway, remains part of a (feminist) materialist critique that is paying close attention to questions of embodiment, biopolitics and ethical responses to “speciesism”.

It is in this context that the critical aspect of anthropomorphism should be noted. Dogs, as arguably humans closest companion species, according to Haraway, nevertheless have the right to “a category of their own”.<sup>25</sup> Their co-evolution makes them humans’ (significant) others but in a non-narcissistic way, or at least potentially so. Dogs ask peculiar “ethical” questions of “their” humans that cannot and should not be understood as purely anthropomorphic, that is not as “projections” of human desires onto their animal others, or as either in some sense “tragic-cathartic” (i.e. the “animal’s” vulnerability, suffering, silence, which are all ultimately understood as lack) or “comic-mechanic” (i.e. the lesser than human, the “abyssal” categorical difference). This is what is at stake in an analysis of one literary, textual dog named Karenin.

Karenin is introduced as a kind of “hybrid” and “post-gender” dog and thus bears important traits of Haraway’s cyborg. She is “a bitch whose body seemed reminiscent of the German shepherd and whose head belonged to its Saint Bernard mother”,<sup>26</sup> named not after Anna Karenina, as Tereza suggested, but Karenin, Anna’s husband; and thus a female dog with a male name and referred to by the male personal pronoun throughout the novel, and who, as a result, develops “lesbian tendencies”. In sum, the relationship between Tereza (and Tomas) and Karenin is beyond pity or responsibility, but instead is based on “selfless love”. Tereza, for example, believes that:

dogs were never expelled from Paradise... Karenin knew nothing about the duality of body and soul and had no concept of disgust. That is why Tereza felt so free and easy with him. (And that is why it is so dangerous to turn an animal into a machine animate, a cow into an automaton for the production of milk. By so doing, man cuts the thread

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<sup>24</sup> Haraway, *The Haraway Reader*, 300.

<sup>25</sup> *The Companion Species Manifesto*, 88ff.

<sup>26</sup> Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, trans. Michael Henry Heim (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), 24 (further references to the novel will be given in the text as *ULB*).

binding him to Paradise and has nothing left to hold or comfort him on his flight through the emptiness of time.). (*ULB 297*)

Karenin is thus not to be misunderstood as a classic child-replacement of the “biologically unproductive” human couple, as the narrator explains: “the love that tied her to Karenin was better than the love between her and Tomas. Better, not bigger... given the nature of the human couple, the love of man and woman is a priori inferior to that which can exist (at least in the best instances) in the love between man and dog, that oddity of human history probably unplanned by the Creator. It is a completely selfless love” (*ULB 297*). This is an important reversal of what Haraway calls (in analogy to “technophilic narcissism” – a “humanist neurosis” by which “man makes himself by realizing his intentions in his tools, such as domestic animals (dogs) and computers (cyborgs)”), “caninophilic narcissism” – “the idea that dogs restore human beings’ souls by their unconditional love.”<sup>27</sup> Tereza’s selfless love is not about saving herself or regaining any kind of plenitude or returning to a prelapsarian Edenic condition. It is not a question of Karenin’s unconditional love making humans somehow “better”, but rather the opposite, namely attaining a knowledge of the animal other *as* other.

According to Will McNeill, this is also what Heidegger’s interpretation of the animal as being “poor in world” (*weltarm*) attempts: “the objection of anthropomorphism or anthropocentrism is always fundamentally a thoughtless or unquestioning one, insofar as it presupposes that we know what the essence of man or *anthropos* is.”<sup>28</sup> What is noteworthy here, however, is that in following this line of argument McNeill is in fact opposed to most zoophile theorists, who tend to interpret Heidegger’s attitude towards the animal as not very charitable and, indeed, as anthropocentric and even essentially “anthropoessentialist”. As McNeill explains, “Heidegger is precisely not trying to understand the essence of the animal in itself, but to understand it *as other*, in its otherness” (26). Being, for Heidegger, is an “opening and access to otherness” and it is in this sense that the (nonhuman) animal may be said to be “poor”, or at least “poorer”, than the human (animal):

The animal has a relation to other things, and openness for other things. But it cannot experience these other things as other, and this because it has no relation to concealment and withdrawal. It seems that it cannot appear to us as such, as what it is, because it

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<sup>27</sup> *The Companion Species Manifesto*, 33.

<sup>28</sup> Will McNeill, *Heidegger: Visions of Animals, Others, and the Divine* (University of Warwick: Research Publication Series: Centre for Research in Philosophy and Literature, 1993), 25.

refuses itself, withdraws. But the reverse is the case: it refuses itself from us and withdraws because it cannot show itself as such, because it cannot point towards concealment. It is only human beings that can point towards concealment as such and that are drawn towards withdrawal. For this reason alone we can appear and show ourselves to one another as other.<sup>29</sup>

In fact, it seems that the animal's *Weltarmut* for McNeill following Heidegger is not that different from Lacan's attempt to construct an ontological difference between human and animal on the basis of the former's ability of deception. The animal cannot appear (to humans) as other in the same way as humans can appear to themselves as other, which seems to boil down in fact to a rather simplistic and counter-intuitive statement that denies animals any form of intentionality.

In Kundera's novel, however, it is the humans who seem rather "poor in world" while the animal, in the form of Karenin, seems surprisingly rich in knowledge, time and happiness. Both Tomas and Tereza realise that Karenin has been in a sense their "home". Their triangular relationship, or their particular "natureculture" and biosociality echoes Haraway's words, who, in relation to "dog training" or "domestication", says: "Just *who* is at home must permanently be in question. The recognition that one cannot know the other or the self, but must ask in respect for all the time who and what are emerging in relationship, is the key. That is so for all true lovers, of whatever species."<sup>30</sup> This "otherness-in-relation" that both Haraway and Tereza wish to call "love" between species is in fact a "being in connection with significant otherness and signifying others" (81). It of course in no way guarantees the overcoming of anthropomorphism (and anthropocentrism) as such, if, indeed, that is possible, but it is the necessary precondition for any serious critique of anthropocentrism to begin with. Just how such a "post-anthropocentric" reading might work for a critical posthumanism is the focus of the remaining pages of this essay.

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<sup>29</sup> McNeill, *Heidegger: Visions of Animals, Others, and the Divine*, 66-67.

<sup>30</sup> Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*, 50.

## Zoohauntology

Our very empathy with the plight of the other being requires us to respect their difference from us and the ways this may affect our capacity to “speak” on their behalf.<sup>31</sup>

*The Unbearable Lightness of Being* seems of course blissfully oblivious to all these articulations. Although it is very much a “philosophical novel” (a *roman à idées*) – indeed, it announces a certain ontology in its title – it is of course free from systematic theorisation, ontological or otherwise, of the relation between humans and animals. Nevertheless it is also a novel written in a highly self-reflexive and ironical tone, with a narrator who clearly functions as a post-Nietzschean and postmodern commentator for whom politics, aesthetics and cultural anthropology open the space for historiographic metafiction (in Linda Hutcheon’s sense).<sup>32</sup> It is tempting to see the novel as a fictional extension of cultural criticism, somewhere in between communist experience and capitalist practice, by which the idea of human individuality is both humbled but also, in the end, reaffirmed. If there was something like ironic or detached existentialism, Kundera’s novel would probably qualify as a prime example. In any case it certainly performs a critique of the liberal humanist idea of the autonomous self that is not too different in its presuppositions from most critical posthumanist theories, especially those following poststructuralist and deconstructionist trajectories. It scrutinises the humanity of its characters and their environment from an ontological rather than an epistemological point of view (cf. Brian McHale’s distinction) and evaluates the “life choices” of the postmodern individual rather than of the modern subject (following Rosenau’s terminology).<sup>33</sup> This is where Kundera’s ontology of “weight and lightness” becomes relevant. Of the seven sections of the novel two bear the title “Lightness and Weight” (parts one and five). The first part opens with a deliberation about Nietzsche’s myth of the eternal return: “Putting it negatively, the myth of eternal return states that a life which disappears once and for all, which does not return, is like a shadow, without weight, dead in advance, and whether it was horrible, beautiful, or sublime, its horror, sublimity, and beauty mean nothing” (*ULB* 3). There is a powerful critique of the transitoriness and the “lightness” of modernity and its “cynicism” in which “everything is pardoned in advance” since it only ever occurs once (“*einmal ist keinmal*”). Eternal return

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<sup>31</sup> Kate Soper, “Humans, Animals, Machines”, *New Formations* 43 (2003): 105.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988).

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1987); Pauline Marie Rosenau, *Post-Modernism and the Social Sciences: Insights, Inroads, and Intrusions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

would instead take away the “mitigating circumstance” of this transitory nature, oppose the “aura of nostalgia” when faced with the ephemeral, and “weigh down” existence: “In the world of eternal return the weight of unbearable responsibility lies heavy on every move we make” (5). The undeniable merit of Kundera’s novel is that it shows the complexity and ambiguity that arises out of this distinction of the “weight of unbearable responsibility” provided by the idea of the eternal return, and that “our lives stand out against it in all their splendid lightness” (5). “The lightness/weight opposition is the most mysterious, most ambiguous of all” (6); and it is an opposition that is obviously related to the question of posthistory and posthumanity: “What happened but once might as well not have happened at all... History is as light as individual human life, unbearably light, light as a feather, as dust swirling into air, as whatever will no longer exist tomorrow” (223).

The destiny of the two couples of main characters – Tereza and Tomas, Franz and Sabina – plays itself out within this paradigm. Tomas tends to err on the side of lightness (“what can life be worth if the first rehearsal for life is life itself... if we only have one life to live, we might as well not have lived at all”, 8). He, the incorrigible womanizer, is weighed down by responsibility and love for Tereza, who arrives with a heavy suitcase (like an “abandoned child”) and with high moral principles of fidelity. Tomas’s compassion (“*Es muss sein*”), his conscience, make him bow to “necessity” and its “metaphysical weights” (33). In Part Five, it is precisely the image of the abandoned child and the question of responsibility, knowledge, and guilt that causes Tomas’s professional “downfall”. In an academic publication Tomas contrasts Oedipus’s admission of his guilt, responsibility and self-punishment despite his lack of knowledge, with the communists’ post-1968 claim towards “innocence” on the basis that they were misled by their own “idealism”. As a result he loses his right to practise as a neurosurgeon and instead becomes a window cleaner. However, when invited to sign a petition for the release of political prisoners he renounces any political activism and instead remembers Tereza’s image as she tries saving a crow cruelly buried alive by children: “It is much more important to dig a half-buried crow out of the ground... than to send petitions to a president” (219-220), Tomas decides. This very Nietzschean transvaluation of values – the lightness of animal rescue placed above the weightiness of political resistance – has earned Kundera a lot of disapproval from all kinds of factions engaged in what the novel itself refers to as “The Grand March”: “The dictatorship of the proletariat or democracy? Rejection of the consumer society or demands for increased productivity? The guillotine or an end to the death penalty? It is all beside the point. What makes a leftist a leftist is not this or that theory but his ability to integrate any theory into the kitsch called the Grand March” (257). This choice would certainly imply a



rejection of any political movement, let's say the movement for animal rights (i.e. "kitsch"), but would at the same time suggest a radical responsibility towards all forms of life and especially the most vulnerable, singular animal, like for example a cruelly trapped crow (i.e. a curious embrace of the "unbearable" ambiguity of lightness and weight of and in being).

Kundera's notion of kitsch is of course central to understanding the idea of the "unbearable lightness of being" and the relation between the political and the ethical, and between metaphysics and aesthetics. The interesting aspect for the question of the posthuman animal in this is how Kundera's novel manages to represent animal "liberationist" issues without being political about them, not even ethical strictly speaking, but rather metaphysical or aesthetic. Kundera seems to object to liberal humanism for "aesthetic" reasons, not in order to develop a radical antihumanism but maybe a Nietzschean kind of transvaluation of all (human) values, or indeed a kind of "superhumanism" without "superman". Ironically, kitsch itself is related to what the narrator refers to as a "theodicy of shit" (246-7): "Shit is a more onerous theological problem than is evil. Since God gave man freedom, we can, if need be, accept the idea that He is not responsible for man's crimes. The responsibility for shit, however, rests entirely with Him, the Creator of man" (246). As long as man stayed in paradise he either did not defecate or he simply experienced no disgust at defecating. With the expulsion from Eden comes disgust, shame and as a result of shame, excitement and sexuality. The human problem is therefore what to do with defecating existence – a rather "down-to-earth" parody of Heideggerian "*Dasein-zum-Tode*". The metaphysical objection to shit goes through a "categorical agreement with being" which, on an aesthetic level, leads to the denial and repression of shit: "This aesthetic ideal is called kitsch... kitsch is the absolute denial of shit, in both the literal and the figurative senses of the word; kitsch excludes everything from its purview which is essentially unacceptable in human existence" (248). Its true function is "a folding screen set up to curtain off death" (253). The painter Sabina (who is Tomas's mistress, and for whom Tomas is the absolute opposite to kitsch) resists communism not because of political repression but for "the mask of beauty it tried to wear – in other words, Communist kitsch" (249). The opposition to the "leftist kitsch" of the Grand March calls for a radical individualism: "The brotherhood of man on earth will be possible only on a base of kitsch" (251). Sabina doesn't see much difference between Soviet kitsch and American kitsch. If anything she would "unhesitatingly prefer life in a real Communist regime with all its persecution and meat queues", but in "the world of the Communist ideal made real, in that world of grinning idiots, she would have nothing to say, she would die of horror within a week" (253). What makes both Sabina and Tomas "anti-revolutionaries" is that for them people who

struggle in their political resistance movements against totalitarian regimes are just as opposed to ambiguity, to the individual asking questions, to uncertainties, as the ideologies they fight against: “They, too, need certainties and simple truths to make the multitudes understand, to provoke collective tears” (254). In other words, kitsch doesn’t know any political allegiance and in the context of the breakdown of certainties and the proliferation of lies, being acquires this “unbearable lightness” which can only be embraced by radical opposition to kitsch and its constant “betrayal”. It could be argued that Kundera’s kitsch is in fact strikingly close to Roland Barthes’s idea of a myth as a culturally produced “naturalisation”:

As soon as kitsch is recognized for the lie it is, it moves into the context of non-kitsch, thus losing its authoritarian power and becoming as touching as any other human weakness. For none among us is superhuman enough to escape kitsch completely. No matter how we scorn it, kitsch is an integral part of the human condition. (*ULB* 256).

In terms of the human/nonhuman theme and the question of humanism the rejection of kitsch is equally relevant. The last part of the novel deals explicitly with the relation between humans and animals, humans and their pets, and also with the relation between pets and domestic and other animals. It does therefore justice to one of the main claims in current posthumanist and animal theory: namely, that it is wrong to speak of “the animal question”, for two reasons. Firstly, “the animal” is an outrageous singular (as Derrida points out), behind which hide singularities, complexities and thus a distance that doesn’t exist. Secondly, there are a number of difficulties surrounding the idea that animals are denied a “response” in this question-and-answer session. The whole issue of communicative interaction, the possibility of dialogue, animal intersubjectivity, and practices of interpellation and subjection is at stake in the usual denial of an animal(’s) response, or in the anthropomorphic practice of speaking “for” the animal.<sup>34</sup>

The bone of contention for zoophile theorists and various “caninists” is what to do with the difference that remains once the radical difference between human and animal, once the “speciesism” has been unmasked as a construct, once its essence has been divested of any foundations.<sup>35</sup> What to do with the *radical* difference, or otherness, the difference of difference,

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. in particular Derrida’s “And Say the Animal Responded,” in *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal*, ed. Cary Wolfe (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 121-46.

<sup>35</sup> Note the almost irrepressible desire in all animal writing to playfully draw on the complete register of animal metaphors or “animetaphors” (cf. Akira Mizuta Lippit, “Magnetic Animal: Derrida, Wildlife, *Animetaphor*”, *MLN* 113.5 (1998): 1111-1125) to “lighten up” the unbearable weightiness of the animal-question; there is something deeply comic about the animal other, closely connected of course to its

the other of the other? Here, we are of course within the remit of Derridean *différance*. Derrida himself seems happy to merely track down and problematise the humanist, or speciesist, residue in the two thinkers who have pushed the question of the human to its limits – Heidegger and Levinas. Derrida’s argument in *Of Spirit*, “Eating Well”, “The Animal that Therefore I Am (More to Follow),” and “And Say the Animal Responded” is that neither Heidegger’s metaphysical humanism, which grants the animal a certain “openness” towards being but denies it any access to being *as* being (i.e. *Dasein*), nor Levinas’s ethical humanism, which implies some human responsibility towards the nonhuman other but denies the animal a face, radically challenge the opposition between animal and human. However, for Derrida the aim cannot be the complete effacement of that difference.<sup>36</sup> This erasure would lend itself undoubtedly to the “worst”: namely, a mere reversal of the humanist hierarchy with some form of generalised animality or a general “becoming-animal”, which would be ethically and critically very badly equipped to deal with all the numerous occasions on which animalisation is merely used for the dehumanisation of humans. Derrida is wary of both purification and deliberate contamination of categories and instead, in true deconstructive and genealogical manner, he follows the trace of an “earlier” distinction underlying the very opposition of (hu)man/animal. In his interview with Elisabeth Roudinesco, “Violence Against Animals”, he says:

Beginning with *Of Grammatology*, the elaboration of a new concept of the *trace* had to be extended to the entire field of the living, or rather to the life/death relation, beyond the anthropological limits of “spoken” language (or “written” language, in the ordinary sense), beyond the phonocentrism or the logocentrism that always trusts in a simple and oppositional limit between Man and the Animal.<sup>37</sup>

Following the trace of an alterity before the distinction between human and animal what Derrida brings to the fore is first of all an irreducible multiplicity: “there is a multiplicity of living beings, a multiplicity of animals, some of which do not fall within what this grand discourse on the Animal claims to attribute to them or recognize in them. Man is one of them, and an

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proximity to the machine and the mechanistic, following Bergson’s definition of the comic: “du mécanique plaqué sur du vivant” (cf. Henri Bergson, *Le rire* (Paris: PUF, 2007)).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); “‘Eating Well,’ or the Calculation of the Subject: an Interview with Jacques Derrida,” in *Who Comes After the Subject?* Eds. Eduardo Cadava et al. (New York: Routledge: 1991), 96-119; “The Animal that Therefore I Am (More to Follow)”, *Critical Inquiry* 28.2 (2002): 369-418; and “And Say the Animal Responded”, *op. cit.*

<sup>37</sup> Jacques Derrida and Elisabeth Roudinesco, “Violence Against Animals”, in *For What Tomorrow...* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 63.

irreducibly singular one, of course, as we know, but it is not the case that it is Man *versus* THE Animal.”<sup>38</sup> There are two aspects pointed out here by Derrida that often become confused in zoophile cultural criticism: the singularity of the human animal among the multiplicity of animals and the living in general; and the problematic nature of the underlying distinction in the opposition between human/nonhuman which constitutes the trace, or “writing,” or indeed the “mark,” in the Derridean sense as a possibility for a truly posthumanist thinking, beyond both animal and human, that does justice to the multiplicity of living beings precisely at a time (as Haraway indicated) when the boundary between organic and inorganic is being eroded. Despite all sympathy with animal ethics, Derrida believes that the implementation of animal “rights” is counterproductive since this still presupposes a notion of responsibility based on the (human) subject and (human) language-response: “to confer or to recognize rights for ‘animals’ is a surreptitious or implicit way of confirming a certain interpretation of the human subject, which itself will have been the very lever of the worst violence carried out against nonhuman living beings.”<sup>39</sup>

Derrida is certainly not against the “practice” of becoming a vegetarian but opposes radical “vegetarianism” simply because “it is not enough to stop eating meat in order to become a non-carnivore” (68). What he terms “carnophallogocentrism” involves a symbolism of sacrifice and incorporation/ingestion that goes far beyond the human practice of eating meat and which is probably constitutive of consciousness and the distinction between self and other and of the law as such. This is what Derrida means when he says that: “I do not believe in absolute ‘vegetarianism’, nor in the ethical purity of its intentions – nor even that it is rigorously tenable, without a compromise or without a symbolic substitution. I would go so far as to claim that, in a more or less refined, subtle, sublime form, a certain cannibalism remains unsurpassable” (67). The symbolic violence against animals – something that Derrida seeks to capture through the neologism “*animot*” (a contraction of animals/*animaux* and words/*mots*) – corresponds to a symbolic appropriation/ingestion on which human self-legitimation and identity (auto-biography and auto-immunity) are necessarily relying, as David Wood explains in his commentary on Derrida’s “The Animal That Therefore I am...” (which was first delivered as a paper at a conference entitled “*L’animal autobiographique*”):

We may surmise that the (external) animal we eat stands in for the (internal) animal we must overcome. And by eating, of course, we internalize it! On this reading, our

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Derrida and Roudinesco, “Violence Against Animals,” 65 (further references will be given in the text).

carnivorous violence towards other animals would serve as a mark of our civilization, and hence indirectly legitimate all kinds of other violence. If we are to target anything for transformation it would be this culture (or should we say cult) of fault and sacrifice.<sup>40</sup>

To return to Kundera's treatment of human responsibility *vis-à-vis* animals, the chapter entitled "Karenin's Smile" is of course an extreme example of "anthropomorphism" which primarily elucidates Kundera's plainly humanist metaphysics. It is so moving because the "innocent" animal, the humanised pet, human's narcissistic other, dies *for* Tereza and Tomas. In the dog's suffering and death they believe to see a message for them, a mirror of their lives and an answer to the question of the meaning of their being (and its "unbearable lightness"). Of course, Karenin is only formally "humanised" in this passage; he or rather she is denied speech. Tomas's and Tereza's "*retour à la nature*" is a retreat mixed with romanticism, nostalgia, misogyny and cultural pessimism. And still, I would like to contest, it preempts virtually all the questions raised by current posthumanist and animal theorists and even outdoes some of them. Despite its sentimentalism bordering on kitsch itself ("Karenin's Smile" is the least "ironic" part of the novel, stylistically the "weightiest", with many authorial/narrator's interventions) it comes close to a reaffirmation of humanism "without" humans, or indeed humans without humanism. The countryside retreat is both a liberation and withdrawal from communist persecution and technological modernity. Tereza and Tomas have sold everything ("their car, their television set, and their radio", *ULB* 281) and have (re)discovered an idyllic, repressed memory of a "harmonious world" of a "big happy family" (282). It is the paradisiac village world of Karenin (the individualised pet dog, the only dog unchained) and his friend Mefisto, the Mayor's pet pig: "But [Karenin] soon made friends with [Mefisto], even to the point of preferring him to the village dogs, because they were all chained to their doghouses and never stopped their silly, unmotivated barking. Karenin correctly assessed the value of being one of a kind, and I can state without compunction that he greatly appreciated his friendship" (284).

One might ask whether this in fact is a fable. What right does the narrator have to see "friendship" between animals of two different domesticated species as between two "individuals"? By abolishing the "abyss" and humanising animals the narrator is of course also opening up the possibility of the reverse, of animalising humans (and there are a number of occasions in the novel where animal metaphors are used to describe humans (Franz for example is compared by Sabina, in disgust, during their love-making, first to a "newborn animal" and

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<sup>40</sup> David Wood, "Thinking with Cats", in *Animal Philosophy: Essential Readings in Continental Thought*, eds. Matthew Calarco and Peter Atterton (London: Continuum, 2004), 139.

then to a “gigantic puppy suckling at her breasts” [116]; while Tereza is compared to animals on various occasions and once to a “sniffing dog” when she recognizes the “aroma of a woman’s sex organs” on Tomas’s hair). On these occasions, when animals are “humanised” and humans are “animalised”, the focus in current cultural criticism is usually on the “politics of representation” involved in the anthropomorphic description of animals as well as the “theriomorphic” imaging of humans.<sup>41</sup>

The transgression of this (constructed) boundary can be used to all sorts of ends, sinister and moralistic. The “bestialisation” and “dehumanisation” of humans has led to the worst excesses of inhuman behaviour. And it is the strategic transgression of the human-animal boundary on the side of animality that continues to legitimate the worst forms of xenophobia and racism against humans (as for example to be seen in Levinas’s account of his prison camp experience (see below). Kundera’s novel is very much aware of this. On several occasions Tereza refers to the traumatic experience of Soviet dog persecution (cf. esp. *ULB* 288-9): “She recalled reading a two-line filler in the papers ten or so years ago about how all dogs in a certain Russian city had been summarily shot” (288). Tereza witnesses the same kind of animal cruelty in Prague after the Soviet invasion where people who had lost all faith in communism were looking for a substitute to “get back at life for something... with revenge on the brain... The substitute they lit upon was animals.” Violence at first is directed against pigeons and then dogs until the real target, namely humans, come within reach:

Only after a year did the accumulated malice (which until then had been vented, for the sake of training, on animals) find its true goal: people. People started being removed from their jobs, arrested, put on trial. At last the animals could breathe freely. (289)

This “logic” implies that cruelty against animals is the first step towards violence against humans – a link that is also evident in relation to the treatment of animals, modern practices of mass slaughter and the Holocaust, as Charles Patterson explains, in *Eternal Treblinka*.<sup>42</sup>

The precariousness of the human-animal boundary with its connected politics of representation of both anthropomorphism and theriomorphism is one of the main arguments for animal theorists to take the animal question *seriously*, as a move that will ultimately be

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<sup>41</sup> “Theriomorphism is the reverse of anthropomorphism”, as Greg Garrard notes in his *Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge, 2004), 141.

<sup>42</sup> Charles Patterson, *Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust* (New York: Lantern Books, 2002).

beneficial for both human and nonhuman animals.<sup>43</sup> However, there is also a certain reductionism involved in this kind of well-meant representationism that claims that whatever you say about animals is inevitably anthropomorphic. For example it risks misunderstanding fiction, like Kundera's novel for example, with its particular "as if" structure,<sup>44</sup> and it also tends to simplify the whole problem of empathy and the question of other minds that is necessary to fundamentally change the relationship between human and nonhuman animals.<sup>45</sup>

A justification for rescuing Kundera from the accusation of anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism lies in a certain reversal of the idea of responsibility at work in the novel which is so central to the animal question in general (and it is worth remembering that, for Kundera, betrayal in the face of an impossible choice in fact is what calls for responsibility and justice in the face of the "unbearable lightness of being" in the first place). Karenin's joy, after what must seem like a rebirth to "him", on waking up from his anaesthetics, is a happiness of return, of repetition, within his circular "dog time": "Who can tell what distances he covered on his way back? Who knows what phantoms he battled? And now that he was at home with his dear ones, he felt compelled to share his overwhelming joy, a joy of return and rebirth" (285). However, as the cancer progresses, Karenin is unable to take part in the rituals he himself helped create and which Tomas and Tereza have found so reassuring. The pain of watching the dog suffer gradually becomes unbearable. The novel, however, is aware of the "helpless nature" of its inevitably anthropomorphic representation in this episode. Tereza and Tomas take Karenin's desire to interact with them and his yelps as signs of his happiness and his will to live: "Standing there watching him, they thought once more that he was smiling and that as long as he kept smiling he had a motive to keep living despite his death sentence" (292). There ultimately comes a point when both realise that Karenin in a sense starts "faking" his smile: "'He's just doing it for us', said Tereza. 'He didn't want to go for a walk. He's just doing it to make us happy'" (293). This realisation sets up the final, maybe most fundamental transvaluation of values related to the "unbearable lightness of being" – that of sadness and happiness: "It was sad what she said, yet without realizing it they were happy. They were happy not in spite of their sadness but thanks to it" (293). This anticipates, in fact, the final sequence before their own death: "She was experiencing the same odd happiness and odd sadness as then.

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. esp. Cary Wolfe's *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) on this question.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Derrida on literature's "as if structure", which allows it, in principle, to say anything; "'This Strange Institution Called Literature': An Interview with Jacques Derrida", in *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992), 33-75.

<sup>45</sup> On understanding the animal question as part of the "other minds" problem in philosophy see Thomas Nagel's "What is it like to be a bat?" *Philosophical Review* 83.4 (1974): 435-450.

The sadness meant: we are at the last station. The happiness meant: we are together. The sadness was form, the happiness was content. Happiness filled the space of sadness” (313-314). What links happiness and sadness in Kundera’s metaphysics is the idea of the “idyllic”. The idyll is “an image that has remained with us like a memory of Paradise: life in Paradise was not like following a straight line to the unknown; it was not an adventure. It moved in a circle among objects. Its monotony bred happiness, not boredom” (295). The price for being human is to be subjected to consciousness’s dualism (soul and body) and self-identity (being an “I”). Having acquired disgust and desire, humans have lost direct access to the idyllic. This is the source of humans’ ethical imperative towards animals and their “gift”: “No one can give anyone else the gift of the idyll; only an animal can do so, because only animals were not expelled from Paradise. The love between dog and man is idyllic. It knows no conflicts, no hair-raising scenes; it knows no development. Karenin surrounded Tereza and Tomas with a life based on repetition, and he expected the same from them” (298). Man’s plight is that “Human time does not turn in a circle; it runs ahead in a straight line. That is why man cannot be happy: happiness is the longing for repetition” (298). *Einmal ist keinmal*. This is what makes the “selfless love” between human and animal “sacred”. It outdoes the love between humans in quality, in purity and selflessness: “given the nature of the human couple, the love of man and woman is a priori inferior to that which can exist (at least in the best instances) in the love between man and dog, that oddity of human history probably unplanned by the Creator” (297). One could thus say that Kundera’s notion of the idyllic is, strictly speaking, “prehumanist” in the sense that “in Paradise man was not yet man” and “Adam was like Karenin”, which means that “the longing for Paradise is man’s longing not to be man” (296).

The gift of the idyll takes two forms, both of which are pictured in the novel: the individual and very special relationship between one admittedly privileged pet-animal and his or her “master(s)”; and the general “pastoral” environment constituted by the proximity and presence of (domestic) animals (Tereza’s function in the village is that of a cowherder). What is striking in the last moments of Karenin’s existence is the reversal of responsibility between human and animal, between Tereza and “her” dog. In their final, mutual interpellation what is evoked is not some kind of sentimentalising humanism of the animal destined to purify the grief of the human master, not so much the lacking “response” of the animal, but rather the opposite:

She could not stand [Karenin’s] stare; it almost frightened her. He did not look that way at Tomas, only at her. But never with such intensity. It was not a desperate look, or even sad. No, it was a look of awful, unbearable trust. The look was an eager question. All his



life Karenin had waited for answers from Tereza, and he was letting her know (with more urgency than usual, however) that he was still ready to learn the truth from her. (Everything that came from Tereza was the truth. Even when she gave commands like ‘Sit!’ or ‘Lie down!’ he took them as truths to identify with, to give his life meaning.)... Tereza knew that no one ever again would look at her like that. (300)

Of course even here there is anthropocentrism at work, even a quasi-religious one. Karenin here occupies the subject position of the “believer” in some higher but unknowable power and Tereza is the equivalent of his “goddess” his “Subject” (or subject-supposed-to-know, in Lacanian terms). But it is nevertheless also a mutual interpellation process. Karenin is waiting for a reply, and the responsiveness of the animal knows no bounds – which strictly speaking almost places the animal into the position of a Levinasian subject. What her face-to-face encounter with “her” dying animal emphasises is her own boundless responsibility and her ethical humanity. The scene mirrors also echoes earlier references to a Kantian categorical imperative: don’t inflict upon others (humans or nonhumans) what you wouldn’t want to endure yourself.

In Levinas’s case it is not Karenin who acts as the interpellating and interpellated animal but Bobby, the dog whose presence for a few weeks seems to interrupt the violent and dehumanising everyday experience of the group of Jewish prisoners in Nazi Germany’s camp number 1492. Treated as “subhuman gang of apes” by the German guards, the Jewish prisoners are made to feel “entrapped in their species” (a “reverse” speciesism, one could say) as “beings without language”. “How can we deliver a message about our humanity which, from behind the bars of quotation marks, will come across as anything other than monkey talk?” Levinas asks.<sup>46</sup> This dehumanisation, this becoming animal, is briefly suspended by the arrival of Bobby, a stray dog, the friend of man, who has no doubts about the prisoners’ humanity: “For him, there was no doubt that we were men” (49). This brief essay of not more than three pages has sparked a series of interventions in zoophile theory attempting to take issue with Levinas on the grounds that when he was thus confronted with a situation, an encounter, of what was undoubtedly an other, Levinasian “practice”, from an animal theory point of view, seems to fall short of what he has been “preaching” about responsibility and the face. The reason is that even though Bobby clearly affirms the humanism of the other human – Levinas goes so far as to call him “the last Kantian in Nazi Germany” (49) – Bobby remains “a means to an end” and that

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<sup>46</sup> Levinas, “The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights”, in *Animal Philosophy*, eds. Callarco and Atterton, 48-49.

the only face that counts for a truly ethical encounter is, by definition, a human face. Even though “[o]ne cannot entirely refuse the face of an animal” (49), the “priority” in an encounter with, for example, a dog, “is not found in the animal, but in the human face” (49). In other words, it is because *we* have access to *Dasein* (i.e. an ethical concern for being itself) and “know what suffering is” that *we* have an obligation to the animal’s “vitality” – an “ethical obligation [that] extends to all living beings” (50). So while the “prototype of this is human ethics”, we, *as* humans, have a responsibility towards the being of animals (even if this being is just a “struggle for life... without ethics”). Levinas’s ethics thus remains radically humanist – it is indeed very similar to Kundera’s – in the sense that through a questioning of the human by the other (human face), the singularity of a human being is constituted. Humanity is thus the condition for a responsibility not only for the other human (a responsibility which is without limit) but also for all living beings “in” their animality:

The aim of being is being itself. However, with the appearance of the human – and this is my entire philosophy – there is something more important than my life, and that is the life of the other. That is unreasonable. Man is an unreasonable animal... (50)

It seems that, for Levinas, while our responsibility towards the nonhuman other is entirely reasonable – which can be seen in the centrality of the question of suffering, sentience and all kinds of other potentially “measurable” or calculable criteria – our responsibility towards the human other or the other human is of an entirely different quality: mystical, sacred, divine. This could of course be interpreted as a confirmation of the abyss, the radical discontinuity between human and nonhuman (animal), a rejection of any naturalism that tries to make the human coextensive with (animal, evolutionary, vitalist, etc.) biology. Peter Atterton, in his commentary on Levinas’s short essay on Bobby, for example, refers to this as Levinas’s “ethical cynicism”. Atterton deplores the fact that Levinas does not recognise the potential that his definition of ethical responsibility for the other could have for animal ethics. In his conclusion he therefore attempts to be more Levinasian than Levinas himself, so to speak:

It seems to me that the lesson Levinas ought to have learned from Bobby was *not* that humans are like animals or animals are like humans, which would be to lack the sophistication required for a discussion of ethics that seeks to respect the absolute otherness of the Other. The lesson he should perhaps have learned was that his ethical theory was perhaps the best equipped of all theories – with the exception of utilitarianism

– to accommodate the inclusion of the other animal, and thereby truly go beyond the very humanism – and human chauvinism – that has served as a philosophical justification for the mistreatment of animals for over two millennia.<sup>47</sup>

This passage, in my view, however, displays an extreme lack of generosity and patience *vis-à-vis* Levinas's argument. What Atterton here argues for, namely the inclusion of the animal other into Levinas's humanist ethics, would precisely invalidate the very possibility for a responsibility for both the human and the nonhuman other by taking away the necessary distinction that also guarantees both human and animal singularity. It is thus quite logical that Atterton seems to favour utilitarianism. Utilitarianism, however, is what is least on Levinas's mind.

Atterton is not alone in his frustration with Levinas's supposed "limitation", namely his apparent unfeeling blindness towards the most vulnerable of others – the animal. John Llewellyn asks whether Levinas's question – "Who is my neighbour?" – shouldn't include the "nonhuman animal."<sup>48</sup> Peter Steeves voices his disappointment that "the two E(I)mmanuels [Levinas and Kant] could never understand" that "[a]nimals do not merely perish".<sup>49</sup> David Clark is somewhat more circumspect.<sup>50</sup> He starts with the observation that Levinas deliberately seems to bring into proximity – without, however, being tempted to establish a comparison between – "the sentimental humanization of animals and the brutal animalization of humans" (168) and the two forms of violence associated with them, physical violence against "animalized Jews" and symbolic violence of the use of the "animal" as "a marker by which ferociously to abject the other" (169), i.e. the "unspeakable human holocaust," and "the unspoken animal one" (170). There is acceptance of responsibility for both but no analogy between these for Levinas, because their confusion would in fact jeopardise responsibility for either, and thus any notion of Levinasian responsibility *tout court*. Bobby's interpellation – his recognising the prisoners as humans, and the prisoners', or indeed Levinas's, conscious anthropomorphisation of Bobby – brings forward a specific form of ethical affirmation,

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<sup>47</sup> Peter Atterton, "Ethical Criticism," in *Animal Philosophy*, eds. Callarco and Atterton, 61.

<sup>48</sup> John Llewellyn, "Am I Obsessed by Bobby? (Humanism of the Other Animal)," in *Re-reading Levinas*, eds. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 234-45.

<sup>49</sup> H. Peter Steeves, "Lost Dog, or Levinas Faces the Animal", in *Figuring Animals: Essays on Animal Images in Art, Literature, Philosophy, and popular Culture*, eds. Mary Sanders Pollock and Catherine Rainwater (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2005), 34.

<sup>50</sup> David Clark, "On Being 'The Last Kantian in Nazi Germany': Dwelling with Animals after Levinas", in *Animal Acts: Configuring the Human in Western History*, eds. Jennifer Ham and Matthew Senior (New York: Routledge, 1997), 165-198 (further references will be given in the text).

according to Clark: “Notwithstanding Levinas’s desire to say ‘no’ to the animal, Bobby’s face cannot entirely be refused, not because there is something residually ‘human’ or ‘prehuman’ about it, but precisely because of its nonhuman excess, because that face, screened though it is through Levinas’s axiomatic discourse, constitutes a ‘yes’ that is not a ‘yes’, a ‘yes’ belonging uniquely to the animal, to *this* animal, and given freely to the human prisoners” (191). However, Clark’s final verdict that Bobby is in fact merely a “domesticated creature”, and as such already half human, is again too harsh. It implies that Bobby’s role can be that of a scapegoat temporarily allowed into the camp to establish or maybe check and reconfirm the boundaries between the human and the nonhuman animal. In my view, there seems to be a compulsive and almost obscene desire in Levinas’s critics to demonstrate that an ethics built on radical responsibility inscribed into the very core of human “essence” perforce remains somehow “uncharitable”, despite or maybe even because all its good intentions. It suggests a desire to demonstrate that the humble appearance of this most humbling of ethics is somehow built on an unacknowledged and repressed hubris.

However, just as in reading Kundera’s story about Karenin, what seems most compellingly ethical and responsible is, in fact, the process of an (admittedly sentimentally humanist) interpellation of the human by a nonhuman animal other which neither completely effaces nor confirms the difference between human and animal, but makes a responsibility for the singular nonhuman other possible. This view receives some endorsement in the work of the philosopher and ethologist Dominique Lestel.<sup>51</sup> Lestel criticises Deleuze’s and Guattari’s notion of “becoming-animal” as too vague and instead explores the notion of “human/animal hybrid communities”, based not so much on mutual becomings but on co-habitation and mutual, but specific, forms of hospitality.<sup>52</sup> The true challenge for zoophile theory, according to Lestel, is the thinkability of “nonhuman individuality” (40) and the autonomy of a “(weak) animal subjectivity” (57). What he calls the “fourth injury to human narcissism” (after Copernicus, Darwin and Freud), lies in the recognition of animal subjectivity. Singular animal identity has to be accepted on the basis of animal-human interactivity and on what Lestel calls (as opposed to human identity relations based on the “intimacy” of the self) the “extimacy” of human-animal relations:

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. in particular his *L’Animal singulier* (Paris: Seuil, 2004).

<sup>52</sup> Lestel, *L’Animal singulier*, 17ff (further references will be given in the text).

Animals are effectively subjects, some are even persons who possess an important autonomy, however, the most manifest subjects remain “heteronomous”, which means they need humans to acquire an important subjective dimension. (78)

Lestel’s model is thus, in fact, one of co-domestication and mutual subjectification (114) and he therefore proposes an important shift in understanding our relation with animals (but also with what he calls “the artifact”, or the machine, the cyborg etc.), which he calls a shift from “*humanité*” to “*humanitude*”:

Humanity is a zoological category which refers to all humans; *humanitude* refers to the community of human potentialities, to this tremendous characteristic of the human to constitute a symbolic-zoological space whose limits can be explored and within which every particular human can engage in their singular ontological adventures according to trajectories that remain to be invented. (123-124)

Lestel’s notion of “*humanitude*” does define a singular “space” for humans but it is a category that is per definition also open and extendable to nonhuman animals.

Kundera’s novel in many ways acknowledges this. Apart from the singular animal and the individual human-animal interpellation (Tereza-Karenin), the novel also has an “animal liberationist” dimension. Tereza, watching the cows and calves in her care, reflects on Genesis and domestication:

Of course, Genesis was written by a man, not a horse. There is no certainty that God actually did grant man dominion over other creatures. What seems more likely, in fact, is that man invented God to sanctify the dominion that he had usurped for himself over the cow and the horse. Yes, the right to kill a deer or a cow is the only thing all of mankind can agree upon, even during the bloodiest of wars. (*ULB* 286)

However, and this is where the categorical imperative is maybe joined by a kind of “critical posthumanist” view: if a “third party” entered this logic of dominion based on “speciesism” and power, for example a “visitor from another planet” who had been given the dominion by “his God” over all other creatures in the universe: “all at once taking Genesis for granted becomes problematical. Perhaps man hitched to the cart of a Martian or roasted on the spit by inhabitants of the Milky Way will recall the veal cutlet he used to slice on his dinner plate and apologize

(belatedly!) to the cow” (286). Man, as Tereza realises watching her cows play, “is as much a parasite on the cow as the tapeworm is on man: ‘Man the cow parasite’ is probably how non-man defines man in his zoology books” (287). Tereza thus turns on Descartes who, by denying animals a soul and turning them into mere *machinae automatae*, began the long legitimisation process of enlightened modernity that made man the master and proprietor of “nature”. Philanthropy or misanthropy in this “speciesist” context are not enough to make you a humanist (or antihumanist sceptic): “There is no particular merit in being nice to one’s fellow man... We can never establish with certainty what part of our relations with others is the result of our emotions – love, antipathy, charity, or malice – and what part is predetermined by the constant power play among individuals” (289). And this is precisely where Kundera seems to reaffirm a profoundly transformed kind of humanism, certainly an “ethical” but also an “ecological”, “essentialist” but also “(ultra)liberal” one: “True human goodness, in all its purity and freedom, can come to the fore only when its recipient has no power. Mankind’s true moral test, its fundamental test (which lies deeply buried from view), consists of its attitude towards those who are at its mercy: animals. And in this respect mankind has suffered a fundamental debacle, a debacle so fundamental that all others stem from it” (289). Cartesianism turns out to be nothing but a self-fulfilling prophesy. The way modernity has overlooked the moral test of the nonhuman and has repressed it behind processes of rationalisation and discourses of economism has indeed turned the increasingly removed, hidden and commodified nonhuman animals into nameless *machinae automatae*. Consequently Tereza seeks, through a move to the countryside, a return to Paradise, characterised by the proximity with (domestic) animals (296), when “man was not yet man” and where “Adam was like Karenin”, unaware of his identity and self-reflection, unaware of disgust and the duality of body and soul (297).

As a consequence of this ethical resacralisation of life and the reinscription of the principle of humanity in the form of an absolute responsibility for animals and nature, Tereza of course does not fall back on the tradition of the Grand March by calling for “animal rights”, but instead she realises and affirms her individuality, isolation and difference (287). Kundera’s novel stresses the individual character of human responsibility and proposes a form of “becoming-animal” very different from Deleuze’s and Guattari’s. To be fair, “becoming” in Deleuze’s and Guattari’s sense has nothing to do with any kind of imitation, identification, evolution or mimesis either. It is not a becoming *like* x. It is pure desire and its effect is a “mutual deterritorialisation” of two concepts. This is why “becoming animal”, for Deleuze and

Guattari, “always involves a pack, a band, a population, a peopling, in short, a multiplicity”.<sup>53</sup> They take the human need for the metaphorisation of the animal literally, as a desire for becoming animal as multiplicity, i.e. as a desire for the outside, in particular the “outside” of identity. This desire is not to be confused with regression, however, but should rather be perceived as an “involution”, according to Deleuze and Guattari, who differentiate between three kinds of animals. The first is the individuated animal (i.e. the domestic pet, e.g. Karenin), who is “sentimental” and “Oedipal”; for Deleuze and Guattari these “narcissistic” animals are clearly not worth “becoming”. Then there are animals with characteristics or mythical animals, basically “animetaphors” (in Lippit’s and Derrida’s sense). And finally, and most appealingly, there are “demonic animals, pack or affect animals that from a multiplicity, a becoming, a population, a tale...”<sup>54</sup> In fact, Deleuze and Guattari, in describing becoming-animal in the form of a contagion and the creation of assemblages, are more in tune with Haraway’s figure of the cyborg and the process of cyborgisation as hybridity or as a strategic contamination of the category of the human. However, their “ethical” conclusions of this becoming are very different. While Haraway moves from the cyborg to the companion species and the dog in particular – that is, to the “individual” animal – animality for Deleuze and Guattari is clearly a collective and it is in this collectivity that the attraction of becoming lies for them. It is interesting that in Kundera’s novel these three forms of animal-human encounters, i.e. with the individual domestic animal and with the herd of cows, and Tereza’s saving of the “wild” animal, the crow, all seem to evoke the same kind of responsibility. However, they certainly do not constitute a “becoming-animal” as such, since Deleuze and Guattari’s ethical ideal is that of a “symbiosis” of bodies in movement:

To become animal is to participate in movements, to stake out the path of escape in all its positivity, to cross a threshold, to reach a continuum of intensities that are valuable only in themselves, to find a world of pure intensities where all forms come undone, as do all the significations, signifiers, and signifieds, to the benefit of an unformed matter of deterritorialized flux, of nonsignifying signs. (96)

The Nietzschean nihilistic ethics that lurks behind this notion of becoming-animal betrays a combination of vitalism, naturalism and materialism. As James Urpeth, in his reading of

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<sup>53</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, “Becoming-Animal,” in *Animal Philosophy*, eds. Calarco and Atterton, 88.

<sup>54</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, “Becoming-Animal”, in *Animal Philosophy*, eds. Calarco and Atterton, 90 (further references will be given in the text).

Deleuze and Guattari, explains: “to undergo a desire-flow of the ‘becoming-animal’ variety is to be drawn back into a reality more fundamental than species and genera, organic classification, and evolution through filiation and descent.”<sup>55</sup> Similarly, Rosi Braidotti envisages the posthuman as a “nomadic subject” always in the process of becoming-other, e.g. through “becoming-animal” as one form of becoming a deterritorialised network which she sees as an opportunity for a new ecological ethics based on the positive embracing of biodiversity and interspecies solidarity.<sup>56</sup>

However, there is a danger in overestimating the subversive potential of this “becoming”, whether it relates to animal-becoming, to becoming-multiple, or, even more “radically”, to becoming “in-organic”, as Kate Soper points out:

It is far from clear why the erosion of the organic and inorganic distinction should be thought of as offering any very pleasurable or liberating opportunities for individual self-realisation let alone provide a platform for a collective post-capitalist utopian agenda.<sup>57</sup>

The idea of “becoming-animal” in Kundera’s novel has indeed very different connotations. In Tereza’s last dream she associates Tomas’s execution with a transformation into a rabbit and realises that what she always had thought of as being her weakness was in fact the power behind their lives’ transformation. In becoming-rabbit Tomas had lost all his strength. He had gradually given up all his “*es muss sein*”, his women, his profession, his “mission” and finally his youth: “She had reached her goal: she had always wanted him to be old. Again she thought of the rabbit she had pressed to her face in her childhood room. What does it mean to turn into a rabbit? It means losing all strength. It means that one is no stronger than the other anymore” (313). For Tereza, becoming animal is embracing one’s vulnerability, one’s responsibility towards the other, whereas Deleuze’s and Guattari’s becoming-animal seems quite the opposite. It is arguably the Nietzschean vitalism that demands a loss of self, but implies a regaining of force through the “multitude” in return, that I find problematic here. While Tereza’s and Kundera’s radical humanism stresses the individuality of responsibility, Deleuze and Guattari’s antihumanism is deliberately “irresponsible”. I would argue that this basically constitutes a political and ethical choice for different “posthumanisms” in relation to the nonhuman other more generally: a singular and predominantly ethical responsibility that humans face *vis-à-vis*

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<sup>55</sup>James Urpeth, “Animal Becomings”, in *Animal Philosophy*, 104.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Braidotti, *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), chapter 3, and *Metaphorhoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), chapter 3.

<sup>57</sup> Kate Soper, “Humans, Animals, Machines,” 107.



the nonhuman *versus* a predominantly political project of becoming other-than-human by embracing (arguably, with the aim of undermining) the conditions of posthumanisation.

### *Animalities*

Anyone who likes cats or dogs is a fool.<sup>58</sup>

Why have I rarely spoken of the “subject” or of “subjectivity”, but rather, here and there, only of “an affect” of “subjectivity”? Because the discourse on the subject, even if it locates difference, inadequation, the dehiscence within auto-affection, etc., continues to link subjectivity with man. Even if it acknowledges that the “animal” is capable of auto-affection (etc.), this discourse nevertheless does not grant it subjectivity – and this concept thus remains marked by all the presuppositions that I have just recalled. Also at stake here of course is responsibility, freedom, truth, ethics, and law.<sup>59</sup>

Cultural criticism has seized upon the animal-other as one of the last “others” left to theorise. As part of its ethico-political project based on notions of responsibility, unknowability and liminality, it is torn between its critique of (necessarily anthropomorphic) representation (of the animal as metaphor) and its own desire to use the animal other strategically (or as a figure of subversive “monstrosity” similar to that of the cyborg) to purify itself of its own anthropocentric premises. This strategy might be described like this: “Western metaphysics” with its Graeco-Judeo-Christian (or “neoplatonist”) base, is profoundly humanist and has progressed by establishing more or less flexible boundaries around a human “essence” whose purity and radical difference from the nonhuman is however continually threatened to be unmasked as a “myth”. Western metaphysics has thus constantly put forward categorisations aimed at excluding the nonhuman from the essence of humanity, e.g. by positing humans’ unique access to God, reason, language, morality, technology etc. Humanism’s constant crisis (self-questioning and self-affirmation) is thus the price to pay for the continuous policing of the conceptual borders of the human. In fact, it could be said that to a certain extent humanism thrives on this crisis; it creates its own monsters, its own challenges, for the purpose of “self-legitimation”. However, the ghosts which it creates through continuously evoking and

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<sup>58</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, “Becoming-Animal”, 90.

<sup>59</sup> Derrida, “Eating Well,” in *Who Comes After the Subject?* Eds. Eduardo Cadava et al., 105.

repressing its fetishised monsters, always come back to haunt this humanity through its expelled and repressed animality (hence my earlier reference to “zoohauntology”) designed to uphold the notion of an essential difference between the human and its nonhuman others. These fetishised and repressed nonhuman others, like all repressed, develop a dynamic of their own and undermine the usability of those very conceptual tools aimed at defining humanness, i.e. God, reason, language, technology, morality etc. Under the conditions of late capitalism this ongoing process of refinement, crisis, breakdown and renewal, which could be called humanism’s very own “posthumanisation”, focuses mainly on the borders which, as Donna Haraway writes, as a result have become “leaky”: animal/human; machine/human; inorganic/organic.<sup>60</sup>

But what exactly is the role that cultural criticism is to play in this context? If it is to be “progressive”, is indeed the only policy for cultural criticism of a posthumanist conviction to not only analytically embrace the process of posthumanisation but to hasten and assist it? That is, should it seek strategies to push culture towards “becoming-animal”, “becoming-machinic” (or cyborg), and “becoming-inorganic”? The problem lies in the (supposedly “semi-autonomous”) location of cultural criticism itself. How can one be sure that this critical stance is not itself contaminated by the very humanist desires it seeks to leave behind? How to make sure that the posthumanist strategies of “becoming-other” have not indeed been missives or missions posted by humanism (to) itself? Given this undecidability there are two strategies one could follow: one, cautiously-critical, based on extreme self-reflexivity and scepticism, conscious of working within and working through contaminated concepts like the subject, difference and otherness; the other, nihilistic-transvaluative, based on instinct and radical indulgence (following Žižek’s Lacanian invitation, so to speak, to “enjoy your symptom”), often combined with a (Nietzschean) rejection of all moral boundaries and an unconditional affirmation of some kind of “life force” or other forms of vitalism and naturalism.

Once more, the fascinating thing is that both of these options are already given in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. In fact, they are at work in the very “lightness of being” that is so unbearable, the undecidability between “human time” and “dog time”, event and repetition, death and ritual, and so on. One could argue that Kundera’s novel somehow thematises the posthumanisation process in the form of an “unbearable lightness of being (not quite, but almost) posthuman”. This is why it subscribes to what could be called the “tragicomedy” of humanism in which sadness is the form and happiness is its content. It gestures towards a death

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<sup>60</sup> Donna Haraway, “A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s,” *The Haraway Reader* (London: Routledge, 2004), 8ff.

of the human which it knows very well it cannot possibly preempt by representing it. What is important for the context of posthuman cultural criticism in this respect is that, in doing so, the novel confirms and deepens the sense of humanity all the while subscribing to the principle of radical responsibility (for the other, the nonhuman animal etc.). It seems to say that only by embracing this contradictory “unbearable lightness” of being human (in the face of becoming posthuman, someone or something else) can one be responsible to and hear the response of the other. Ironically, betrayal thus becomes the only real guarantee for faithfulness.<sup>61</sup> It is not by abandoning or “overcoming” the human or by some phantasm of “becoming-animal” that humanism can be either saved or defeated. Borders can be redrawn, but not simply overcome or confirmed. Betrayal of a boundary lies in being *fidèle* to its contradictory imperatives (this is the Derridean idea of the *plus d’un*).<sup>62</sup> In terms of the animal-other this probably means that an acceptance of some form of humanist anthropocentrism is indispensable for an ethical response to animals and our treatment of them, allowing for being interpellated by an animal-other in the first place, without which no animal rights movement, vegetarianism and animal cultural criticism would be even thinkable.

There is no reason to doubt that humans can indeed be interpellated by nonhuman animals, be they pets, domestic or wild, mammals or insects, individuals or packs. In fact, if one rereads Althusser’s famous essay on ideology and the interpellation of the subject carefully, two things become quite clear: the first is, that Althusser’s subject is, as Suzanne Gearhart (following Etienne Balibar) puts it, a very specific subject who is always already immersed in a language (not language as such) and everything that is presupposed by that language in the form of its specific language community, i.e. a nation with its fictions of ethnicity, sexuality, gender etc.<sup>63</sup> Gearhart goes on not so much to invalidate Althusser’s “little theatre” of interpellation but to claim its radical openness to (re)interpretation, or indeed its fundamental ambiguity. To her, Althusser’s notion of interpellation is too pessimistic and authoritarian: “there is no reason to assume that the act of interpellation is exclusively or primarily aggressive, hostile, or repressive – any more than that there is any reason to assume that it is friendly or

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. Jacques Derrida “Fidélité à plus d’un: Mériter d’hériter où la généalogie fait défaut”, *Cahiers Intersignes* 13 (1998): 221-65.

<sup>62</sup> See my “*Plus d’un – Deconstruction and the Translation of Cultural Studies*”, *Culture Machine* 6 (2004), available at: <http://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/article/viewarticle/4/3>.

<sup>63</sup> Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)”, in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 121-73; and Suzanne Gearhart, “Interpellations: From Althusser to Balibar”, in *Discipline and Practice: The (Ir)resistibility of Theory*, eds. Stefan Herbrechter and Ivan Callus (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2004), 178-204.

‘positive’. It could be either (or both), some of each in the other, open and underdetermined in its ultimate effects and consequences.”<sup>64</sup> And she adds that her point is not:

to argue that Althusser’s scene of interpellation is either true or false, positive or negative, good or bad. It is rather to emphasize the ambiguity of that scene and to acknowledge that there are no unassailable, indisputable principles that can be referred to in order to determine its ultimate meaning, not only with respect to the work of the two philosophers [Althusser and Balibar] who have concerned me here but also in relation to the broader context of contemporary debates on nationalism, immigration, internationalism, and transnationalism. (201)

This is precisely – and this is the second point – why it would be both possible and desirable to add “speciesism” to Gearhart’s list here, because the second thing that becomes obvious in rereading Althusser’s account of the interdependence of subject and ideology in the process of interpellation is that he not only fails to problematise the nationalism inscribed within this cultural scene (even though he is aware of the cultural specificity of at least one aspect of his example, namely the handshake as ritual),<sup>65</sup> but also his unquestioned (anthropocentric) humanism. Althusser specifically states, in the best tradition of philosophical anthropology and also humanist Marxism, that for him, “man is an ideological animal by nature.”<sup>66</sup> Arguably it is the very definition of ideology as radical immanence within language (i.e. one is, for Althusser, “always already” in ideology, in the same way as one is always already “in” language) which prevents Althusser from “seeing” the ideology of humanism and speciesism that underpin his interpellation scene, his notion of ideology and of the subject as necessarily national-humanist subject.

However, another reading is at hand, following Gearhart’s point about the radical ambiguity of the interpellation scene. The hailing process, which Althusser takes as interpellation *par excellence*, can occur in various forms: “verbal call or whistle.”<sup>67</sup> Gearhart picks up on this,<sup>68</sup> but is happy just to claim, convincingly, that for Althusser there does not seem to be any doubt that even this whistle is a linguistic sign, and therefore is already in language and merely a variation of verbal interpellation proper. However, one is allowed to

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<sup>64</sup> Gearhart, “Interpellations,” 195 (further references will be given in the text).

<sup>65</sup> Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses”, 161.

<sup>66</sup> Althusser, 160.

<sup>67</sup> Althusser, 163.

<sup>68</sup> Gearhart, “Interpellations”, n. 12, 202.

take the idea of something like “wolf-whistling” seriously, almost literally, and not just in its macho and sexist sense. Why, indeed, should not an animal cry or whistle be able to interpellate “us”, or an animal face (like Karenin’s “awfully” trusting eyes at the moment of greatest suffering which is at the same time the absolute expectation of truth), or indeed even a “thing”? And what would this mean for the (human) subject? Would that still be an affirmation of “double specularity” at work in ideological interpellation, as Althusser presupposes? Christian ideology, which Althusser holds up as the “best example” of this double specularity, is of course inextricably mixed up with the question of humanism:

We observe that the structure of all ideology, interpellating individuals as subjects in the name of a Unique and Absolute Subject is *specular*, i.e. a mirror-structure, and *doubly* specular: this mirror duplication is constitutive of ideology and ensures its functioning. Which means that all ideology is *centred*, that the Absolute Subject occupies the unique place of the Centre, and interpellates around it the infinity of individuals into subjects in a double mirror-connexion such that it *subjects* the subjects to the Subject, while giving them in the Subject in which each subject can contemplate its own image (present and future) the *guarantee* that this really concerns them and Him...<sup>69</sup>

If we apply this “mutual recognition of subjects and Subject, the subjects’ recognition of each other, and finally of the subject’s recognition of himself” (168) to what Derrida calls, in relation to speciesist humanism, “carnophallologocentrism”, it becomes clear that the only way to sidestep humanism is to break through its specific “double specularity” in which the humanist subject recognises him or herself (and thus reassures him or herself of the radical difference between human and nonhuman others). But in order to avoid the mere substitution of one Subject or one form of pseudo-religious transcendence, or of one transcendental signifier, by another, a mere rejection of the ideology, subject and interpellation process is not enough. It is deconstruction’s merit to offer a disjuncture, not a dissolution, of double specularity by radical contextualisation and its emphasis on singularity – *this* other, *this* subject, *this* interpellation. The attention to specificity and singularity may help stave off the inevitable excesses of merely replacing humanist anthropocentrism with, for example, new forms of “biocentrism” proposed as a solution to anthropomorphism in various forms of ecocriticism.

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<sup>69</sup> Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses”, 168.

In conclusion, despite all the good intentions in posthumanist zoophile theory, there are limits to the dyad anthropomorphism/theriomorphism and it is therefore good to be reminded from time to time that, as Kate Soper writes:

Not only can no other animal recognise a right or feel an obligation to respect it; most other animals are also profoundly indifferent to the welfare of other living beings, and happily so in many ways. What is more, none of them can begin to imagine what it is like to be a human being, let alone write about that imagining.<sup>70</sup>

What value does *my* sentimentality, *my* being moved by Karenin's smile have, then? Undoubtedly, it confirms the humaneness of *my* (shared) humanity, even if it is at the price of anthropomorphisation. At the same time it also temporarily erases the boundaries between humanity and animality by making the animal almost "more human than human" (cf. Levinas's account of "Bobby", above). This moment of disjuncture is therefore the moment critical posthumanism must cultivate in its readings of humanism and its associated "animalities", for the sake of the (nonhuman) other.

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<sup>70</sup> Soper, "Humans, Animals, Machines", 106.