9 "Not that I am afraid of becoming an animal" – Ecography in Marlen Haushofer's *The Wall*

> That wouldn't be too bad, but a human being can never become just an animal; he plunges beyond, into the abyss.[1]

Our time is framed by human-induced climate change, the return of war to Europe with another reminder of the persistent threat of nuclear annihilation. Under these circumstances, a re-reading of Marlen Haushofer's novel, *The Wall*, first published in 1963, and mostly ignored until the 1980s, seems almost to impose itself. It was first translated into English in 1990, but it was the 2012 film adaptation[2] which allowed it to reach a wider and more international audience, who were subsequently quick to recognise the prescience of its (post)apocalyptic, (post)human and (post)ecological scenario.[3] In other words, *The Wall* deserves a place in the emerging canon of contemporary "Anthropocene fiction".[4]

Julian Pösler's "Afterword" to the reissued 2012 edition of the English translation whose dust jacket now bears a still from Pösler's movie with the tagline "Now a major motion picture", is quite representative in this new kind of appreciation the novel has been receiving:

> *The Wall* is one of the greatest texts ever written in German-language literature and, for that matter, in any language. (…) I do feel (…) that the novel and the film based upon Haushofer's masterwork gets at something of the human condition that no other work of fiction does – the truth of yourself when you are the last remaining member of the human race. *The Wall* is a novel [that has been described as] the precise embodiment of clinical depression.[5]

Indeed, if there is one feeling the reader of Marlen Haushofer's work is left with at the end of *The Wall* it is that of disillusionment. It is somewhat surprising that a female author should have been so utterly disarming in her bleak description of a time and a humanity that had just

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[1] Marlen Haushofer, *The Wall*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (Berkeley: Cleis Press, 1990), p. 34 (further references will be given in the text. The German original is: "Nicht dass ich fürchtete, ein Tier zu werden, das wäre nicht sehr schlimm, aber ein Mensch kann niemals ein Tier werden, er stürzt am Tier vorüber in einen Abgrund" (Marlen Haushofer, *Die Wand* [1962] (Frankfurt: Ullstein 1987), p. 44). Further references to this edition will be given in the text.

[2] *Die Wand*, dir. Julian Pölsler (Vienna and Berlin: Studiocanal, 2012).

[3] Alyssa Howards points out that in her teaching experience COVID-19 as well "has given the novel renewed relevance" due to its "narrator's frontier-style life", cf. Howards, "A Cold War Text for the COVID Generation", *Die Unterrichtspraxis/Teaching German* 56 (2023): 14-16.

[4] Cf. Adam Trexler, *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015).

[5] Julian Pösler, "Afterword", in *TheWall*, pp. 247-248. Sabine Frost is less kind to both film and novel in her "Looking Behind Walls: Literary and Filmic Imaginations of Nature, Humanity, and the Anthropocene in *Die Wand*", in: Sabine Wilke and Japhet Johnstone, eds, *Readings in the Anthropocene: The Environmental Humanities, German Studies, and Beyond* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), pp. 62-88. Of the film, Frost says that it "romanticizes the relationship between humanity and nature" (p. 62) and of the novel's protagonist she thinks that "the woman sacrifices her individual existence for the care of the remaining animals. She regards this stewardship as altruistic and selfless, but she actually re-enacts humanity's oppressive attitude towards nature" (p. 67). In my reading I am hoping to show that at least the second of Frost's judgements is very uncharitable indeed.

survived one of the worst human-made catastrophes. Marlen Haushofer belonged to a generation of pre-1968 women who were still brought up 'traditionally', often disenchanted by marriage and family life, and by men, but who did not yet have the 'revolutionary' inclination of the generation that followed. Instead, Haushofer as so many other women in her social situation continued to suffer in silence growing more detached from the world, while clearly seeing how society was going to the dogs. Maybe the most devastating aspect of this disillusionment and the bleakness it spreads throughout Haushofer's fiction is the absence of any trace of cynicism. Haushofer is almost brutal in her merciless earnestness and hopelessness. Hers is an abysmal sadness without redemption, a melancholia without any longing, only a completely helpless and gradual abandoning of self and world in the face of inescapable violence, suffering, death and insignificance. Reading her is depressing but one is hooked because despite everything one senses that she is not devoid of care, on the contrary. It is depressing precisely because Haushofer's female protagonists (and some male ones as well) still seem to care about everything, life's everyday details, 'nature' and, above all, nonhuman animals. In a way, *The Wall*'s protagonist is a female version of Camus's Sisyphus, just without any remaining absurdist heroism, existentialism without hope.

With hindsight therefore, the parameters of the current reception of the film and the novel seem clearly defined: on the one hand, the gender issue it raised when it first appeared remains very relevant, as the feminist movement of the 1980s was quick to recognise and focus on, given the existential isolation of the anonymous female narrator as the only survivor after the violent self-destruction of patriarchal civilisation (the novel has been frequently classified as a "female Robinsonade"). On the other hand, the pacifist interpretation of the anti-nuclear and ecologist movement of the 1980s obviously read Haushofer's survival scenario as that of a post-nuclear war and as a 'world without us' utopia. There is no question that both dynamics are legitimate and still very pertinent, however, both angles tend to focus on the *human* question of survival in the face of a catastrophe that seems to have 'petrified' *all* life beyond the mysterious wall in Haushofer's fiction. They tend to remain fundamentally *humanist* in their mainly anthropocentrically motivated readings, even though in very different ways: readings of *The Wall* as a 'female Robinsonade' and as an example of *écriture féminine* tend to stress the prospect of (human) survival and foreground the question of a new beginning for a 'better' civilisation (i.e. beyond patriarchy and predominantly male violence). They ask the question of what will become of 'us' (humans) after the end of civilisation as we know it? Not only the feminist movement, but also the pacifist one is therefore concerned with a disruption and a new beginning. Both are focused on what one might call the idea of 'rescue' and its logic, and both are thus 'ecological' in a still very limited, namely anthropocentric, sense.

It is precisely here, in my opinion, that a much more radical and critically *post*humanist reading of *The Wall* is required. It is indeed questionable whether Haushofer's novel is (still) about any 'logic of rescue'. The protagonist is at best divided about returning to or rebuilding human civilisation. In this sense, it is questionable whether *The Wall* is (still) a humanist or an anthropocentric story, for the narrator is equally divided about the impending loss of her own humanity. It might even be no longer a story about humans at all, not even in the anthropomorphic sense of an animal fable. Instead, Haushofer's novel seems to anticipate a postanthropocentric worldview that has been gaining momentum since the beginning of the 21st century, one that is no longer based on humanist ethical and ecological values.

Haushofer's novel, as I would argue, thus moves along a line of flight, from an *écriture féminine* to what one might refer to as an *écriture animale*, and possibly even beyond, namely to an *écriture écologique* (or an 'ecography' as I am proposing to call it). In doing so, *The Wall* is also already raising the question of what role fiction is to play in a posthumanist context, and in the process of 'de-anthropocentring' it advocates.[6]

From écriture féminine *to* écriture animale *to...*

Marlen Haushofer emphasised that it was the writing process itself that was the central concern of her work and literary criticism has duly tended to present her as a 'writerly' writer from the beginning. It is no coincidence that a central writerly motif of one of her novels, *Eine Handvoll Leben* [*A Handful of Life*], became the title of one of the most comprehensive collections of essays in German on Haushofer's work to date: "Perhaps a very distant eye could unravel a secret writing from this splintered work".[7] In *The Wall* the protagonist-narrator-writer sees writing as an indispensable form of recording her experience and to remind herself of her own humanness. It thus serves as a kind of human 'self-assurance', even though ultimately it also is becoming a meaningless cultural technique given her existential isolation as the (presumably) only survivor, as a writer without a reader. Writing therefore inevitably plays a structurally ambivalent role for the narrative. Writing is an existential technique for the narrator because it serves as a protective device against 'madness', as she explains: "I'm not writing for the sheer joy of writing; so many things have happened to me that I must write if I am not to lose my reason" (1).[8] However, the writing process in *The Wall* is in fact a very complex one. It is both a mere recording (a 'report') and a safeguarding through remembering; it is so to speak a double writing, or writing and its double. "All I have to rely on is a few meagre jottings; meagre, because I never expected to write this report" (1), as the narrator confesses. As a result, she fears that "much that I remember will be different from my real experiences"

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[6] The original version of this chapter was written 2013 and appeared in German as "'Nicht daß ich fürchtete, ein Tier zu werden…' Ökographie in Marlen Haushofers *Die Wand*", *Figurationen* 15.1 (2014): 41-55. It thus predates recent readings which see *The Wall* as a forerunner to current Anthropocene fiction like Frost's, cited above, or also Anna Richards's "'The Friendship of Our Distant Relations': Feminism and Animal Families in Marlen Haushofer's *Die Wand* (1963)", *Feminist German Studies* 36.2 (2020): 75-100. I quote Richards, however, because of our shared focus on the role of animals in the novel, and because of the elegant and concise plot summary she provides:

> Appearing in 1963, before the increase in public awareness of animal abuse, Marlen Haushofer's *Die Wand* (*The Wall*, 1991) is extraordinary in its portrayal of animals as valuable individuals in their own right, rather than simply as creatures existing for human benefit. The novel consists of the first-person account of a woman who wakes up one morning in a hunting lodge in the Austrian Alps to find that, nearby, an invisible wall has descended and the people and animals on the other side are dead. Apparently the only human survivor, the narrator develops close, mutually dependent relationships with a dog, a cat, a cow, and their offspring. While blaming humanity, and in particular men, for creating a loveless, technologically oriented society responsible for its own demise, the narrator attributes largely positive qualities to these animals and loves them like a family. (Richards, p. 76)

[7] Marlen Haushofer, *Eine Handvoll Leben* [1955] (München: DTV, 1991), p. 156. Cf. Anke Bosse and Clemes Ruthner, eds., "*Eine geheime Schrift aus diesem Splitterwerk enträtseln…" – Marlen Haushofers Werk im Kontext* (Tübingen: Francke, 2000).

[8] "Ich schreibe nicht aus Freude am Schreiben; es hat sich eben so für mich ergeben, daß ich schreiben muß, wenn ich nicht den Verstand verlieren will" (*Die Wand*, 7).

(1).[9] Her report and her notes are separated from each other both temporally and ontologically. The sparse notes were not written with the intention of later completing a full report. There were in fact periods when the narrator did not take any notes at all. The report, i.e. *The Wall*, like any report inevitably can only come into being *post factum*, after everything has already happened and time has literally stopped: "I don't know what time it is exactly. Probably around three in the afternoon. I've lost my watch" (2).[10] In addition, the annual ascent to the mountain pasture (*Alm*) is accompanied by a profound transformation of the narrator into a 'stranger' living in a state of 'timelessness' outside of writing, as she explains: "I probably didn't make many entries about this because it all struck me as a little unreal. The *Alm* lay outside of time" (158).[11]

The narrator meticulously describes her writing technique at the beginning of her report: "I have a ball-point pen and three pencils. The ball-point pen is almost dry, and I very much dislike writing in pencil. My writing doesn't stand out as clearly against the paper. The delicate grey strokes blur into the yellowish background. But I have no choice, after all. I'm writing on the backs of old diaries and yellowed business paper" (2).[12] This fading and blurred writing of the last surviving human is the only thing that seems to delay the loss of (human) reason and memory. The limited resource of paper also determines the length of the report, the end of which coincides with the last page of the old 'business papers' and 'calendars' she found: "Today, the twenty-fifth of February, I shall end my report. There isn't a single sheet of paper left" (244).[13] "When winter came in November, I decided to write this report. It was my last resort. I couldn't spend the whole winter sitting at the table with that one question in my head, a question that no human being, nobody at all in the world, can answer" (243).[14]

The question that ultimately motivates her writing is the question about humans, who they are and why they do what they do. However, it is also the classical philosophical 'question of the animal': "I don't understand what happened. Even today I wonder why the strange man killed Bull and Lynx" (243).[15] At the end of the report, after the all-motivating question has been asked, the narrator describes her state of mind in the following words: "Now I am quite calm. I can see a little further ahead. I can see that this isn't the end. Everything goes on. (…)

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[9] "Ich bin angewiesen auf spärliche Notizen; spärlich, weil ich ja nie damit rechnete, diesen Bericht zu schreiben, und ich fürchte, daß sich in meiner Erinnerung vieles anders ausnimmt, als ich es wirklich erlebte" (7).

[10] "Ich weiß nicht genau, wie spät es ist. Wahrscheinlich gegen drei Uhr nachmittags. Meine Uhr ist verloren-gegangen" (8).

[11] "Wahrscheinlich machte ich auch keine Aufzeichnungen darüber, weil mir alles ein wenig unwirklich erschien. Die Alm lag außerhalb der Zeit" (182).

[12] "Ich besitze einen Kugelschreiber und drei Bleistifte. Der Kugelschreiber ist fast ausgetrocknet, und mit Bleistift schreibe ich sehr ungern. Das Geschriebene hebt sich nicht deutlich vom Papier ab. Die zarten grauen Striche verschwimmen auf dem gelblichen Grund. Aber ich habe ja keine Wahl. Ich schreibe auf der Rückseite alter Kalender und auf vergilbtem Geschäftspapier" (8).

[13] "Heute, am fünfundzwanzigsten Februar, beende ich meinen Bericht. Es ist kein Blatt Papier übriggeblieben" (276).

[14] "Als im November der Winter hereinbrach, beschloß ich, diesen Bericht zu schreiben. Es war ein letzter Versuch. Ich konnte nicht den ganzen Winter am Tisch sitzen mit dieser einen Frage im Kopf, die mir kein Mensch, überhaupt niemand auf der Welt, beantworten kann" (275).

[15] Ich verstehe nicht, was geschehen ist. Noch heute frage ich mich, warum der fremde Mann Stier und Luchs getötet hat" (275).

something new is coming, and I can't escape that" (243).[16] This is not to be misread as a sign of a confidence gained. It merely constitutes some reprieve of remembering, which will make room for something new and will make sure she won't lose her humanness, even though she is very much aware that this will only bring some temporary relief. Writing is therefore to be understood as a kind of human 'therapy', as therapeutic for the narrator's humanity. This is explained in more detail in a reflection on why the *Alm* is no place for writing, but only for pure 'sensuality':

> In my memory, that summer is overshadowed by events that occurred much later. I can no longer feel how beautiful it was, now I only know it was. There is a terrible difference. That's why I can't draw the picture of the pasture. My senses have a worse memory than my mind, and one day they may stop remembering entirely. Before that happens I must have written everything down. (187)[17]

An incredibly complex logic seems to underlie this train of thought: two kinds of memory are here distinguished, that of the senses and that of the mind; one is purely affective and based on 'feeling', the other is rational and based on 'knowing'. Affective memory, like Lynx's sniffing, is superior to purely rational (human) memory, which is only secondary. Significantly, and somewhat paradoxically, writing, of all things, is intended to stop the narrator's dreaded fading of affect, perhaps even to capture the sensuality of the Alpine pasture and make it accessible to her once again. It is as if writing for the narrator could outwit the brain and undermine its dominance. In a quite literal sense, the recording process in *The Wall* is about a 'report of experience', a 'sensual writing'. It is an entirely different writing that seems to sit between rational remembering and sensual forgetting (cf. "My thoughts almost always raced ahead of my eyes and distorted the true picture" (185)).[18]

As Marlen Haushofer's narrator recognises, being possibly the last representative of the human species and gradually shedding her female, human face, she also has to familiarise herself with the feeling that her writing will no longer find any human reader. So why keep on writing, one might ask. This question in fact has a concrete effect in terms of the fictitious addressee of the report. The narrator must take into account its future reader's possible 'non-humanity' and thus has to legitimate her writing as a no longer (exclusively) human act: "Over the last few days I have realized that I still hope [a human being] will read my report" (70; translation modified).[19] In return, the story also demands from its actual (human) reader an attitude that suspends the human/nonhuman distinction that is usually always tacitly presupposed in any narrative. *The Wall* is thus less, or at least not only, an early example of *écriture féminine*, but instead the invention of an *écriture animale*.

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[16] "Jetzt bin ich ganz ruhig. Ich sehe ein kleines Stück weiter. Ich sehe, daß dies noch nicht das Ende ist. Alles geht weiter. (…) aber etwas Neues kommt heran, und ich kann mich ihm nicht entziehen" (275).

[17] "In der Erinnerung ist der Sommer überschattet von Ereignissen, die viel später eintraten. Ich spüre nicht mehr, wie schön es war, ich weiß es nur noch. Das ist ein schrecklicher Unterschied. Deshalb gelingt es mir nicht, das Bild der Alm zu zeichnen. Meine Sinne erinnern sich schlechter als mein Hirn, und eines Tages werden sie vielleicht ganz aufhören, sich zu erinnern. Ehe dies eintritt, muß ich alles niedergeschrieben haben" (213).

[18] "Fast immer waren die Gedanken schneller als die Augen und verfälschten das wahre Bild" (210).

[19] "Seit einigen Tagen ist mir klar geworden, daß ich immer noch hoffe, ein Mensch werde diesen Bericht lesen" (84).

The first sign of this can be found in the narrator-protagonist's awareness of this shift in perspective is when she realises that she in her observation process she is also being watched by her animals: "I'm hurt, but who knows, maybe the cat knows me better than I know myself, and knows what I could be capable of. As I write, she's lying in front of me on the table, staring with her big yellow eyes over my shoulder at a patch of the wall" (40).[20] The idea of 'animal writing' becomes increasingly literal and material over the course of the report, as the narrator becomes aware that she is no longer necessarily writing to leave some human legacy:

> But mice will eat the report long before that. (…) They probably like eating paper with writing on just as much as blank sheets. (...) It's a strange feeling, writing for mice. Sometimes I simply have to imagine I'm writing for people, which is a bit easier. (70-71)[21]

The idea of a 'mouse writing' – writing with, by and for mice (in a literal sense, i.e. with the certainty that the writing is both for no one but rodents by whom it will most likely be eaten).

Apart from this radically literal understanding of 'animal writing', the actual tracks or traces animals leave also play a central role in the remembering process of the narrator's post-apocalyptic survival scenario, with its literally postanthropocentric environment. The memory trace, which, as Jacques Derrida showed, in general has to be thought 'beyond' or outside any distinction between human and nonhuman writing.[22] This explains the ambivalent role tracing and writing play in *The Wall*. Animal and human traces here merge into a form of meaningful inscription as a result of a new human-animal relationship that actually form the narrator's memory:

> I'm not surprised that I still hear the dry branches cracking under the light tread of his feet. Where else would his little dog's soul go haunting, if not on my trail? He's a friendly ghost, and I'm not afraid of him. Lynx, beautiful, good dog, my dog, it's probably just my poor head making the sound of your footsteps, the gleam of your coat. As long as I exist you'll follow my trail, hungry and yearning, as I myself, hungry and yearning, follow invisible trails. Neither of us will ever bring our prey to ground. (100).[23]

Of course, it would be easy to pick up on the melancholic tone of this passage, which is still profoundly humanist (because anthropocentric) and 'moving' (for humans, presumably). It is

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[20] "Es kränkt mich, aber wer weiß, vielleicht kennt die Katze mich besser, als ich selbst mich kenne, und ahnt, wozu ich fähig sein könnte. Während ich dies schreibe, liegt sie vor mir auf dem Tisch und sieht aus großen gelben Augen über meine Schulter auf einen Fleck der Wand" (50).

[21] "Viel eher aber werden die Mäuse den Bericht fressen. (…) Wahrscheinlich fressen sie beschriebenes Papier genauso gern wie unbeschriebenes. (…) Es ist ein merkwürdiges Gefühl, für Mäuse zu schreiben. Manchmal muß ich mir einfach vorstellen, ich schriebe für Menschen, es fällt mir dann ein wenig leichter" (84-85).

[22] Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* [1967] (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), pp. 9ff.

[23] "Es wundert mich nicht, daß ich noch immer die dürren Äste hinter mir knistern höre unter dem leichten Tritt seiner Sohlen. Woanders sollte seine kleine Hundeseele spuken als auf meiner Spur? Es ist ein freundlicher Spuk, und ich fürchte ihn nicht. Luchs, schöner, braver Hund, mein Hund, Wahrscheinlich macht nur mein armer Kopf das Geräusch deiner Tritte, den Schimmer deines Fells. Solange es mich gibt, wirst du meine Spur verfolgen, hungrig und sehnsüchtig, wie ich selbst hungrig und sehnsüchtig unsichtbare Spuren verfolge. Wir werden beide unser Wild nie stellen" (116-117).

also marked by the narrator's self-pity. And certainly its great appeal lies in the very sober and 'tragic' note that runs throughout the report. However, such a reading, in my view, would be too one-sided and unfair. It would not be generous enough, because it would overlook the fact that in the narrator's memory the distinction between human and animal traces is truly erased. The narrator's anthropocentrism is directly challenged by herself in the following passage, which alludes to the 'otherness' and 'indecipherability' of what would be an entirely different, posthuman and posthumanist writing:

> The only creature in the forest that can really do right or wrong is me. And I alone can show mercy. Sometimes I wish that burden of decision-making didn't lie with me. But I am a human being, and I can only think and act like a human being. Only death will free me from that. Whenever I think 'winter', I always see the white, frost-covered fox standing by the snow-covered stream. A lonely adult animal going his predetermined way. Then it seems that this image means something important to me, as if it is only a sign for something else, but I can't get to the meaning of it. (109-110)[24]

This clearly resonates with Derrida's idea that an extraordinary responsibility arises from the special position of humans, which even a radically postanthropocentric and posthumanist world view will find difficult to deny.[25] It is the narrator's central insight that it is precisely this responsibility which also constitutes the unsurpassable limitation of human understanding. It gestures towards the animal (which I am/that I follow [*que je suis*]) and which I can only represent and 'think' as an (animal) 'sign' [*animot*], and which stands in for something completely other whose meaning eludes me *qua* human being.

This does not in any way constitute or sanction a separation from the animal 'in' me, or from the animal that I *am* or that I am compelled to *follow* [*l'animal que donc je suis*]. On the contrary, the narrator's animal writing is also to be understood as 'writing as an animal'. In writing, the narrator becomes one with her animals, whom she follows and tracks (in her writing). For example, in her 'absurd' but irrepressible hope of a return to human civilisation she compares herself to a blind mole:

> And yet I still nurture an insane hope. I can only smile upon it indulgently. With the same stubborn independence, as a child I had hoped that I should never have to die. I see this hope like a blind mole, crouched within me, brooding over his delusion. As I can't drive him from me, I have to endure him. (63)[26]

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[24] "Das einzige Wesen im Wald, das wirklich recht oder unrecht tun kann, bin ich. Und nur ich kann Gnade üben. Manchmal wünsche ich mir, diese Last der Entscheidung liege nicht auf mir. Aber ich bin ein Mensch, und ich kann nur denken und handeln wie ein Mensch. Davon wird mich erst der Tod befreien. Wenn ich ‚Winter' denke, sehe ich immer den weiß-bereiften Fuchs am verschneiten Back stehen. Ein einsames, erwachsenes Tier, das seinen vorgezeichneten Weg geht. Es ist mir dann, als bedeute dieses Bild etwas Wichtiges für mich, als stehe es nur als Zeichen für etwas anderes, aber ich kann seinen Sinn nicht erkennen" (128).

[25] See e.g. Derrida's "'Eating Well', or the Calculation of the Subject, An Interview with Jacques Derrida", in: Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor and Jean-Luc Nancy eds, *Who Comes Afte the Subject?* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 111ff.

[26] "Und doch sitzt in mir noch immer eine wahnsinnige Hoffnung. Ich kann nur nachsichtig darüber lächeln. Mit diesem verstockten Eigensinn habe ich als Kind gehofft, nie sterben zu müssen. Ich stellte mir diese Hoffnung als einen blinden Maulwurf vor, der in mir hockt und über seinen Wahn brütet. Da ich ihn nicht aus mir vertreiben kann, muß ich ihn gewähren lassen" (76)

It is in fact this very mole, one might argue, that does the writing when the narrator describes her ('humanimal') drive to record her experience – the animal that she pursues in her writing and whom she thus literally, trustingly and blindly follows around. The most astonishing aspect in fact is the fundamental undecidability in this connection between human and animal writing. There is the animal that 'writes in me' and the animal that I 'become' through writing, as the narrator reveals in the central 'dream passage', in which she describes her animal 'family':

> In my dreams I bring children into the world, and they aren't only human children; there are cats among them, dogs, calves, bears and quite peculiar furry creatures. But they emerge from me, and there is nothing about them that could frighten or repel me. It only looks off-putting when I write it down, in human writing and human words. Perhaps I should draw these dreams with pebbles on green moss, or scratch them in the snow with a stick. But I can't yet do that. I probably won't live long enough to be so transformed. Perhaps a genius could do it, but I'm only a simple person who has lost her world and is on the way to finding a new one. This way is a painful one, and still far from over. (207-208)[27]

This limitation of human writing in the narrator's process of 'becoming animal' (cf. her reference to an ongoing transformation, above) goes even further than evoking the need for an 'animal writing'. In fact, it points both back and forward to a time of radical proto- *and* postanthropocentric forms of 'writing', namely a writing with pebbles or snow and sticks. I will briefly return to this notion of an 'ecological' or environmental writing, or 'ecography', as one might call it, towards the end of this chapter. First, however, I would like to establish more generally to what extent the narrator's views fit into a contemporary understanding of postanthropocentric and posthumanist writing.

Surviving – Postapocalypse, Ecocide and Postanthropocentric Writing

Posthumanism should not be equated with some more or less naive cyborgisation fantasies. The effect of the prefix 'post-' is rather to be understood in a deconstructive vein. Such a 'critical posthumanism'[28] is in fact a working through of 'our' humanist values and reflexes. Hence also the proximity of posthumanism to current postanthropocentric and ecological thinking. Contrary to the projected desires and anxieties of a traditional commonsense humanist-anthropocentric view of the human that so-called *trans*humanists believe they can achieve through technological enhancement, critical posthumanism is in fact resisting such an

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[27] "Im Traum bringe ich Kinder zur Welt, und es sind nicht nur Menschenkinder, es gibt unter ihnen Katzen, Hunde, Kälber, Bären und ganz fremdartige pelzige Geschöpfe. Aber alle brechen sie aus mir hervor, und es ist nichts an ihnen, was mich erschrecken oder abstoßen könnte. Es sieht nur befremdend aus, wenn ich es niederschreibe, in Menschenschrift und Menschenworten. Vielleicht müßte ich diese Träume mit Kieselsteinen auf grünes Moos zeichnen oder mit einem Stock in den Schnee ritzen. Aber das ist mir noch nicht möglich. Wahrscheinlich werde ich nicht lange genug leben, um so weit verwandelt zu sein. Vielleicht könnte es ein Genie, aber ich bin nur ein einfacher Mensch, der seine Welt verloren hat und auf dem Weg ist, eine neue Welt zu finden. Dieser Weg ist schmerzlich und noch lange nicht zu Ende" (235).

[28] Cf. Stefan Herbrechter, *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis* [2009] (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

idea of a 'new man'. Instead it understands the human as a being that has fundamentally misunderstood and overestimated itself, and as a result has repressed its true responsibilities. The survival scenario in Haushofer's story falls into the period of the Cold War with its of threat of nuclear self-destruction (cf. "At the time everyone was talking about nuclear wars and their consequences…" (3)),[29] from which the female protagonist and sole human survivor miraculously escapes thanks to the wall. The nuclear threat today has of course not disappeared, in fact the nuclear self-destruction of humanity remains evidently possible; however, over the last decades the fear of ecocide has become more and more concrete given the growing scientific evidence of human-induced climate change and the ongoing dramatic loss of biodiversity. If the unspecified weapon and its life-suspending effects on the other side of the glass wall in Haushofer's novel resemble those of a nuclear strike or a neutron bomb, in today's catastrophic imaginary it most likely evokes some species-threatening ecocatastrophe caused by humans now living in the 'Anthropocene', under the conditions of self-inflicted global warming. Or indeed, it might be the effect of some genetically or biotechnologically induced act of destruction, a new kind of biological warfare, maybe a virus infinitely more deadly than COVID-19.

Haushofer's proto-posthumanist affinity with our present, in the early 21st century, lies precisely in its fictional examination of the ecological and postanthropocentric effects of a postapocalyptic survival scenario after such an extinction event like a global ecocide. Haushofer's story is fascinating because it neither accuses nor warns, but rather tries to think humanness in a ruthlessly postcivilisational environment. However, it does so without any illusion, unsparingly, but also without cynicism or giving in to nihilism. The resulting emotional detachment and sobriety is part of the reader's fascination with the protagonist's description of her situation. It is also closely linked to the responsibility the narrator feels, as a sole survivor, to tell the truth about humanity: "I can allow myself to write the truth; all the people for whom I have lied throughout my life are dead" (31).[30]

The damning judgment the narrator casts in her criticism of human civilisation is weighed up against the new postanthropocentric, posthumanist and (post)ecological situation of her nonhuman 'family' in the following passage:

> Things happen, and, like millions of people before me, I look for meaning in them because my vanity will not allow me to admit that the whole meaning of an event lies in the event itself. If I casually stand on a beetle, it will not see this event, tragic for the beetle, as a mysterious concatenation of universal significance. (…) But we are condemned to chase after a meaning that cannot exist. (…) I pity animals, and I pity people, because they're thrown into this life without being consulted. Maybe people are more deserving of pity, because they have just enough intelligence to resist the natural course of things. It has made them wicked and desperate, and not very lovable. All the same, life could have been lived differently. There is no impulse more rational than love. It makes life more bearable for the lover and the loved one. (...) I can't understand why we had to take the wrong path. I only know it's too late. (209-210)[31]

[29] "Damals war immer die Rede von Atomkriegen und ihren Folgen…" (10).

[30] "Ich kann mir erlauben, die Wahrheit zu schreiben; alle, denen zuliebe ich mein Leben lang gelogen habe, sind tot" (40).

[31] "Die Dinge geschehen eben, und ich suche, wie Millionen Menschen vor mir, in ihnen einen Sinn, weil meine Eitelkeit nicht gestatten will, zuzugeben, daß der ganze Sinn eines Geschehnisses in ihm

The subdued, existentialist and tragic tone of this passage and the almost Nietzschean criticism of human narcissism (see also 193/220) remain of course themselves traces of a 'residual' humanism, but they are recognised as such by the narrator as indelible, as an attempt to legitimate the special position human animals take despite or maybe because of their utterly deplorable 'nature': "Pity was the only form of love for human beings that remained for me" (201).[32] However, out of this pity also arises a special responsibility (towards others, be they human, nonhuman or the environment), and the narrator obviously tries to appeal to all of these with her desperate call to reason and love.

It is not that the narrator denies her own humanity, nor is she afraid of becoming an animal, as the title-epigraph states. Nevertheless, the 'deanthropocentering' process *The Wall* describes can be said to follow a logic of 'strategic' misanthropy,[33] and is designed to prevent the narrator from falling into the 'abyss' that, unbridgeably, separates humans from nonhuman animals and instead threatens to turn humans into something even 'worse' than animals. As seen, the protagonist's misanthropy is fired by the question of why the 'strange man' killed her animals, which, is the actual motivation for writing her report. Nevertheless, it is also from this questioning that her ultimately life-affirming and ethical-ecological attitude also emerges: "Yet there is no escape, for as long as there is something for me to love in the forest, I shall love it; and if some day there is nothing, I shall stop living" (140).[34]

The narrator attempts to push the limits of her own 'deanthropocentring' as far as possible by trying to live entirely without (human or humanist) illusions and to thereby to fit into her new ecological situation ("the great game of the sun, moon and stars" (184/209)): "It was better to think not about human beings [literally: to think away from, or outside humans]. The great game of the sun, moon and stars seemed to be working out and that hadn't been invented by humans" (184).[35] "To think away from humans" means to think of oneself as posthumanist, perhaps even as posthuman, if that was possible. In doing so, the protagonist exposes herself to what she sees as the greatest danger, namely the abyss of some suicidal 'inhumanity': "I had got as far from myself as it is possible for a human being, and I realized that this state couldn't last if I wanted to stay alive" (184).[36]

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selbst liegt. Kein Käfer, den ich achtlos zertrete, wird in diesem, für ihn traurigen Ereignis einen geheimnisvollen Zusammenhang von universeller Bedeutung sehen. (…) Nur wir sind dazu verurteilt, einer Bedeutung nachzujagen, die es nicht geben kann. (…) Ich bedaure die Tiere, und ich bedaure die Menschen, weil sie ungefragt in dieses Leben geworfen werden. Vielleicht sind die Menschen bedauernswerter, denn sie besitzen genausoviel Verstand, um sich gegen den natürlichen Ablauf der Dinge zu wehren. Das hat sie böse und verzweifelt werden lassen und wenig liebenswert. Dabei wäre es möglich gewesen, anders zu leben. Es gibt keine vernünftigere Regung als Liebe. Sie macht dem Liebenden und dem Geliebten das Leben erträglicher. (…) Ich kann nicht verstehen, warum wir den falschen Weg einschlagen mußten. Ich weiß nur, daß es zu spät ist" (238).

[32] "Mitleid war die einzige Form der Liebe, die mir für Menschen geblieben war" (228).

[33] On the notion of 'strategic misanthropy' see Daniel Cottom, *Uncommon Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), pp. 148ff.

[34] "Es gibt keinen Ausweg, denn solange es im Wald ein Geschöpf gibt, das ich lieben könnte, werde ich es tun; und wenn es einmal wirklich nichts mehr gibt, werde ich aufhören zu leben" (161-162).

[35] "Es war besser von den Menschen wegzudenken. Das große Sonne-, Mond- und Sterne-Spiel schien gelungen zu sein, es war auch nicht von Menschen erfunden worden" (209-10).

[36] "Ich hatte mich so weit von mir entfernt, wie es einem Menschen möglich ist, und ich wußte, daß dieser Zustand nicht anhalten durfte, wenn ich am Leben bleiben wollte" (210).

Towards the end of the story, the protagonist comments on her namelessness by writing: "It occurs to me that I haven't written down my name. I had almost forgotten it, and that's how it's going to stay. No one calls me by that name, so it no longer exists" (35).[37] However, the danger of a complete 'dehumanisation' her deanthropocentring process might lead to remains. "The only enemy I had ever encountered in my life so far had been man" (15),[38] the narrator explains while focusing on protecting her new animal family by way of compensation, because "as long as [humans] got the people they hadn't given a thought to the animals in the course of their slaughter" (32).[39] In this sense, dehumanisation understood merely as a form of '(re)animalisation' of the only surviving human would not only not be enough; it would actually be a catastrophe, or falling into the abyss of inhumanity:

> I don't know why I do that [i.e. writing], it's as if I'm driven by an inner compulsion. Maybe I'm afraid that if I could do otherwise I would gradually cease to be a human being, and would soon be creeping about, dirty and stinking, emitting incomprehensible noises. Not that I'm afraid of becoming an animal. That wouldn't be too bad, but a human being can become just an animal; he plunges beyond into the abyss. (34)[40]

The protagonist is therefore, so to speak, condemned to remain human and to protect her humanness, if not her humanity, from the Heideggerian 'abyss of being' as one might say.[41] For the narrator, the transformation into some inhuman 'creature' – an inhuman human, who would not even be worthy of a nonhuman animal – would essentially be an insult both to animals and humans. Because, as with Heidegger, the meaning of human being in *The Wall* lies in a kind of pastoral attitude towards being.[42] It is a responsibility not primarily towards humans as such, but very much a human responsibility towards nonhuman others more generally: "My mind is free, it can do what it likes, but it mustn't lose its reason, the reason that will keep me and the animals alive" (53).[43] It is in fact the intimate living with 'her' animals, whose existence she follows and shares, that requires her to remain human, and which require her to keep her human capacity of 'reasoning' intact. However, remaining human in this sense no longer derives from a special hierarchical position, but from a pure, yet ultimately inexplicable, responsibility: "The cat and I we were made of the same stuff, and we were in

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[37] "Es fällt mir auf, daß ich meinen Namen nicht niedergeschrieben habe. Ich hatte ihn schon fast vergessen, und dabei soll es auch bleiben. Niemand nennt mich mit diesem Namen, also gibt es ihn nicht mehr" (44-45).

[38] "Der einzige Feind, den ich in meinem bisherigen Leben gekannt hatte, war der Mensch gewesen" (23).

[39] "Solange es Menschen gab, hatten sie bei ihren gegenseitigen Schlächtereien nicht auf die Tiere Rücksicht genommen" (41).

[40] "Ich weiß nicht, warum ich das tue, es ist fast ein innerer Zwang, der mich dazu treibt. Vielleicht fürchte ich, wenn ich anders könnte, würde ich langsam aufhören, ein Mensch zu sein, und würde bald schmutzig und stinkend umherkriechen und unverständliche Laute ausstoßen. Nicht dass ich fürchtete, ein Tier zu werden, das wäre nicht sehr schlimm, aber ein Mensch kann niemals ein Tier werden, er stürzt am Tier vorüber in einen Abgrund" (44).

[41] On Heidegger's notion see Mark A. Wrathall's entry on "Abyss", in: Wrathall, ed., *The Cambridge Heidegger Lexicon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 9-11.

[42] Cf. "Man is the shepherd of Being", Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism", in: *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper Collins, 1977), p. 234.

[43] "Mein Kopf ist frei, er darf treiben, was er will, nur die Vernunft darf ihn nicht verlassen, die Vernunft, die er braucht, um mich und die Tiere am Leben zu erhalten" (65).

the same boat, drifting with all living things towards the great dark rapids. As a human being, I alone had the honour of recognizing this, without being able to do anything about it. A dubious gift on the part of nature, if I thought about it" (176-177).[44]

In passages like these, however, it also becomes clear that, for Haushofer, as opposed to Heidegger, it is not about advancing an idea of supposed 'world poverty' in animals so that one might legitimate humans' special status as that of 'guardians of being'.[45] Haushofer's emphasis is closer to Derrida's thinking (who follows Jeremy Bentham) which stresses the 'compassionate' bond of a natural 'sympathy' between humans and animals and their ability to suffer: "The barriers between animal and human come down very easily. We belong to a single great family, and if we are lonely and unhappy we gladly accept the friendship of our distant relations. They suffer as we do if pain is inflicted on them, and like myself they need food, warmth and a little tenderness" (207).[46]

Nevertheless, the narrator is wary of idealising nature: "Nature sometimes struck me as one great trap for its creatures" (212).[47] Nor are animals 'better people', as they may occasionally be stylised in some contemporary fictional or indeed also nonfictional postanthropocentric scenarios. The episode of the white crow might serve as an example in this respect. "Strangeness and badness are still one and the same thing for me. And I see that not even animals are free of this idea" (222).[48] The narrator records her own ambiguous reaction towards this albino crow ("a miserable absurdity that shouldn't exist" (222));[49] "[i]t can't know why it's been ostracized; that's the only life it knows. It will always be an outcast and so alone that it's less afraid of people than its back brethren" (222). Still, she cannot help but also find the white bird beautiful. For the narrator, the dubious 'privilege' of humans lies, perhaps, right here: "But I want the white crow to live, and sometimes I dream that there's another one in the forest and that they will find each other" (222).[50] It is therefore certainly no coincidence, and this undoubtedly further contributes to the tragic and 'residual' humanism of the story, that the last scene of the novel is dedicated to the survival of the white crow: "The crows have

[44] "Die Katze und ich, wir waren aus dem selben Stoff gemacht, und wir saßen im gleichen Boot, das mit allem, was da lebte, auf die großen dunklen Fälle zutrieb. Als Mensch hatte ich nur die Ehre, dies zu erkennen, ohne etwas dagegen unternehmen zu können. Ein zweifelhaftes Geschenk der Natur, wenn ich es recht überlege" (201-2).

[45] On the animal's 'poverty in world' see Martin Heidegger, *Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1983), pp. 273ff.

[46] "Die Schranken zwischen Tier und Mensch fallen sehr leicht. Wir sind von einer einzigen großen Familie, und wenn wir einsam und unglücklich sind, nehmen wir auch die Freundschaft unserer entfernten Vettern gern entgegen. Sie leiden wie ich, wenn ihnen Schmerz zugefügt wird, und wie ich brauchen sie Nahrung, Wärme und ein bißchen Zärtlichkeit" (235).

[47] "Die Natur schien mir manchmal eine einzige große Falle für ihre Geschöpfe" (240).

[48] "Fremd und böse sind für mich immer noch dasselbe. Und ich sehe, dass nicht einmal die Tiere davon frei sind" (251).

[49] "Sie kann nicht wissen, warum sie ausgestoßen ist, sie kennt kein anderes Leben. Immer wird sie ausgestoßen sein und so allein, daß sie den Menschen weniger fürchtet als ihre eigenen schwarzen Brüder" (252).

[50] "Ich will, daß die weiße Krähe lebt, und manchmal träume ich davon, daß es im Wald noch eine zweite gibt und die beiden einander finden werden" (252).

risen, and are circling screeching over the forest. When they are out of sight I shall go to the clearing and feed the white crow. It will already be waiting for me" (244).[51]

This almost tender image of feeding the crow is in stark contrast to the previous 'murder scene', in which the protagonist shoots the strange (and probably last) man. She does so, unjustifiably, at least from a humanist-anthropocentric (and obviously even more so from a patriarchal) point of view, because he ('merely') killed her bull and her dog. The narrator readily admits: "I was glad he was dead; it would have been hard for me to kill an injured person. And yet I couldn't have left him alive" (241).[52] It is precisely this apparent cold-bloodedness, this inexplicable and 'unnatural' detachment from her own species identity, the lack of empathy towards her own species, or as one might say her radical 'antispeciesism', which seems to scare the narrator herself, as she realises that it goes against her innermost human reflexes. But perhaps this is the price that she needs to pay so that she can acquire a new, a posthumanist view of humanity that should not lead into the abyss of inhumanity. At least that is how one might read the following passage, in which the protagonist, anticipating Donna Haraway's famous "Cyborg Manifesto" by two decades,[53] sets out to challenge the boundary between humans and machines and that between humans and animals at the same time:

> I don't know whether I will be able to bear living with reality alone. Sometimes I try to treat myself like a robot (...). But it only works for a short time. I'm a bad robot; I'm still a human being who thinks and feels, and I shall not be able to shake either habit. (186)[54]

And just Haraway a few decades after her first manifesto, the narrator of *The Wall* realises that she has "gone to the dogs" in her post-civilisational and also post-technological world.[55] The full ambiguity of her (post)human existence is thus reflected in her relationship to her companion species:

> With Lynx nearby I could never stay sad for long. It was almost shaming that being with me made him so happy. I don't think that grown animals living wild are happy or even content. Living with people must have awoken this capacity in the dog. I'd like to know why we have this narcotic effect on dogs. Perhaps man's megalomania comes from the dogs. Sometimes even I imagined there must be something special about me that made

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[51] "Die Krähen haben sich erhoben und kreisen schreiend über den Wald. Wenn sie nicht mehr zu sehen sind, werde ich auf die Lichtung gehen und die weiße Krähe füttern. Sie wartet schon auf mich" (276).

[52] "Ich war froh, daß er tot war; es wäre mir schwergefallen, einen verletzten Menschen töten zu müssen. Und am Leben hätte ich ihn doch nicht lassen können" (273).

[53] Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century [1985]", in: *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 149-182.

[54] "Ich weiß nicht, ob ich es ertragen werde, nur noch mit der Wirklichkeit zu leben. Manchmal versuche ich mit mir umzugehen, wie mit einem Roboter [...] Aber es geht nur kurze Zeit. Ich bin ein schlechter Roboter, immer noch ein Mensch, der denkt und fühlt, und werde mir beides nicht abgewöhnen können" (211-12).

[55] Cf. Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm, 2003); see also Manuela Rossini, "To the dogs: Companion speciesism and the new feminist materialism", *Kritikos* 3 (2006); available online at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254870797_To_the_Dogs_Companion_speciesism_and_the_new_feminist_materialism (accessed 09/01/2024).

> Lynx almost keel over with joy at the sight of me. Of course there was never anything special about me; Lynx was, like all dogs, simply addicted to people. (99)[56]

The symbiotic human-dog 'ecotope' that largely replaces (human) civilisation in this story is based on a mutual, drug-like interdependence. For the narrator, Lynx is her "sixth sense", without which she feels like an "amputee" (129). His quasi-human status is emphasised more and more as the story progresses: "Sometimes I imagined that Lynx had suddenly grown hands, would soon have started thinking and talking as well" (118).[57] Finally, shortly before the final 'catastrophe', at the end of the report, any distinction between human and dog is entirely abolished: "That summer I quite [literally: completely] forgot that Lynx was a dog and I was a human being. I knew it, but it had lost any distinctive meaning. (…) Now, at last, there was a silent understanding between us" (234).[58] The magnitude of the loss for the protagonist caused by Lynx's death can only be understood in this postanthropocentric context. The narrator loses her only human-like companion. His uniqueness is just as irreversibly lost as that of the other (male) human. Lynx, we must believe, was the sole survivor of his own species, possibly the last dog-companion on the planet. It is this irreparable loss that outweighs the extinction of her own species which also explains the contrast in the way the narrator treats the bodies of the dead strange man and that of her dead dog – one of the aspects which most shocked Haushofer's readers at the time. She unceremoniously throws the man over a cliff and gives Lynx a dignified burial.

The Posthumanist and 'Ecographical' Future of Fiction

It was not my intention in this posthumanist reading of *The Wall* to merely show that literature has the fictional power to anticipate 'our' postanthropocentric moment, or to make it real by imagining it. The interest of such a reading, instead, lies more in adding to the growing human self-consciousness of and sensitivity for 'our' ability to follow human, animal or other traces before they might be entirely blurred. If one accepts to engage with the kind of impossible thought experiment of a posthumanist and postanthropocentric writing *The Wall* invites its readers to pursue, one will also have to recognise that Haushofer's story can be a strong ally for the necessary construction of new ecologies, politics and ethics that will serve to further push, and perhaps one day dissolve, the boundaries inherent in the still very much prevalent canon of humanist and anthropocentric values. What is particularly precious in this context is the fact that *The Wall* speculates on a posthumanism 'without' (or 'after') technology, so to

[56] "Ich konnte neben Luchs nie lange traurig bleiben. Es war fast beschämend, daß es ihn so glücklich machte, mit mir zusammen zu sein. Ich glaube nicht, daß wildlebende erwachsene Tiere glücklich oder fröhlich sind. Das Zusammenleben mit dem Menschen muß im Hund diese Fähigkeit geweckt haben. Ich möchte wissen, warum wir auf Hunde wie ein Rauschgift wirken. Vielleicht verdankt der Mensch seinen Größenwahn dem Hund. Sogar ich bildete mir manchmal ein, es müßte an mir etwas Besonderes sein, wenn Luchs sich bei meinem Anblick vor Freude fast überschlug. Natürlich war nie etwas Besonderes an mir, Luchs war, wie alle Hunde einfach menschensüchtig" (116-17).

[57] "Manchmal bildete ich mir ein, daß Luchs, wären ihm plötzlich Hände gewachsen, bald auch zu denken und zu reden angefangen hätte" (137).; on the connection between the hand, thinking and the human see Derrida, "Geschlecht II: Heidegger's Hand", in: John Sallis, ed., *Deconstruction and Philosophy: The Texts of Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989)pp. 161-196.

[58] "In jenem Sommer vergaß ich ganz, daß Luchs ein Hund war und ich ein Mensch. Ich wußte es, aber es hatte jede trennende Bedeutung verloren. (…) Jetzt endlich herrschte zwischen uns ein stillschweigendes Verstehen" (265).

speak;[59] a posthumanism of ecological deceleration: "It's only since I've slowed down that the forest around me has come to life" (194).[60]

The other, perhaps even more important, insight, however, lies in the incredible difficulty the surpassing of her humanist-anthropocentric self-image the (last) human being encounters, and who again and again falls victim to some residual, 'tragic' humanism, even after she has seemingly reached the endpoint of her self-doubt, at the end of a long and almost clinical process of self-examination or unlearning. Not that the narrator ever had any doubts about the limitations of her humanist education (70); nevertheless, a an irresistible desire remains in her that is both unattainable and suspect, suspect perhaps precisely because it remains unattainable, that is, some nostalgic "feeling of having suffered a terrible loss" (202), of a humanity, a humanist legacy and its undeniable cultural achievements.

The secret of this desire undoubtedly informs the (human) self-identification process as such. Even in the denial of one's humanity, even in the experience of a radical deanthropocentring in an extreme survival situation, in the act of writing as well as in the act of reading, an identification with nonhuman others must obviously and necessarily remain a mere metaphor, an inescapable anthropomorphism. Nevertheless, a speculation, a fictional 'leap', is the only way to critically address the posthumanising and deanthropocentring tendencies 'our' present. In this sense, 'we', just like the narrator, know that one day we are going to have to deal with *The Wall* as an event, and we might follow her in saying – and I am fully aware that I am here condemned to repeat the residual humanism inherent in any (human) reading process: "[t]he wall has become so much a part of my life that often I don't think about it for weeks. The wall forced me to make an entirely new life, but the things that really move me are still the same as before: birth, death, the seasons, growth and decay. The wall is a thing that is neither dead nor alive, it really doesn't concern me, and that's why I don't dream of it. One day I will have to reckon with it, because I won't be able to live here forever…" (129-130).[61] Just like the narrator, then, the last surviving human, we will not be able to continue living 'here' or 'like this' forever, maybe not even much longer, because from a planetary point of view, again just like the narrator, "even now [we are] nothing but a thin skin covering a mountain of memories. I don't want to go on. What will happen to me if that skin gets torn?" (54).[62]

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[59] Cf. Ivan Callus and Stefan Herbrechter, "Critical Posthumanism, or, the *Inventio* of a Posthumanism Without Technology", *Subject Matters* 3.2/4.1 (2007): 15-29.

[60] "Seit ich langsamer geworden bin, ist der Wald um mich erst lebendig geworden" (221).

[61] "Die Wand ist so sehr ein Teil meines Lebens geworden, daß ich oft wochenlang nicht an sie denke. (…) Die Wand ist ein Ding, das weder tot noch lebendig ist, sie geht mich in Wahrheit nichts an, und deshalb träume ich nicht von ihr. Eines Tages werde ich mich mit ihr befassen müssen, weil ich nicht immer hier werde leben können…" (150).

[62] "Ich bin schon jetzt nur noch eine dünne Haut über einem Berg von Erinnerungen. Ich mag nicht mehr. Was soll denn mit mir geschehen, wenn diese Haut reißt?" (66).