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Bioethics Otherwise, or, How to Live with Machines, Humans and Other Animals

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For thinking concerning the animal, if there is such a thing, derives from poetry. There you have a thesis: it is what philosophy has, essentially, had to deprive itself of.

(Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*)

It seems that an animal is in the world as water in the water.

(Bojan Šarčević, video project, Galerie BQ, Cologne)

I never wanted to be posthuman, or posthumanist, any more than I wanted to be postfeminist.

(Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*)

Broken Wings

How can the human speak in the shadow of the post-humanist critique? This essay arises out of a prolonged moment of doubt, a cognitive and affective confusion over the ontology and status of what goes under the name of “man”. Now, that confusion is of course nothing new. It has been inherent to the disciplinary inquiry within the *humanities* conducted under the aegis of philosophical positions broadly associated with post-structuralism over

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the last few decades. The early twenty-first century attempts on the part of humanities scholars to turn to a more serious engagement with those hard sciences that deal with different human parts and particles – anatomy, neurology, genetics – have contributed even further to this uncertainty, as has the discovery that the typical signal points of the human such as language, tool use, culture (or “leaving traces”), and emotions are to be found across the species barrier². Rather than aim at ascertaining the identity of the human/non-human animal, in all its biodigital configurations, what I am predominantly concerned with in this essay is discussing how this transformed understanding of the human can help us not only think better about ourselves and others who may or may not be like us, but also live better with others – machines, humans, and other animals. The emphasis in this investigation falls on the pragmatics of the “how” as much as on the nature of that “we”. My focus here is therefore primarily ethical rather than ontological. And yet the very inquiry into ways of living a good life must be accompanied by the assessment not only of who will do the living but also of who will be involved in the process of judging its goodness, and in structuring a theoretical discourse around our biological and political forms of existence.

In a certain sense this essay is an attempt to return to the human “after the cyborg”³. This attempt is underpinned by an intellectual and, dare I say it, personal imperative to find a way out of what I see as the posthumanist impasse of some strands of contemporary cultural theory, whereby the widespread

2 For a discussion of how the features and behaviors that used to be seen as uniquely human have been identified across the species barrier see Cary Wolfe, “In Search of Post-Humanist Theory: The Second-Order Cybernetics of Maturana and Varela”, *Cultural Critique* 30, *The Politics of Systems and Environments*, Part I (Spring 1995): 35 and Matthew Calarco, *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 3.

3 The figure of the cyborg, borrowed from the tradition of cyberfeminism, has been an important concept in my work. In my *On Spiders, Cyborgs and Being Scared: The Feminine and the Sublime* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001) and *The Cyborg Experiments: Extensions of the Body in the Media Age* (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), the cyborg served as a hybrid, material figure signaling the human’s kinship with other creatures as well as the human’s dependency on technology – or what the philosopher Bernard Stiegler has called “originary technicity”. Yet the power of this metaphor has perhaps become somewhat exhausted, not only because of the transience of academic fashions for metaphors and concepts. While cyborgs for me have always been technical and processual, I am concerned that my continued use of this concept may give too much ammunition to the proponents of many “fluid” theories of human-machine couplings, where the overall metaphor of the flow seems to have swept away any discrete beings and entities. But the defense or critique of the cyborg as a singular entity is not my primary aim in this essay. My efforts rather arise out of my dissatisfaction with *some aspects* of the relational theory of becoming which at times leads to an all-too-quick dissolution of differences between beings, species and kinds – hence my return to the human “after the cyborg” here.

acceptance of the notions of transhuman relationality, interspecies kinship, and the machinic becoming by many humanities scholars seems to have diminished the need for a more rigorous interrogation of the singularity of trans-species and intra-species difference. It is thus armed with doubt and singularity as my analytical tools, coupled with the intransigent use of the “I” pronoun which simultaneously undermines and reasserts the humanist presence of this piece of writing, that I set out to explore these issues. Obviously, there is also a possibility that this posthuman, all-too-human interrogation is just another exercise in narcissism, a desperate attempt to return to the self and hang on to a fantasy of human exceptionalism. In this context, Jacques Derrida’s query, “Is there animal narcissism?”, becomes something of an accusation, aimed perhaps at those of us who are still obsessed by Descartes’ question: “But as for me, who am I?”⁴.

Still, post Freud, this fantasy of human exceptionalism is not an easy one to retain, as Donna Haraway explains poignantly in her book, *When Species Meet*. The three great wounds to the primary narcissism of the human – the Copernican revolution, the Darwinian theory of evolution, and the Freudian excavation of the unconscious – have seriously destabilized humanity’s geographical, historical, and psychic self-centeredness⁵. To these Haraway adds a fourth, “informatic or cyborgian” wound, “which infolds organic and technological flesh”⁶. As a result, the human has to think of her- or himself as always already technological, as co-constituted and co-evolving with the world which is made up of animate and inanimate entities. To explain this performative process, Haraway takes recourse to the metaphor of dance and argues that this process of co-constitution is never fully stabilized or accomplished, and that each intervention, each movement, generates a new state of becoming. “All the dancers are redone through the patterns they enact”, she writes⁷.

Applying a critical lens to the theoretical offerings on interspecies relations by Haraway and two other theorists of becoming-with-animals, Matthew Calarco and Paul Patton, I want to raise some broader questions about the emergent (inter)discipline of animal studies which has gone some way towards considering human-nonhuman relations precisely as *r e l a t i o n s*.

4 Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 51-52.

5 Haraway engages here with Derrida’s essay, “And Say the Animal Responded?”, first delivered as a lecture in 1997 and included in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*.

6 Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 12.

7 Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 25.

This is why “animal studies” are sometimes referred to as “human-animal studies”⁸. “While there is no widely agreed upon definition of what precisely constitutes animal studies”, as Calarco acknowledges in the introduction to his *Zoographies*, “it is clear that most authors and activists working in the field share the conviction that ‘the question of the animal’ should be seen as one of the central issues in contemporary critical discourse”⁹. The key debates within animal studies thus focus, on the one hand, on the being or (for the lack of a better word) the “nature” of animals, and, on the other hand, on the possibility of making the human-animal distinction¹⁰. Within this, the question of living-with but also of living-as animals becomes central to this field of inquiry.

It is the promises and limitations of the very notion of interspecies or companion ethics as outlined by animal studies theorists that are of particular interest to me in this piece. To let the cat out of the bag, so to speak, I am not going to be too optimistic about the viability of any such ethical framework or model. This conceptual hesitation will be outlined against the wider canvas of what I called in my earlier work “alternative bioethics”. “Departing from the more accepted definition of bioethics as the interrogation of ‘ethical issues arising from the biological and medical sciences’, [...] bioethics for me stands for an ‘ethics of life,’ whereby life signifies both the physical, material existence of singular organisms (what the Greeks called *zoē*) and their political organization into populations (*bios*)”¹¹. Traditionally, the bioethical debate about issues of health and life management has been primarily procedural, with questions of moral agency, political influence, and economic interest already pre-decided in many of the dominant ethical paradigms which are applied to resolving the so-called moral dilemmas concerning genomic interventions, cosmetic surgery, and cloning. Rooted in the philosophy of alterity, the “alternative” non-systemic bioethics I propose instead takes as its focal point relationality and kinship between humans and non-humans – such as animals and machines. Yet, for all my consideration of interspecies relationality and the recognition of its significance as both a set of material circumstances and an ethical injunction, I stop short of embracing companion or interspecies ethics as a viable proposition for what we can tentatively (but not unproblematically) call the posthuman age. In the argument that follows I will attempt to provide a justification for this ethical stoppage on my part

8 Calarco, *Zoographies*, 3.

9 *Ibid.*, 1.

10 *Ibid.*, 2.

11 Joanna Zylińska *Bioethics in the Age of New Media* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2009), xii–xiii.

and work through the three fundamental blind spots that the intermeshed trajectories of thought in animal studies have frequently run into. These are, to shoot from the hip:

1. The humanist blind spot, which is centered around issues of language, culture, affect, and the violence of imposition. Arguably, the majority of what we can call distributed positions on interspecies ethics return (to) the human through the back door, even if the theorist has temporarily descended into the kennel, looked her cat seriously in the eye or his horse in the mouth. That return in itself is not so much of a problem, I will argue, provided it is recognized as such, rather than slid or galloped over.
2. The technician blind spot, where much work goes into recognizing the animal's anima, i.e. its "subjectivity", with the animal becoming an extension of the human. Entities designated as "human" and "animal" then get carved out of a complex field of co-constitutive technical forces and situated on the side of "nature".
3. The violentist blind spot, where violence is posited as the enemy of ethics, something that should be overcome both in "us" and in "the world", rather than being seen as a structuring and inevitable condition of all relationality¹².

The reason I have decided to reroute my discussion of (the difficulties of) interspecies ethics here via the thought of Haraway, Calarco, and Patton is not because I am positioning these thinkers as the representatives or figureheads of "animal studies" – although of course they cannot by themselves fully resist such an interpellation. I am turning to them primarily because in their respective works they have actually taken some significant steps towards addressing, more or less explicitly, the three blind spots outlined above. To what extent these efforts have been successful and whether or not they can help us envisage some better ways of living with non-human others is something I will discuss in the course of what follows. The essay will end with a tentative outline of a bioethics for the twenty-first century, a kind of "in-the-clouds" proposal that piggy-backs on the ideas of the animal studies scholars such as Haraway, even if it ultimately takes many of their notions in a somewhat different direction.

¹² The important animal studies texts whose authors have made significant efforts in resituating the traditional debates and discourses on the animal beyond their anthropocentric assumptions and biases but which have nevertheless fallen prey to at least one of the three blind spots listed here include, to name but a few, Carole Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (London and New York: Continuum, 1990); Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000); Erica Fudge, *Animal*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2002); Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003).

Haraway's *When Species Meet* is an exceptional book precisely because of its consistently playful yet rigorous effort to undermine human exceptionalism through a series of philosophical exegeses, scientific reports, auto-ethnographic accounts, and personal anecdotes. It is also an attempt to enact what we may describe as lived philosophy, whereby the theorist lays on the table, for all to see, both her well-processed intellectual trajectories and her much more convoluted desires and passions. Such an act of dual revelation is not entirely new: feminist and queer scholars have been attempting to incorporate, literally and figuratively, their passions, desires, and everyday foibles into their theoretical and activist projects for a few decades now. Importantly, Haraway is prepared to turn her own critical lens not only on her ideas, but also on her own everyday lived practices – her agility training with her dog Cayenne, her family history – while also exposing, for all to see, the weaknesses and contradictions of any such “live/d theory”. It is precisely while stumbling and becoming entangled in the texts and textures of human-nonhuman environments made up of academics, dogs, bureaucrats, Californian sunshine, wine, training competitions, research papers, French philosophers, and technologies big and small that Haraway's argument becomes most powerful.

Puppy Love

Haraway has frequently been accused of either hedging around ethical questions in her earlier books, or of resorting all too early to the American legal discourse, with its clearly identified, individualized moral and political subjects. However, in her latest offerings – primarily her 2003 text, *The Companion Species Manifesto* – she makes a more explicit effort to outline an alternative (bio)ethics of living-with, and emerging-with, other beings. The origins of her ethics of companion species are experiential and spring from “taking dog-human relationships seriously”¹³. Significantly, the natural habitats for these cross-species acts of encounter and emergence are always already technological. In her attempt at thinking how to live well together, Haraway insists that the orientation of this ethical project has to transcend the wishes and desires of man as the sole arbitrator of “goodness”. This is when she makes one of those well-known gestures of hers which tend to leave many of her critics, myself included, somewhat baffled: namely, she proposes “love” as the source of an ethical bind between companion species. Although she is careful to distinguish it from technophilic or canonophilic narcissism (i.e. the belief that dogs are either “tools” for human activity or sources of unconditional affection and spiritual fulfillment for humans), this notion of love as

¹³ Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*, 3.

ethical co-emergence and cohabitation entails a number of problems. Not least among these is the way in which the values that underpin her ethics of companion species – love, respect, happiness and achievement – have a distinctly human “feel” to them precisely because it is the human who defines the meaning of these values and their appropriateness for all companion species. There is no escape from the philosophical quandary that even the most committed of efforts to give dogs what they want, and not what humans merely want for them, inevitably depend on the human ideas of “want”, “satisfaction” and “gift”. This is not to say that dogs should tell “us” what “they” want; only that a value-driven theory of good is not the most appropriate basis for this kind of ethics¹⁴.

To a certain extent, *When Species Meet* is a continuation of Haraway’s attempt to think an interspecies ethics, but one of the most significant developments in this book concerns the suspension of any programmatic, value-driven intimations of Haraway’s prior ethical outlook. Instead, she is much more self-reflexive and hesitant. Picking up a thread from her earlier work, Haraway proposes that “to be a situated human being is to be shaped by and with animal familiars”¹⁵. While this is an ontological given for her, an ethical way of being-with needs to involve curiosity about our ontology and our becoming – i.e., about those who are not us, but who constantly challenge us through their gaze, their touch or through the lick of their tongue.

Sealed with a Kiss

Haraway lays out her ethical injunction for animal curiosity – arguably the softest and yet, paradoxically, also the strongest building block of any ethics of interspecies cohabitation – through an encounter with that oft-cited text within the posthumanist circles, Jacques Derrida’s essay, “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)”. In this text Derrida provides an account of finding himself naked, gazed at, and thus put to shame, by his own cat – “a real cat, truly, believe me”, he insists¹⁶. Now, Haraway is very upfront about her affections: she loves her dog – “We have had forbidden conversations; we have had oral intercourse”, she confesses¹⁷ – and rather likes Derrida. She is just slightly worried about the latter’s actual feelings for his cat. More precisely,

14 Some of the ideas included in this paragraph have been borrowed from my review of Haraway’s book, “Dogs R Us?,” *parallax* vol. 12 no1 (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2006), 129–131.

15 Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 47.

16 Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 6.

17 Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 16.

she is disappointed with Derrida for ultimately using his cat as a stepping stone for a nice philosophical parable about human unknowingness, and for not being intimate enough with his cat or curious enough about her. Begrudgingly, Haraway writes: “he did not seriously consider an alternative form of engagement..., one that risked knowing something more about cats and how to look back, perhaps even scientifically, biologically, and therefore also philosophically and intimately”¹⁸. Derrida himself admits as much: “my having confessed to feeling disarmed before a small mute living being, and my avowed desire to escape the alternative of a projection that appropriates and an interruption that excludes, all that might lead one to guess that I am not ready to interpret or experience the gaze that a cat fixes, without a word, on my nakedness...”¹⁹. In this very event Derrida came “right to the edge of respect” but then got sidetracked by himself, by his own nakedness and his pee-pee, and hence his own philosophic-anthropocentric narcissism. He thus “failed a simple obligation of companion species; he did not become curious about what the cat might actually be doing, feeling, thinking, or perhaps making available to him in looking back at him that morning”. In Haraway’s reading, that day Derrida “missed a possible invitation, a possible introduction to other-worlding”²⁰.

This is a serious admonition; one as a failed animal lover – i.e. someone who has never owned a dog, does not coo over kittens, and has no desire to go horse riding – I take personally, which is also perhaps the sign of the aforementioned narcissism (as well as unreconstructed humanism). Yet what if Derrida did indeed “get curious”, but then refused to rechannel this curiosity through his own imagined ideas of desire, love, respect, and companionship?

Love is Not Enough

The uneasiness of these admonitions raised by Haraway – not just against Derrida, but also against other “metropolitan” theorists of critical persuasion (like myself) who are somehow prevented by their own disciplinary corset and urban upbringing from caring sufficiently and adequately about animals – raises for me the important issue of what it actually means to become undone by another species, and to redo oneself after the encounter. Is this “becoming-undone” the best post-humanism can hope for, where the “post-” refers to the transformative interspecies encounter rather than any

18 Ibid., 20.

19 Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 18.

20 Haraway *When Species Meet*, 20.

straightforward overcoming of the human²¹? In which case what happens if this animal is not just a dog, a cat or a horse from the family of befriended or domestic animals, but rather a parasite, bacteria or fungus? (Incidentally, all these are also included in Haraway's notion of companion species, even if they are not really properly "encountered" as such in her writings.) In a review of *When Species Meet*, Boria Sax similarly criticizes Haraway for showing "hardly any interest in wild creatures, except when these offer opportunities to display human ingenuity"²². Love for Ms Cayenne Pepper, as Haraway's Australian shepherd is often referred to affectionately, seems to win over an obligation to tell a multispecies story, with what Derrida calls "unsubstitutable singularity"²³ giving way to mere particularism – or, to put it in less generous terms, to being undone by pet love. Rather than worry about overcoming the human-animal difference via the shared experience of "other-worlding", perhaps we should spend more time tracing the already embedded, "world-ed" differences between animals, breeds, and kinds, and analyze what they *mean*, not just how they unfold? Horses, for example, are said to induce either reticence or careless familiarity in those who do not know them, according to Australian sociologist Ann Game. "But to live relationally with horses", writes Game, "is to know and respect their otherness and difference, which, in turn, implies recognition of the otherness in us"²⁴.

What shall we do then with Calarco's postulate that "the human-animal distinction can no longer and ought no longer to be maintained"²⁵? If by distinction we mean the listing of structural differences that safely place different beings in entirely discrete categories – *Homo sapiens*, *Canis lupus familiaris*, *Erinaceus europaeus* – then perhaps there are good reasons for suspending, at least temporarily, such a typology, especially given how it can be used to justify interspecies dependency and exploitation (even if we are to conclude eventually that power relations inevitably define human-animal coexistence). Yet the acknowledgement of a gap between human and animal as conceptual categories at our disposal is necessary if we are not to fall all too easily into uncritical species continuum, a theory that claims that "we" are basically "animals" professed by neo-Darwinists such as

21 Haraway *When Species Meet*, 21.

22 Boria Sax, *Human and Post-Animal: Review of Haraway, Donna J. "When Species Meet"*, H-Net, H-Net Reviews, April 2008, <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=14416> (dostęp: 06.30.2009), non-pag.

23 Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 9.

24 Anne Game, "Riding: Embodying the Centaur". *Body and Society* 7 no 4 (2001): 10.

25 Calarco, *Zoographies*, 3.

Richard Dawkins. The latter of course exerts all his human cognitive privileges in carrying out the theoretical maneuver of subsuming one conceptual category – i.e., “the human”, under another – “the animal”. In the same way, Calarco’s statement about the need to obviate “the human-animal distinction” can only ever be made from the point of species difference.

When Calarco asserts that “philosophy still has a unique and significant role to play” in transforming “our thinking about what we call human”, he seemingly remains unaware of the fact that his proposition reaffirms the very distinction he is trying to overcome²⁶. In describing Derrida’s reluctance to “abandon the human-animal distinction” altogether as “dogmatic”²⁷, Calarco reveals and simultaneously conceals his own gesture of attempting to continue philosophizing about the animal, even if the latter is seen as part of a broader system of co-emerging materialities. Now, I do not want to enter into a discussion as to whether the animal can or cannot do philosophy, since I am not sure such a discussion would get us very far. I only aim to foreground this differential, cutting gesture of philosophizing about the other – which is singularly different from, say, eating the other. It is not therefore surprising that Derrida would not abandon this evidently troublesome and politically sensitive human-animal distinction. After all, any such act of “abandonment” could only ever be conducted from within the most anthropocentric position of not just “I am”, but also “I decide” and “I profess”, with all the hegemonic authority this carries. What Calarco therefore sees as Derrida’s “refusal” is perhaps only a hesitation, one that actually adds strength to the latter’s attempt at practicing “animal studies”. Incorporating such a moment of hesitation as a condition of responsible interspecies ethics, however, is not something either Calarco or Haraway particularly want to consider. Significantly, in turning to the latter’s “Cyborg Manifesto” on the penultimate page of his own book, Calarco takes as a statement of fact what is evidently a normative proposition – i.e. that “the boundary between human and animal is thoroughly breached” – a proposition that, incidentally, remains disconnected from any particular material context and that carries all the rhetorical force of an I that writes, signs, and breaches. Ironically, Calarco proposes that a better solution than Derrida’s “refusal” is to be found in Haraway’s closing statement that “many *people* no longer feel the need for such a separation”²⁸. (I hope I do

26 *Ibid.*, 4.

27 *Ibid.*, 145.

28 *Ibid.*, 140.

not need to explain the unwitting joke once I have italicized it for you, dear reader?)

Do Not Let the Stars Get in Your Eyes

Where do we go from here? How far can this hesitation about the animal take us – epistemologically and ethically? Derrida provides us with the following, much more jagged but perhaps also much more responsible and thought out (in that old-fashioned anthropocentric way) suggestion:

There is no interest to be found in debating something like a discontinuity, rupture, or even abyss between those who call themselves men and what so-called men, those who name themselves men, call the animal. Everybody agrees on this; discussion is closed in advance; one would have to be more asinine than any beast ... to think otherwise. ... The discussion is worth undertaking once it is a matter of determining the number, form, sense, or structure, the foliated consistency, of this abyssal limit, these edges, this plural and repeatedly folded frontier. The discussion becomes interesting once, instead of asking whether or not there is a limit that produces a discontinuity, one attempts to think what a limit becomes once it is abyssal, once the frontier no longer forms a single indivisible line but more than one internally divided line; once, as a result, it can no longer be traced, objectified, or counted as single and indivisible. What are the edges of a limit that grows and multiples by feeding on an abyss?²⁹

From there, Derrida develops a threefold thesis, which asserts that: (1) this abyssal rupture does not mark a straight and clear-cut distinction between two entities: Man and Animal; (2) the border of this abyssal rupture has a history which we cannot ignore or dismiss all too quickly; (3) beyond the border of the human there exists a heterogeneous multiplicity of the living, or “a multiplicity of organizations of relations among realms that are more and more difficult to dissociate by means of the figures of the organic and inorganic, of life and/or death”³⁰.

There is perhaps a similarity between what Derrida calls “a multiplicity of organizations” between indissociable realms and what Haraway understands as the co-evolution and co-emergence of the organic and the inorganic. This line of argument also points to the technical dimension of these multiple

²⁹ Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 30-31.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

ontologies, whereby beings come to life precisely via the technical process of bringing-forth or creation, in which no fixed elements precede their mutual becoming. However, even if we are to take co-evolution and co-emergence as a starting point for considering ethical relations between species and kinds, I suggest we need to get there via the Derridean detour of caring not only about other beings and other species but also about the history and meaning of these processes of “saming” and “othering”. This, in turn, requires us to recognize “our” kinship not just with animals but also with machines(s), with technics. Ethical responsibility stands for the ability and need to respond – “responders are themselves co-constituted in the responding”³¹ – which applies to people as well as lab and domestic animals. It also entails acknowledging the inevitability of relations of dependency between and among humans, animals and machines, some of which may include causing pain and killing – even though, as Haraway insists, such practices “should never leave their practitioners in moral comfort, sure of their righteousness”³².

What emerges from the above is that violence and dependency are positioned as inevitable conditions of “worlding”. This conclusion should not be seen as a get-out clause from ethical responsibility. The recognition of the inevitability of violence in any relation with alterity does not take away the injunction to both minimize the violence and reflect on it. An ethical theory that embeds violence into its framework – rather than just pushing it aside in a fantasy gesture of moral purification – promises to address the question of dependency in all its complexity. This does not imply imposing moral

31 Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 71.

32 Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 77. Dogs and other animals do not come to us from some kind of prelapsarian world: they are actors and subjects in the complex technoscientific networks of technocapitalist production. Following Edmund Russell, Haraway recognizes that dogs are “biotechnologies, workers, and agents of technoscientific knowledge production in the regime of lively capital;” they are herders “deliberately selected for their working capacities”, sled laborers, workers/competitors in sheep trials, and livestock guardian dogs (56). Like humans and other animate and inanimate world beings, dogs are mutually co-emerging via the interlinked multiple processes of biotechnological production. And yet Haraway also acknowledges that it is humans who “make the deliberate planes to change things” (56), and who thus define the purpose and direction of many of these transformative processes – be it those of guide dogs for the blind or training dogs in competitive agility sports – even if, in order to achieve these objectives, “dogs and people have to train together in subject-changing ways” (57). However, she also argues that people and dogs “emerge as mutually adapted partners in the naturecultures of lively capital”, which leads her to postulate that we should think harder about what she terms “encounter value” (62). The latter will also presumably be very different depending on whether we are encountering a dog or a microbe. The existence of such different economies of scale and cuteness is one of the key reasons why the overarching value- and principle-driven interspecies ethics is rather difficult to design.

equivalence between all forms of violence and all forms of dependency, even if we accepts that “a n y act of identification, naming, or relation is a betrayal of and a violence toward the Other”³³. Yet in spite of recognizing that there is no “pure” ethical position, “no way of living that is not also a way of someone, not just something, else dying differentially”³⁴, Haraway’s proposal for “ruthlessly mundane”, non-utilitarian interspecies ethics ultimately sounds rather fuzzy when she writes that “The needed morality, in my view, is cultivating a radical ability to remember and feel what is going on and performing the epistemological, emotional, and technical work to respond practically in the face of the permanent complexity not resolved by taxonomic hierarchies and with no humanist philosophical or religious guarantees”³⁵. By saying this she seems to fall prey to what Simon Glendinning calls the “cognitivist presumption” of humanism³⁶, in the sense that the human acts and processes of “remembering”, “feeling what is going on”, and “performing practically” are not adequately assessed for their anthropocentrism. Again, this is not to say that humans need to invite “others” – animals, sentient machines – into their thinking, feeling, and acting circle: such a gesture would only confirm the taxonomic hierarchy. It is only to suggest that a certain doubt or hesitation should perhaps be introduced at the very foundation of any such ethical endeavor. Yes, there is a danger that this *ego dubito* will only be an extension of the Cartesian thinking and reasoning I. Yet in order that it would be about the ethics of the other, rather than primarily about the ontology of the self, the outcome of this doubting process needs to be pointed elsewhere. *Ethical* doubt has the potential to turn the focus and attention of the study of interspecies relationality precisely to the alterity that is not in me. It does not therefore serve the ultimate reaffirmation of the human I.

Anything else – no matter if I was to defend the special positioning of the human as a being with its own teleology and truth, or the species continuum of modern naturalism which only affirms differences of degree, not of kind – would require the reinstatement of the position of *k n o w i n g* the nature

33 Calarco, *Zoographies*, 136. Commenting on Derrida’s ethical thought, Calarco explains that the inevitability of violence in any relation with the Other “should not be taken to mean that such violence is immoral or that all forms of violence are equivalent. Rather, the aim is to undercut completely the possibility of achieving good conscience in regard to questions of nonviolence toward the Other. The ideal of ethical purity is ruled out a priori as structurally impossible” (136).

34 Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 79.

35 *Ibid.*, 75.

36 Simon Glendinning, *In the Name of Phenomenology* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 184.

of interspecies difference and being able to arbitrate over it once and for all. There is ethical value in the injunction for curiosity about “animals”, yet this curiosity has to be combined with the recognition of not knowing all that much about “them”. Otherwise we face the danger that this curiosity will lead to the projection of our most unreformed beliefs, ideas, and desires onto “the animal other”, with the alleged knowledge being a mere extension of what we thought we knew in the first place, a filtration of some observed behavior through the cognitive and conceptual apparatus at our disposal which also makes us believe that we have been co-constituted together – while in fact we have only constituted this “animal” in our own image (of “us” or “them”). The ethical recognition of this difference between a human and an animal does not therefore amount to knowing its nature once and for all. Indeed, any attempt to cognitively master it will only be a narrative, a story, one that inevitably has a mythical character. It will also be another technical prosthesis – alongside flint tools, hammers and computers – that shapes our systemic co-emergence in and with the world³⁷.

Side Saddle

If stories and myths shape the human as much as technical tools and apparatuses do, one particular story that is of interest to me in the context of this enquiry into interspecies ethics concerns animal training as narrated by both Haraway and Paul Patton. Reflecting on training to a high standard of performance for competitions with her dog Cayenne, Haraway remains aware of the economies of class, leisure, and geography that shape this particular sport. She also acknowledges that it is the human who decides that training will take place, even though “the human must [then] respond to the authority of the dog’s actual performance”³⁸, and hence take account of what Game calls

37 In *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, trans. Richard Beardsworth and George Collins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998) Bernard Stiegler draws on the paleontological theories of André Leroi-Gourhan to argue that the human is originally prosthetic, i.e. dependent on technical prostheses for his or her emergence and existence. For Stiegler, the drive towards exteriorization, towards tools, artifice and language is due to a technical tendency which already exists in the older, zoological dynamic. It is due to this tendency that the (not-yet) human stands up and reaches for what is not in him or her: and it is through visual and conceptual reflexivity (seeing herself in the blade of the flint, memorizing the use of the tool) that she emerges as always already related to, and connected with, the alterity that is not part of her. For more on the consequences of this line of thinking for our idea of ethics, see my *Bioethics in the Age of New Media*, 35-63.

38 Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 221.

animal (or, to be more precise, horse) “sociality”³⁹. But even if we recognize, with Game, that in any training situation animals need to “allow people to teach them to be led”⁴⁰, we also need to acknowledge the problem of multiple temporalities – i.e., a difference between the animal present and the human future, which is also a difference between (strategic) necessity and expediency. Haraway admits to having had the same reservations regarding the perfecting of the breed to “produce dogs who could herd with matchless skill, win in conformation, excel in obedience and agility sports, and serve as pets with dignity” that many cultural theorists display, but she apparently changed her mind after she “fell in love”⁴¹. Now, we should take this confession less as an acknowledgement that what she calls “the love of the breed” has clouded her critical-ethical judgment and more as an admittance to being with, amongst and close to animals; and thus also an admonition against critical theorists (such as myself perhaps) who only ever look at animals from far away, treating them as objects of interpretation while also reducing them to two-dimensional figures of speech. Haraway seems to be saying to us: some of you know how to think with animals but not really how to live with them – and actually what to do with them.

Analogous concerns underpin Paul Patton’s attempt to think animal philosophy from the bottom, or rather saddle, up. His essay, “Language, Power, and the Training of Horses” in Cary Wolfe’s edited collection, *Zoontologies*, opens with a generic declaration of animal love: “People love horses for all kinds of reasons”⁴². Patton himself fell in love with horses through the experience of learning to train them. In a similar vein to Haraway, he is attempting to combine his philosophical position rooted in continental philosophy with “a good story” about his training relationship with his horse Flash. And yet what is missing for me from Patton’s narrative is a deeper reflection on this desire to train, and hence master another being – and on the pleasure of that. Even if we recognize that precision in training involves making the horse “do the right thing”, this does not explain why “we” would want to achieve this in the first place. What is the purposefulness of horse/man training? The argument about ennoblement borrowed from horse trainer Vicky Hearne that Haraway brings under the rubric of flourishing and that Patton also refers to is just too close to colonial narratives of improving the native for

39 Game, *Riding: Embodying the Centaur*, 4.

40 Ibid., 4.

41 Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 129.

42 Paul Patton, “Language, Power, and the Training of Horses.” in John Protevi and Paul Patton eds., *Between Deleuze and Derrida* (London and New York: Continuum, 2003), 83.

my own, admittedly paper-thin animal lover's comfort. Of course, Haraway and Patton are no strangers to postcolonial theory. Patton also realizes that "The aesthetic-moral defense of the activities for which animals are trained is corrupt ... to the extent that it misrepresents what, anthropomorphically, we might call the 'values' of the animals involve and it projects onto them as natural certain aptitudes and airs that are valued by their all too human trainers"⁴³.

How does he then get out of the potential accusation of rationalizing certain human preferences and culturally acquired desires for beauty, grace, and skill through training practice? Not very well, I fear, as evidenced in the following declaration: "Disciplinary relations of command and obedience are precisely a means to create and maintain stable and civil relations between different kinds of beings, not only among individuals of the same species, but also between representatives of different species"⁴⁴. Conceding, after Nietzsche and Foucault, that all social relations are power relations does not resolve the socio-political quandary that not all social relations are the same; they do not all mean the same thing, and are not necessary in the same way. For example, how has a decision been reached that training horses is a good thing? I am not particularly convinced by the more spiritualist justification of human-horse training provided by Game as a way of living together more "creatively"⁴⁵. While the majority of us humans would probably agree that training horses is not morally equivalent to beating or eating horses, I also wonder what criteria underpin Patton's notion of "civility" that structures his declaration and how he has arrived at it. Patton says that we learn from animal training "that hierarchical forms of society between unequals are by no means incompatible with ethical relations and obligation toward other beings"⁴⁶. But this argument has to be developed further via the notion of species singularity, the forgetting of which will only perpetuate the species exceptionalism that both Haraway and Patton are so keen to avoid. By asking, "What is the point of training?"; I am not therefore promoting some kind of Edenic fantasy of free roaming wolves or mares. I am only suggesting that a clarification is needed with regard to the affective investments of animal lovers and animal studies theorists. The reflection on the trainer's desire to make the universe supple, to have it bend under their command, is nevertheless something Haraway and Patton withhold in their affective

43 Ibid., 93.

44 Ibid., 95.

45 Game, *Riding: Embodying the Centaur*, 7-8.

46 Patton, *Language, Power, and the Training of Horses*, 95.

analyses of human-animal relationships. Even if we acknowledge, as Patton does, that a training relation is one possible form of an ethical relation which “enhances the power and the feeling of power of both horse and rider”⁴⁷, we are back in a logical loop, with the theorist’s fantasy and projection covering over the violence involved in making the world and in making meanings in the world with and via animals.

What’s New Pussycat, or Bioethics Otherwise

Is there a way out? As the discussion above hopefully demonstrates, any gesture of attempting to propose an ethical framework is always inevitably suspended between anthropocentrism and violence. Yet this recognition should not absolve us of an ethical responsibility to work out better ways of living-with – with humans, other animals, and machines. As biotechnologies and digital media are constantly challenging our established ideas of what it means to be human and live a human life, they also command a transformation of the recognized moral frameworks through which we understand life, as well as a rethinking of who the moral subject is in the current conjuncture. The so-called post-humanist critique discussed throughout this essay has the potential to call into question the anthropocentric bias of our established ways of thinking – i.e. the belief that the human is situated at the top of the “chain of beings” and that this special positioning entitles him or her to a particular set of consumerist and exploitative attitudes towards non-humans (mammals, fish, rainforests, the ecosphere as a whole, etc.). Following Haraway *et al.*, the human can be understood instead as being part of a complex natural-technical network and as emerging in a dynamic way out of this network. On this emergence, the human is presented with an ethical task of having to make decisions, always in an uncertain terrain, about life, in all its different incarnations and enactments.

In the biodigital age, this tentatively differentiated human needs to respond to an expanded scope of obligations, beyond those exerted by singular human others. The field of bioethics thus has to deal not just with questions of the transformation of life on a biological level – via genomics, DNA sequencing, cloning, and so forth – but also with life situated in a broader political context, through questions of the financing of the biotech industry, of the database management of the immigration and asylum systems, of the normativity of cosmetic surgery, of national and cellular surveillance, of bi-citizenship etc. The decision-making processes of those who call themselves human, with all the awareness of the historical and cultural baggage this term

47 *Ibid.*, 97.

carries, and of the temporary and fragile nature of any such identification, are important in any situation when issues of life and its multiple transformations are at stake. Involvement in these processes does not have to amount to the celebration of human superiority though: it should rather be seen as a practical mobilization of the human skills, however compromised and imperfect, of critical reflexivity and practical intervention. Now, the question of whether “animals” or “machines” should also engage in such ethical processes is irrelevant, even if we recognize that the features and behaviors that used to be seen as uniquely human have recently been identified across the species barrier. It is irrelevant because this responsibility only ever refers to “me”: a temporarily stabilized singular human who emerges in-relation-with human and non-human others.

The moral quandary of whether “we” should respect parrots, bacteria, cyberdogs or even iPods that is sometimes raised in the context of interspecies ethics shows a reluctance to submit this “we” category, in all its implied unity and speciesism, to a rigorous critique. Also, in the framework outlined throughout this essay ethics is not so much about respect, because respect assumes that I am already fully constituted as a moral agent before I encounter the other, any other, and then I can give this other my gift of recognition, care, and kindness. Instead, ethics can be thought more productively in terms of phenomenological responsiveness and moral responsibility – a position which assumes that whatever attitude I adopt towards the other, I am already responding to the other’s presence and demand⁴⁸. Indeed, sometimes withholding respect might be the most responsible thing to do, depending on the circumstances. Also, it is worth emphasizing again that the notion of the

48 Broadly speaking, the philosophical framework for understanding ethics in this way is provided by the work of Emmanuel Levinas and by Derrida’s rereading of it. Levinas’ ethical theory shifts the focus of attention and concern from myself to the Other and can therefore be read as a blow to human self-centredness. The place I occupy in the world for Levinas is never just mine. Instead, it belongs to the Other whom I may have oppressed, starved or driven away from my home, my country and my life. His thought provides a justification for caring about the life, any life, of the Other, especially the precarious and destitute lives of all those who lack recognition in the dominant political debates and policies, and those whose biological and political existence is confined to “zones of exception”: comatose patients, asylum seekers, refugees, people with non-normative bodies and looks, victims of biotech experimentation. Yet drawing on Levinas in an effort to develop a post-humanist bioethics is not unproblematic as his theory suffers from an anthropological bias, which is evident, for example, in the excessive weighting he gives to human language. His notion of the Other therefore needs to be expanded if, in the digital era, we are not sure any longer whether the Other who is before me is human or machinic, and whether the “fraternity” Levinas talks about extends to all of DNA-kin (chimpanzees, dogs, bacteria). I discuss the viability of Levinas’ philosophy for thinking a bioethics of human and non-human relations in *Bioethics in the Age of New Media*.

human – who, as soon as she takes up ethical responsibility, she differentiates herself from carrots, machines and the general flow of life – does not disappear altogether in this “alternative” bioethical theory, even if we raise some substantial questions for the humanist, anthropocentric assumptions around many traditional bioethical positions.

Understood in this way, bioethics becomes a supplement to both morality and politics; a prior demand on those of us who call themselves humans to respond to the difference of the world critically and responsibly, without taking recourse all too early to pre-decided half-truths, opinions, beliefs, and political strategies. But it is not something that can be “implemented” once and for all or become a practical tool for resolving specific moral dilemmas over life and death. The kind of alternative bioethics I am attempting to outline here cannot be instantiated in a single “example” because any such example would inevitably take over and even colonize the need for open-ended critical work of bioethics by becoming a measuring stick against which other bioethical cases and dilemmas could be compared⁴⁹. In undertaking this kind of critical-creative work of bioethics, I am much more interested in shifting the parameters of the ethical debate from an individualistic problem-based moral paradigm in which rules can be rationally and strategically worked out on the basis of a previously agreed principle, to a broader political context in which individual decisions are always involved in complex relations of power, economy, and ideology.

By pointing to a place of difference as a productive site of relationality and interspecies kinship, bioethics as an ethics of life the way I envisage it has the capacity to challenge the hierarchical system of descent through which relations between species and life forms have traditionally been thought. At the same time, focusing on the multiple instances in which this difference manifests itself, always differently, is one way of ensuring that we do not collapse various beings and life forms into a seamless flow of life, and then continue philosophizing about it as if nothing had happened. This non-normative, technology-aware bioethics thus needs to seriously consider the polyvalent relations of co-evolution and co-emergence. However, it must also carry a visible trace of reflection on the very process of its creation: from the human vantage point of language, philosophy, and culture. In other words, this technics-aware bioethics entails an injunction to give an account of the violence of thinking ethics, including that of interspecies relations.

49 Having said that, in my various writings I have addressed multiple bioethical scenarios and events which arise in the context of cosmetic surgery, abortion, cloning, genetic testing, or art practice which uses biomaterial, and have also suggested ways of thinking ethically about all these different cases.

Importantly, doubt needs to become the condition and structuring device of such an alternative bioethics. Yet this is not the impartial doubt of the Cartesian ego cogito. Rather it involves the suspension of the cognitive essentialism that knows the nature of interspecies difference in advance, all too early. Even if this sounds like a much more tentative and hesitant ethical proposition than some of those discussed throughout the course of this essay (not to mention many procedural or value-based bioethical theories, where different forms of life are assigned value in advance and are then weighted against each other), it can perhaps speak more convincingly to those of “us” to whom animal love does not come “naturally”, as it were. It can also keep a check on those animal studies experts who love their companion species, or even themselves *as* companion species, a little too much. Because the question that is posed to us is not only, “What does my pet want?”, or even the Cartesian, “But as for me, whom am I?”, but also, perhaps first of all, “And what if a bacteria responded?”