8 Animalities – Milan Kundera and the Unbearable Lightness of Being Posthuman[1]

[T]otal humanization of the animal coincides with a total animalization of man.[2]

Dog Stories

If I have a dog, my dog has a human; what that means concretely is at stake.[3]

Milan Kundera's novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* was first published in Czech in 1984 and translated into English the same year. Most criticism of Kundera's novel has 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). Comparatively little attention has been given to what is arguably a fifth, and maybe even central character in this novel: namely, Karenin, Tereza's and Tomas's dog.[4] The last of the seven sections of the 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

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[1] *A note on the text:*
The original version of this chapter was written in 2006 and, of course, the discussion about animal rights and animal studies in particular has moved on. The reason I am publishing it here nevertheless is to remind myself and others that critical posthumanism (CPH) did not focus exclusively on the technological aspect of posthumanism and its critique – an impression one might have got from my own *Posthumanismus: Eine kritische Einführung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2009) and its English translation, *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), as well as many other critically posthumanist work in that same phase. What the below reading of Kundera's novel, in my view, reassuringly demonstrates is that CPH was well aware of its 'animal side' practically from the start – a side that, in my view, has not ceased to grow in importance given the discussion about biopolitics and climate change which started around the same time as the Kundera essay was written, and given the general focus on transhumanism that the technological side of 'our' becoming 'posthuman' has taken. I therefore feel justified in reproducing my 'posthumanist reading' of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* here in what is almost its original form, in which has been available on Academia.edu for a while. My approach here takes Kundera's novel as 'test case' for animal studies, CPH and the (philosophical) 'question of the animal' (which of course goes beyond the nevertheless important issue of 'animal rights'). At its starting point, it does in fact resemble Bruce Lord's 2003 online text "Karenin's Smile: Notes Towards Animal Rights Literary Criticism", available online at: http://bruce.bruce.nmsrv.com/karenins_smile.html (accessed 14/12/2023) –a text I was not aware of at the time, but which I would like to recommend as a possible (re)entry point today.

[2] Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 77.

[3] Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), p. 54.

[4] While there are of course many books and articles on Kundera and *Unbearable Lightness* I am aware of only three articles published since 2006 that contain a focus on Karenin: 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", in: Thirouin and Martine Boyer-Weinmann, eds., *Désaccords parfaits: La reception paradoxale de l'oeuvre de Milan Kundera* (Grenoble: ELLUG, 2009), pp. 291-304. More specifically linking Karenin to ethical questions are 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.Coetzee's *Disgrace*", *English Academy Review* 30.1 (2013): 76-91; and Joseph 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.

losing Karenin might be misunderstood as just another deeply sentimental, humanist or anthropocentric story about a thoroughly anthropomorphised nonhuman animal serving as a stand-in for the 'missing child' in the novel. On a more sympathetic reading, however, it becomes clear that there is more than mere narcissistic anthropomorphising and pathos at work here. There is indeed a profound metaphysical engagement with the philosophical 'question of the animal'. Karenin, as well as Mephisto, the mayor's pet pig, play an important part in the narrative, and so do Tereza's cows, as well as animals more generally. The consequence is that the relationship between humanity and animality is a theme that runs throughout the novel and is openly problematised in some of its central passages. So intense is this questioning, I would argue, that it in fact anticipates many aspects of the so-called 'animal turn' within critical posthumanist thought. This turn towards the 'question of the animal', or, indeed, 'the animal as question', has been focusing on a peculiar ambiguity at the heart of the relationship between human and nonhuman animals.

At a time when the largely imaginary or 'fictional' 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' are proliferating. 'The animal' is without doubt one, if not the most, essential of all human (significant) others. However, what is rather surprising is that posthumanist theory, which has given space to so many *animaux* (animals) and *animots* (animetaphors; Derrida's term) has so far largely ignored Kundera's novel. In my view, Kundera prompts a critical thinking of 'animalities' that in many ways anticipates the rise of posthumanist animal studies. In my reading of *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* I will place Kundera's novel alongside some of the ground-breaking zoophile posthumanist work of the past decades to show that, as Manuela Rossini aptly put it, posthumanism has gone 'to the dogs'.[5] Going to the dogs is of course not meant in a negative way here. On the contrary, it marks a development, coinciding in particular with 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:

> [I]n 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.[6]

[5] 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 14/12/2023).

[6] Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*, p. 4.

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 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 techno-logical 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.[7]

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".[8]

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 from its 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".[9] 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."[10] Hence Haraway's privileging of concepts like 'co-evolution', 'symbiosis' and 'naturecultures'. As she goes on to explain: "I have come to see cyborgs as junior siblings in the much bigger, queer family of companion species, in which reproductive biotechnopolitics are generally a surprise, sometimes even a nice surprise".[11] Humans' biosociality with dogs in particular is part of this rewriting of history in terms of the co-implication of nature and culture. In a sense, Haraway emphasises the earlier dog-people-

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[7] Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*, pp. 4-5.
[8] *Ibid*., pp. 9-10.
[9] Haraway, *The Haraway Reader* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 9.
[10] Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*, p. 15.
[11] Haraway, *The Haraway Reader*, p. 300.

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".[12] Their co-evolution makes them humans' (significant) others but in a non-narcissistic way, or at least potentially so. Dogs ask specific '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 usually understood as somehow 'lacking' compared to humans) or 'comic-mechanic' (i.e. the less(er)-than-human, and the 'abyssal' categorical difference between 'us' and 'them'). This is what is at stake in an analysis of the very 'special' literary dog named Karenin.

Karenin is introduced as a kind of 'hybrid' and 'post-gender' dog and thus actually bears important traits reminiscent of Haraway's cyborg. Karenin is "a bitch whose body seemed reminiscent of the German shepherd and whose head belonged to its Saint Bernard mother",[13] 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'. 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 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 unreproductive' 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 'technophiliac narcissism' – a 'humanist neurosis' by which "man makes himself by realizing his intentions in his tools, such as domestic animals (dogs) and computers (cyborgs)"), 'caninophiliac narcissism', or "the idea that dogs restore human beings' souls by their unconditional love."[14] Tereza's selfless love is not about saving

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[12] Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*, pp. 88ff.
[13] Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, trans. Michael Henry Heim (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), p. 24 (further references to the novel will be given in the text as *ULB*).
[14] Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*, p. 33.

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 to show: "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."[15] 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 'anthropo-essentialist'. 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).[16] 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' (in 'world'), 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 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.[17]

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 at least, 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."[18] This 'otherness-in-relation' that both Haraway and Tereza decide to call 'love' between species is in fact a "being in connection with significant otherness and signifying others" (81).[19] It of course in no way guarantees the

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[15] Will McNeill, *Heidegger: Visions of Animals, Others, and the Divine* (University of Warwick: Research Publication Series: Centre for Research in Philosophy and Literature, 1993), p. 25.
[16] *Ibid*., p. 26.
[17] *Ibid*., pp. 66-67.
[18] Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*, p. 50.
[19] *Ibid*., p. 81.

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 CPH is the focus of the remaining part of this chapter.

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.[20]

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 already 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).[21] It is tempting to see the novel as a fictional extension of cultural criticism, somewhere in between a commentary on 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 that of CPH, especially in those of its representatives who continue in 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 choice' of the postmodern individual rather than of the modern subject (following Rosenau's terminology).[22]

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 on 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 (Kundera's '*einmal ist keinmal*'). The eternal return 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" (*ULB* 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

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[20] Kate Soper, "Humans, Animals, Machines", *New Formations* 43 (2003): 105.
[21] Cf. Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988).
[22] 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).

unbearable responsibility provided by the idea of the eternal return, and that “our lives stand out against it in all their splendid lightness” (*ULB* 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 its main (human) 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 womaniser, is weighed down by responsibility and love for Tereza, who arrives with a heavy suitcase (like an “abandoned child”) with her 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 that was cruelly buried alive by some (‘innocent’) 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 (to be classified under “kitsch” following the narrator), 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, as well as between metaphysics and aesthetics. The interesting aspect for the question of the posthumanist question of the 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 strictly metaphysical and aesthetic. Kundera seems to object to liberal humanism for aesthetic reasons, not in order to develop a radical antihumanism, but maybe rather a Nietzschean kind of transvaluation of all (human) values, or indeed a kind of ‘superhumanism’ without ‘superman’, however. 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). It follows that 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 our defecating existence – a rather 'down-to-earth' parody of the Heideggerian "*Dasein-zum-Tode*", one might say. The metaphysical objection to shit goes through a categorical agreement with being which, on an aesthetic level, leads to the denial and repression of the excremental: "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, in fact, calls for a radical individualism: "The brotherhood of man on earth will be possible only on a base of kitsch" (251). Sabina does not 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 does not 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 technique of '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 animal studies, 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. The categorical 'animal' serves to create a distance that does not 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.[23]
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.[24] What to do with the *radical* difference, or otherness, the difference of difference, the other of the other that somehow remains and resists, one might ask? Here, we are of course confronting the Derridean notion of *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)," as well as "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 metaphysical opposition between animal and human. However, for Derrida the aim can also not be to completely efface that difference.[25] 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 a 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.[26]

Following the trace of an alterity *before* the distinction between human and animal, Derrida returns to the idea of 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

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[23] Cf. in particular Derrida's "And Say the Animal Responded," in: Cary Wolfe, ed., *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 121-46.
[24] 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 proximity to the machine and the mechanistic, following Bergson's definition of the comic as "du mécanique plaqué sur du vivant" (cf. Henri Bergson, *Le rire* (Paris: PUF, 2007)).
[25] 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*.
[26] Jacques Derrida and Elisabeth Roudinesco, "Violence Against Animals", in: *For What Tomorrow...* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 63.

Animal claims to attribute to them or recognize in them. Man is one of them, and an irreducibly singular one, of course, as we know, but it is not the case that it is Man *versus* THE Animal".[27] 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, on the one hand; and the problematic nature of the underlying distinction in the opposition between human/nonhuman, which also 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, on the other. It is only the latter, from a posthumanist point of view, that can do justice to the multiplicity of living beings precisely at a time (as Haraway indicated) when the boundary between organic and inorganic is (also) being eroded. Or, in other words, as the boundary between human and nonhuman animals erodes, the boundary between human and machine, organic and inorganic is also challenged and thus threatens to 'overtake' the 'animal question'.

Despite all his sympathy for animal ethics, Derrida believes that the implementation of animal 'rights' is counterproductive since rights 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."[28] Derrida is certainly also not against the 'practice' of becoming a vegetarian but he does oppose radical 'vegetarianism' simply because "it is not enough to stop eating meat in order to become a non-carnivore".[29] 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 arguably 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".[30] 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 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.[31]

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[27] *Ibid.*

[28] Derrida and Roudinesco, "Violence Against Animals," p. 65.

[29] *Ibid*., p. 68.

[30] *Ibid*., p. 67.

[31] David Wood, "Thinking with Cats", in: Matthew Calarco and Peter Atterton, eds., *Animal Philosophy: Essential Readings in Continental Thought* (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 139.

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 to the human(ist) reader 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 own 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 (human) 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 most of the questions raised by posthumanist animal theory. It might even outdo some of it. Despite its sentimentalism bordering on kitsch itself ("Karenin's Smile" is the least 'ironic' part of the novel, stylistically the 'weightiest', with many authorial or narrator's interventions) it comes close to a reaffirmation of humanism 'without' humans, one might say, or indeed of humans without humanism. The 'pastoral' 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 by 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 (Sabina, for example, compares Franz during their love-making to a "newborn animal" and to a "gigantic puppy suckling at her breasts" (116); while Tereza becomes 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 a 'politics of representation' involved in the anthropomorphic description of animals as well as the 'theriomorphic' imaging of humans.[32]

The transgression of the (constructed human-animal) boundary can be used to all sorts of ends, both 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, cf. below). Kundera's novel is very much aware of this risk. 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

[32] "Theriomorphism is the reverse of anthropomorphism", as Greg Garrard notes in his *Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 141.

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)

Cruelty against animals is thus the first step towards violence against humans – a link that is also evident in the critique of the 'industrial' treatment of animals, i.e. modern practices of mass slaughter and their ('dreaded') comparison to the (human, Jewish) Holocaust, as Charles Patterson writes, in *Eternal Treblinka*.[33]

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 beneficial for both human and nonhuman animals.[34] 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, with its particular 'as if' structure;[35] 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.[36]

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 first place, given the 'unbearable lightness of being'). Karenin's joy, after what must seem like a rebirth to 'him', on waking up from his anesthetics, is a happiness of return, 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 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

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[33] Charles Patterson, *Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust* (New York: Lantern Books, 2002). Cf. also Marjorie Spiegel's *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery* (London: Mirror Books, 1996).

[34] 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.

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

[36] 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.

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. 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 idyll. 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' (or indeed 'proto-posthumanist') 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) animal*s* (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-ability' 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 the face-to-face encounter with 'her' dying animal emphasises is her own boundless responsibility and her ethical humanity. The scene also echoes earlier references to the Kantian categorical imperative: don't inflict upon others (humans or nonhumans) what you wouldn't want to endure yourself.

In Levinas's case, much discussed within posthumanist animal philosophy or 'zoophile theory', as one might call it, 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 everyday dehumanising experience of the group of Jewish prisoners in Nazi Germany's camp number 1492. Treated as a "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.[37] 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".[38] 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 Levinasian ethics has been 'preaching' about unlimited 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"[39] – Bobby remains 'a means to an end' and that the only face that counts for a truly ethical encounter is and remains, by definition, a human face. Even though "[o]ne cannot entirely refuse the face of an animal", as levinas admits, the 'priority' in an encounter with, for example, a dog, "is not found in the animal, but in the human face".[40] 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".[41] 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

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[37] Levinas, "The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights", in: Callarco and Atterton, eds., *Animal Philosophy*, pp. 48-49.
[38] *Ibid*., p. 49.
[39] *Ibid*.
[40] *Ibid*.
[41] *Ibid*., p. 50.

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.[42]

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.[43]

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?" – should not include the "nonhuman animal."[44] Peter Steeves also voices his disappointment that "the two E(I)mmanuels [Levinas and Kant] could never understand" that "[a]nimals do not merely

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[42] *Ibid*.

[43] Peter Atterton, "Ethical Criticism," in: Callarco and Atterton, eds., *Animal Philosophy*,p. 61.

[44] John Llewelyn, "Am I Obsessed by Bobby? (Humanism of the Other Animal)," in: Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley, eds., *Re-reading Levinas* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp. 234-245.

perish".[45] David Clark is somewhat more circumspect. 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" 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", i.e. the "unspeakable human holocaust," and "the unspoken animal one".[46] 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, 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".[47] 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.[48] 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.[49] The true challenge for zoophile theory, according to Lestel, is the thinkability of "nonhuman individuality"[50] and the autonomy of a "(weak) animal subjectivity".[51] What he calls the "fourth injury to human narcissism" (after

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[45] 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.

[46] David Clark, "On Being 'The Last Kantian in Nazi Germany': Dwelling with Animals after Levinas", in: Jennifer Ham and Matthew Senior, eds., *Animal Acts: Configuring the Human in Western History* (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 168-170.

[47] *Ibid*., p. 171.

[48] Cf. in particular his *L'Animal singulier* (Paris: Seuil, 2004).

[49] Lestel, *L'Animal singulier*, 17ff.

[50] *Ibid*., p. 40.

[51] *Ibid*., p. 57.

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:

> 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[52] 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 captures in a shift from "*humanité*" to "*humanitude*":

> Humanity [*humanité*] 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.[53]

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 also 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 legitimation process of enlightened modernity that

[52] *Ibid*., p. 114.
[53] *Ibid*., pp. 123-124.

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 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”.[54] They take the human need for the metaphorisation of the animal literally, namely as a desire for becoming animal as multiplicity, i.e. as a desire for the outside, in particular the ‘outside’ of (individual) 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 mythical characteristics, basically “animetaphors” (in Lippit’s, and “*animots*”, 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.”[55] 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

[54] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, “Becoming-Animal,” in: Calarco and Atterton, eds., *Animal Philosophy*,p. 88.
[55] *Ibid*., p. 90.

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.[56]

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 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".[57] 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.[58]

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.[59]

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 had always 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 seins*", 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

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[56] *Ibid*., p. 96.

[57] James Urpeth, "Animal Becomings", in: Callarco and Atterton, eds., *Animal Philosophy*, p. 104.

[58] Cf. Braidotti, *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), chapter 3, and *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), chapter 3.

[59] Kate Soper, "Humans, Animals, Machines", p. 107.

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* the nonhuman, on the one hand, and a predominantly political project of becoming other-than-human by embracing (in the hope of undermining) the current (neoliberal, technoscientific, global capitalist…) conditions of posthumanisation.