

# **The Humanities and Posthumanism**

issue editor

**GRZEGORZ GROCHOWSKI**

**MICHAŁ PAWEŁ MARKOWSKI** Humanities:  
an Unfinished Project

**EWA DOMAŃSKA** Ecological Humanities

**RYSZARD NYCZ** Towards Innovative Humanities:  
The Text as a Laboratory. Traditions, Hypotheses, Ideas

**OLGA CIELEMĘCKA** Angelus Novus Looks to the Future.  
On the Anti-Humanism Which Overcomes Nothingness

**SZYMON WRÓBEL** Domesticating Animals:  
A Description of a Certain Disturbance

<b>EDITORIAL BOARD</b>	<b>Agata Bielik-Robson</b> (UK), <b>Włodzimierz Bolecki</b> , <b>Maria Delaperrière</b> (France), <b>Ewa Domańska</b> , <b>Grzegorz Grochowski</b> , <b>Zdzisław Łapiński</b> , <b>Michał Paweł Markowski</b> (USA), <b>Maciej Maryl</b> , <b>Jakub Momro</b> , <b>Anna Nasiłowska</b> (Deputy Editor-in-Chief), <b>Leonard Neuger</b> (Sweden), <b>Ryszard Nycz</b> (Editor-in-Chief), <b>Bożena Shallcross</b> (USA), <b>Marta Zielińska</b> , <b>Tul'si Bhambry</b> (English Translator and Language Consultant), <b>Justyna</b> <b>Tabaszewska</b> , <b>Marta Bukowiecka</b> (Managing Editor)
<b>ADVISORY BOARD</b>	<b>Edward Balcerzan</b> , <b>Stanisław Barańczak</b> (USA), <b>Małgorzata</b> <b>Czermińska</b> , <b>Paweł Dybel</b> , <b>Knut Andreas Grimstad</b> (Norway), <b>Jerzy Jarzębski</b> , <b>Bożena Karwowska</b> (Canada), <b>Krzysztof</b> <b>Kłosiński</b> , <b>Dorota Krawczyńska</b> , <b>Vladimir Krysinski</b> (Canada), <b>Luigi Marinelli</b> (Italy), <b>Arent van Nieukerken</b> (Holland), <b>Ewa Rewers</b> , <b>German Ritz</b> (Switzerland), <b>Henryk Siewierski</b> (Brasil), <b>Janusz Sławiński</b> , <b>Ewa Thompson</b> (USA), <b>Joanna Tokarska-Bakir</b> , <b>Tamara Trojanowska</b> (Canada), <b>Alois Woldan</b> (Austria), <b>Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska</b>
<b>ADDRESS</b>	Nowy Świat 72, room. 1, 00-330 Warsaw, Poland phone +48 22 657 28 07, phone/fax +48 22 828 32 06 e-mail: <a href="mailto:redakcja@tekstydrugie.pl">redakcja@tekstydrugie.pl</a> <a href="http://www.tekstydrugie.pl">www.tekstydrugie.pl</a>
<b>GRAPHIC DESIGN</b>	<b>Marcin Hernas</b>   <a href="http://tessera.org.pl">tessera.org.pl</a>
<b>EDITING AND</b> <b>PROOFREADING</b>	<b>Artur Zwolski</b>
<b>TYPESETTING</b>	<b>Publishing House of the Institute of Literary Research,</b> <b>Polish Academy of Sciences</b>



*theory of literature · critique · interpretation*

## *The Humanities and Posthumanism*

5	<b>GRZEGORZ GROCHOWSKI</b>	Ubi Leones
13	<b>MICHAŁ PAWEŁ MARKOWSKI</b>	Humanities: an Unfinished Project
29	<b>RYSZARD NYCZ</b>	Towards Innovative Humanities: The Text as a Laboratory. Traditions, Hypotheses, Ideas
46	<b>WŁODZIMIERZ BOLECKI</b>	A Different Take on Humanities
53	<b>MACIEJ MARYL</b>	F5: Refreshing Philology
64	<b>OLGA CIELEMĘCKA</b>	Angelus Novus Looks to the Future. On the Anti-Humanism which Overcomes Nothingness
83	<b>MAGDALENA POPIEL</b>	The Avant-Garde Artist: Between the All-Too-Human and the Inhuman. Towards an Anthropological Aesthetics
112	<b>PIOTR PIOTROWSKI</b>	From Global to Alter-Globalist Art History
135	<b>ARKADIUSZ ŻYCHLIŃSKI</b>	The Narrative Instinct. The Anthropological Difference in the Philological Framework
155	<b>BOGUSŁAWA BODZIOCH-BRYŁA</b>	Towards the Post-Human Body. On New Poetry and New Reality

173	<b>ALEKSANDRA UBERTOWSKA</b>	Nature at Its Limits (Ecocide). Subjectivity After the Catastrophe
186	<b>EWA DOMAŃSKA</b>	Ecological Humanities
211	<b>JOANNA ZYLINSKA</b>	Bioethics Otherwise, or, How to Live with Machines, Humans, and Other Animals
231	<b>GRAŻYNA GAJEWSKA</b>	On Erotically Marked Objects from the Perspective of Object Studies
248	<b>ANNA BARCZ</b>	Posthumanism and Its Animal Voices in Literature
270	<b>SZYMON WRÓBEL</b>	Domesticating Animals: A Description of a Certain Disturbance
290	<b>MONIKA BAKKE</b>	"Between Us, Animals" Emotional Ties Between Humans and Other Animals



---

# Foreword

---

Grzegorz Grochowski

---

**Ubi Leones**

---

DOI: 10.18318/td.2015.en.1.1

**T**he rhetoric of the end of history may irritate today but it continues to retain its paradoxical vitality, fuelled by the influx of additional concepts. Their growth has begun with postmodernism and poststructuralism, and the list now includes also postmemory, postgender, postcolonialism, post-theater, post-politics, postsecularism, (post)traumatic post-realism, post-dependence studies (even a monograph on the anthropology of postfootball has been published recently). The fondness for such apocalyptic diagnoses was criticized once, among others, by Bruno Latour: "There is only one positive thing to be said about the postmodernists: after them, there is nothing. Far from being the last word, they mark the end of all ends"<sup>1</sup>. Ironically, Latour himself became one of the godfathers of a yet another apocalyptic movement, usually referred to as posthumanism.

There are also several terms competing with the above, circulating within the academia and referring to a similar range of phenomena: antihumanism, transhumanism, posthumanities or non-anthropocentric humanities. Each, however, sets the profile of its postulated investigation slightly differently, it

---

**Grzegorz Grochowski** – works in the Institute of Literary Studies at the Polish Academy of Sciences, doing research in the fields of poetics, genres and discourse. He is the author of a book on text hybrids and co-author of the dictionary of Cultural Studies. He is a member of the editorial board of the journal "Teksty Drugie".

---

1 Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, transl. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1993), 62.

could even be said that those individual terms include quite divergent, and sometimes contradictory, tendencies agreeing only about the notion of the exhaustion of humanistic thinking. Such multidirectionality, although troublesome to describe and discuss, should not be seen as something discouraging as similar situations are not unusual even in the traditional humanities. It will probably be best to take posthumanism as the main frame of reference, allowing us to embark on cognitive journeys into the domains delineated by the remaining terms. There are two main reasons behind my choice of such a formula. First, it does not require one to adopt a hostile attitude to the existing tradition, and thus can contain both the clearly polemical (anti-humanistic) projects as well as those that propose a rather natural law of succession. The latter is related to the second reason, namely the need to contextualize the entire question historically. And that, in turn, is because the very essence of the presumed change is frequently swept under the slogan of "objects, animals, machines" (replacing the "race, class and gender" triad of cultural studies), a gesture which decidedly detracts from the importance of the endeavor, reducing it to the level of traditional thematic criticism. Meanwhile, many signals suggest that the changes in question are more serious in nature which can only be seen from a longer temporal perspective.

Humanism is (or was, according to some) a very broad and yet a historically defined movement characterized by a certain set of views, one that influenced strongly the transformations of the entire Western culture and determined the official ideology of the humanities, especially in the area of education. As a result, it provides an important context for grasping the dynamics of the more recent intellectual trends. It is easier to leave the realm of the anecdotal and understand the current interest in the liminal forms of subjectivity if one juxtaposes the increase in the number of works about objects or animals with the symptoms of the crisis in the classical interpretation of humanity. One can see then with more clarity that a trend, which when it is analyzed in isolation may appear to be a short-term curiosity or an intellectual fad, is in fact an element of a long-term cultural process.

For posthumanism (as well as for the majority of postmodern trends) Nietzsche remains an important forerunner and inspiration, and his "Turin episode" (when the philosopher tossed his arms around a whipped horse, crying) became one of the *topoi*, perhaps even the founding myth, of this formation. But it was not until the 20th century that similar movements surged. Shortly after Nietzsche, already in the 1920s, José Ortega y Gasset declared dehumanization to be the dominant feature of the entire modernity which shunned the "all too human" everyday life and "melodramatic" emotions in favor of "unheard-of gestures" and "singular figures"<sup>2</sup>. On the other hand, the opponents of these new trends frequently made refer-

2 José Ortega y Gasset, "The Dehumanization of Art" in *Dehumanization of Art and Other Essays*, transl. Helene Weyl (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 22.



ence to humanism in a mode that grew increasingly discouraging with time, as is perfectly illustrated by the anti-modernist campaign led under the banners of the aesthetic of realism and Marxist humanism by György Lukács. His criticism of modernist literature (identified, among others, with the works of Franz Kafka) was in fact an overview of violations against the anthropocentric routine (amorphous intermixing of phenomena, excessive focus on objects, deliberate overlooking of the purposefulness of human actions), crowned with a thesis about the morbid anti-humanism of the avant-garde. What followed later seems to show convincingly that the programmatic reference to humanism met with a certain degree of resistance already in the ideological debate; it was even more unfortunate in the literary reflection, as it clearly favored the normative dogma and a disregard for experimentation.

The conviction that humanism has found itself in a crisis, a sense that its rhetoric has become ossified and its solutions insufficient, were clearly verbalized as a result of war trauma. Their classic examples can be found in the ambivalent prose of Thomas Mann, even if in the popular perception the writer was often presented as a "bard of humanist values" and Lukács saw in him a defender of classical realism. While *The Magic Mountain's* Settembrini, as a humanist figure, is still one of the heroes of ideological psychomachia, Zeitblom, his successor from the 1948 *Doctor Faustus*, becomes a naive mediator of the narrative and a victim of the author's ironies. His guileless storytelling, subject to the bourgeois norms of correctness, seems to be a testimony to the cognitive helplessness of a polite philologist faced with the turbulences of dark passions, historical cataclysms and the tragedy of lonely existence. However, as far as this point is concerned, the critique of the classical model reveals also a certain hesitance and an ambiguous relation to the questioned object, as it is hard to see in Leverkühn a positive alternative to the bourgeois conventionality of Zeitblom.

It was in the same period that similar concerns were expressed in the philosophical debate. As early as in 1946 Sartre still argued that *Existentialism is a Humanism*, attributing positive connotations to both notions but soon afterwards Heidegger opens a new conversation in the *Letter on Humanism*:

the highest determinations of the essence of the human being in humanism still do not realize the proper dignity of the human being. In this respect the thinking in *Being and Time* is against humanism. But the opposition does not mean that such thinking aligns itself against the humane and advocates the inhumane and deprecates the dignity of the human being. Humanism is opposed because it does not set the *humanitas* of the human being high enough<sup>3</sup>.

3 Martin Heidegger, "Letter on 'Humanism'" in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill, transl. Frank A. Capuzzi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 251.

And it is without doubt that *Being and Time* and not *Being and Nothingness* that remains the main point of reference for the majority of contemporary concepts (especially ones associated with posthumanism), from Giorgio Agamben's *The Open* to Peter Sloterdijk's *Rules for the Human Zoo*. While it is good to remember Adorno's sneers about Heidegger's "jargon of authenticity" in which he saw sinister glimpses of ideology, Adorno himself is hardly a defender of traditional humanism, especially since already in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* he considers the separation of the subject from the world to be the original sin of the Western civilization. As a condition necessary to avoid the catastrophe, he proposes (in a spirit similar to the main currents of posthumanism) that humanity "transcend[s] its own concept of the emphatically human, positively"<sup>4</sup>.

The pathos of old disputes may seem slightly exaggerated today but it is difficult to downplay the conviction itself, shared by such different authors, that already in their time humanism has lost the ability to explain existence and determine the order of values. The pertinence of diagnoses seem to have been confirmed indirectly by the effort made in the subsequent decades by the social sciences to dismantle structures, categories and beliefs associated with the anthropology of humanism. Colonial and gender studies, along with new historicism and cultural poetics, largely contributed to the questioning of the universalist claims of the Western model of "humanity". Critical sociology frequently showed that the skills promoted by the humanists may turn into mechanisms of distinction and perpetuate social injustice (despite a declarative recognition of egalitarian ideals). Postructuralism, allied with psychoanalysis, brought a criticism of rationality, uniformity and self-transparency of the subject, significantly weakening the cognitive optimism of the humanities. A culmination of those critiques may be found in the Foucauldian "death of the subject," directed against taking the figure of an abstract, universal subject as the main principle of our thinking.

Although the crisis of the classical vision of man is an important context for the discussed changes, it would be unjust to view their field in terms of rubble remaining after the demolition of humanism. Indeed, as a separate formation, posthumanism attempts to create new strategies and descriptive categories allowing it to reach "where lions live" (*ubi leones*), in other words, the non-representable areas of the non-human. What seems notable about such pursuits is their performative reformulation of the issue of subjectivity (that heretofore used to occupy the center of the humanities) or even need to replace it with a reflection on "agency" which does not impose binding references to intention, awareness, function, sense or purpose. This shift in emphasis results in a broad definition of potential "agents" and paves the way for the reflection on the actions of marginalized minorities, handicapped sub-

---

4 Theodor Adorno, "Messages in a Bottle" in *Mapping Ideology*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (London and New York: Verso, 2012), 37.

jects, or even “non-human actors” – animals, artifacts, material traces, anonymous mechanisms. Sometimes, in fact, it questions the very possibility of distinguishing the human being from the abundance of other phenomena.

Numerous similar formulations are related directly to the postulates and values associated with environmentalism and it is sometimes difficult to avoid an impression that, despite postulated reservations, some of them slip into a naive Rousseauism, sprinkled with political moralizing and spiritual New Ageist monism (facilitated by the proclamatory mode of the contemporary practice within the humanities). Rarely does one hear concern about the strangeness of that which may be encountered during the expeditions into the areas of non-human existence. For the sake of counterbalance, then, it may be worth to recall one of Werner Herzog’s works: in the famous *Grizzly Man* the director attempts to present the story of Timothy Treadwell who took the notion of a lack of boundaries between the animal and human worlds very literally and consequently his romantic adventure with nature ended with him being torn apart by bears. Herzog provides an authorial commentary for this sequence of tragic events, revealing not so much natural harmony but rather the merciless cruelty of nature: “what haunts me is that in all the faces of all the bears that Treadwell ever filmed, I discover no friendship, no understanding, no mercy. I see only the overwhelming indifference of nature. To me, there is no such thing as a secret world of the bears. And this blank stare speaks only of a half-bored interest in food”.

I do not mean to use a drastic *exemplum* to undermine the validity of the discussed approaches, instead, I am trying to point out the fundamental ambiguity, the eternal problematics of the relationships between species. It seems that a radical discourse of renouncement (i.e. one that ignores the diversity of positions and suggests an already defined outcome as if the overcoming of traditional thinking was a *fait accompli* and not a proposal) tends to lean toward naive answers and is often susceptible to expedient appropriations. It reminds me of the recent excessively enthusiastic respect for the Other which through a one-sided celebration of radical difference reduced it to the role of a conceptual fetish or ethical bogymen. Similarly, a complete openness and simplistic affirmation of the non-human carries the risk of its inaccessibility being replaced by sentimental clichés.

Most of the works included in this volume present a different approach, closer to the cautiously critical position. Its specificity can be summarized in three points. First, the collected texts avoid the easy demonization of traditional orders and locate the presumed or postulated turn toward posthumanism within a dynamic of historical and civilizational transformations which change the sensibilities of the participants of culture. Second, the authors in general do not deny the existence of generic divisions nor try to nullify them with some radical gestures but rather problematize their attributed status, for instance through a historical analysis of the creation of differences. Finally, crossing the borders of anthropocentrism is viewed

with approval but without excessive optimism, in other words, as a normative postulate (perhaps an inevitably utopian one) or a risky challenge, tempting with the potential to reshape the existing forms of representation.

What seems particularly interesting is the question of how the attempts to touch the non-human translate to specific textual solutions, especially in the creative arts. So far the matter remains poorly diagnosed but it appears noteworthy insofar as one could imagine here a considerable diversity of auctorial poetics and strategies. Since discussions of this kind can be found in the following volume, I will mention briefly only one example, removed slightly from the mainstream of current research, namely the somewhat forgotten Alain Robbe-Grillet, a representative of the French *nouveau roman* who in the late 1950s criticized the traditional narrative (mainly in his programmatic "Nature, Humanism and Tragedy"). Robbe-Grillet attacked mainly the anthropomorphic metaphors dominant in the literary imagination which tell us, he says, to treat nature as a kind of counterpart of human experience leading to an inevitable rupture in the face of the silence of objects. To Robbe-Grillet, looking for sense in the non-human world, cultivated within the humanities, remains a superstition rooted in the mythology of "deeper meaning" and leading to the misery, or the tragic alienation of human existence. If literature is to liberate man, it should denounce the "lie of humanism" and follow science in its utilitarian approach to nature, giving up on the fantasy of a kinship of beings. A possible cure for metaphysical anxieties could be found via representations of the non-human world performed without an anthropocentric mediation, which in Robbe-Grillet's program leads to the postulate of formalization, or even geometrization, of description. Dispassionate measurements of proportions, determining distances, cataloging shapes, comparing cones and polyhedra were to allow for a representation of the world of objects which, freed of the burden of symbolic meanings, could then refer only to themselves.

Later reception was generally rather skeptical about the success of this project and it would be difficult to find authors arguing that narrative experiments managed to liberate man from the tragedy of existence and the existential rupture. It is also doubtful whether the scientific approach indeed should be viewed as free of anthropocentric limitations. Today in particular, with the rising wave of suspicion against the scientific ideology, scientific discourse is frequently seen as a cultural construct used to perpetuate human dominion over the world. Also the poetics of Robbe-Grillet's own novels move away from his program enkindling further doubts about the potential effectiveness of his proposals. Critics often point to their involuntary metaphorical potential and see in the supposedly neutral and dry reconstructions images of human alienation, loneliness and objectification.

Further doubts can be addressed but they have little impact on the assessment of the writer himself – indeed, unrealistic expectations tend to accompany the majority of artistic endeavors and there is nothing exceptional about the discrepancies between the artist's postulated program and practice, especially in the case of

avant-garde artists. But the internal tensions and contradictions of Robbe-Grillet's project, his struggle with the conventions and tradition as well as the intricacy of his argument exemplify the problematics of the attempts to venture beyond the anthropocentric perspective. One can clearly see that criticism of the symbolic order often results in its reshaping while an austere description that at some point in time becomes a phenomenology of actuality and a touch of the thing itself, a moment later may reveal itself as an intertextual shift and another convention. This does not detract in the least from the purposefulness of the explorations that distort customary formulas but is rather to remind that the question of our relation to the non-human remains unanswered.

*Translation: Anna Warso*



---

Michał Paweł Markowski

---

## Humanities: an Unfinished Project

---

DOI: 10.18318/td.2015.en.1.2

**M**y good high school friend decided to be a doctor rather early, already in elementary school. When we would meet at the university, which was not happening all that often, he liked to compare our professions (even though we were just beginning to practice them), wondering loudly why anyone would choose something as trifling as literature if one could do something useful, for instance, treat people. Such reasoning seemed cheap to me back then (my decisions are better by virtue of being mine), logically feeble (and what if everyone became a doctor?) and unjust (does this mean that what I like to do in my life is pointless?) but today I see that the argument about the usefulness of applied sciences and the uselessness of the humanities goes beyond theoretical deliberations, and is more than a question of idiosyncratic choices, touching instead upon crucial public issues, as I presume.

The heat of the debate on several issues concerning the humanities (whether they should be financially supported or left to die out<sup>1</sup>, whether they should broaden

---

**Michał Paweł Markowski** – professor, holder of the Hejna Chair in Polish Language and Literature at the University of Illinois in Chicago; artistic director of the International Joseph Conrad Literary Festival in Cracow. Author of numerous books devoted to the relations between philosophy and literature; translator and editor of the *Works of Roland Barthes* (1999–2001). He recently published a book entitled *Polityka wrażliwości. Wprowadzenie do humanistyki* (2013). Contact: markowski@uic.edu

---

1 Sadly, this debate is not as fervent in Poland as it is in the U.S. where it takes many forms. Recent books by Nussbaum, Menand, Taylor, Fish (referenced further in this text) concern the university but their reflection focuses on the humanities.

their scope or narrow it down, whether they have applications in real life or not) shows that the crux of the problem lies not in the difference between natural sciences and the humanities (establishing it is the favorite pursuit of taxonomic minds) or their true nature (the pastime of theoreticians who perused dictionaries when they grew up) but in the question whether they have a social goal to achieve today, or not. In other words, the question is if and where one can find for them an external justification. As Louis Menand rightly observes in his recent book, *The Marketplace of Ideas*<sup>2</sup> the problem emerged more or less two decades ago when the humanities were affected by the “crisis of institutional legitimation”<sup>3</sup> – or, to put it in simpler terms, when those outside the universities began to wonder what it is that the scholars in humanities actually do and whether their work has any social justification, and whether it is possible that the university professors, above all those who have a steady job, lead comfortable lives – especially in the West – cultivating a profession, or rather a hobby, useless to everyone except them.

The most common view (once formulated clumsily but hurtfully by my friend, a student of medicine) assumes that the humanities have no justification at all as they do not create anything, do not produce any goods, and as such should not be supported by the state (the representative of the tax payers) or private sponsors, who should rather spend their money on the development of sciences useful to everyone: medical sciences that may produce a cure to terminal diseases or a pill for longevity, engineering sciences whose inventions will enable us to lead comfortable lives, economic sciences whose theories will contribute to a better distribution of the acquired wealth so that the rich are not getting poorer and that the poor are getting richer, and all other sciences that will make human life more efficient. From this point of view the humanities do not improve anything, but – on the contrary – make thinking about a better life much harder, weakening the common sense that knows how things should look and be. Studies of the Italian sonnet find no application outside of Italian studies, scholarship on Polish Enlightenment novel are of interest to maybe a dozen people in the world (speaking optimistically), and arguments on the logical status of fictional sentences take place in low-circulation journals of logic. There is no chance for the humanities to have the kind of clout that the biological, technological, or computer sciences do, and so a serious question arises whether the humanities can be justified in any way, or perhaps: can the humanities find any justification

2 Louis Menand, *The Marketplace of Ideas. Reform and Resistance in the American University* (New York: Norton, 2010).

3 Menand, *The Marketplace of Ideas*, 61.



outside the university walls, or even inside them, in the eyes of increasingly mercantile administrators deciding about university budgets. It is not the question about what the humanities really are but whether they still have any mission to fulfill.

The debate on the issue is, as we all know, heated and has been going on for a long time. From several important voices I have selected four that I find most distinctive, in order to formulate, among this polyphony, my own proposals.

### Compensation

I will begin with the oldest among the views of interest to me, formulated by Odo Marquard in 1985. In the speech entitled “On the Unavoidability of the Human Sciences”<sup>4</sup> he posits that the more modern the modern world becomes, the more unavoidable the humanities become. Why? Because modernization of the world – here Marquard clearly supports Max Weber’s thesis about the disenchantment of the modern world – means, among others, that the humanities become increasingly unnecessary as a result of the expansion of natural sciences. The experiment supersedes the narrative, Marquard says, which results in life that is impoverished, more technical and shallow, less connected to the individual experience. This is why human sciences, pushed back to the margin, should fulfill a compensatory function toward the neutralization of our historical (that is – also individual) experience resulting from the expansion of the experimental sciences and the homogenization and globalization of this experience that blur its unique character. According to Marquard, we are human more as a consequence of tradition and history, that we belong to, than of modernization that is supposed to liberate us from this particularism. In other words, our particularity means that our life is woven out of individual, idiosyncratic convictions, strongly rooted in the historical experience whose uniqueness is viewed by natural sciences, keeping pace with modernization, as a complication in the scientific conquest of reality. But, as Marquard rightly stresses, human sciences are not opposed to modernization as such. If they are to compensate for that which is degraded as a consequence of the ascendancy of the scientific worldview, they also enable further modernization. To make this possible, the humanities must again make closer to man that which has become removed from him. Reclaim what has been alienated. This should be made possible through the art of interpretation, in other words, hermeneutics, seen not as a theory of understanding, as Dilthey would have it, but as the art of telling stories.

---

4 Odo Marquard, “On the Unavoidability of the Human Sciences”, in *In Defense of the Accidental: Philosophical Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

For human beings *are* their stories. But stories have to be told. This is what the human sciences do: they compensate for the damage done by modernization by telling stories. And the more things are objectified, the more, in compensation, stories have to be told. Otherwise humans die of narrative atrophy<sup>5</sup>.

This leads Marquard to the following conclusions. Atrophy of narration results in the liquidation of diverse points of view and raises one of them, the narration of the unbound progress of the human kind, above all others. By eliminating all opposing stories, opposing points of view, it also causes ambiguity to become the basis for the interpretation of reality. Marquard views the birth of the humanities as a reaction to the traumatic experience of religious wars always sparked by the argument over the interpretations of the Holy Scripture. The humanities, by introducing to our historical experience the category of ambiguity (or: by showing that our historical experience cannot be unambiguous especially if it is historical), soothe the trauma of the early modernity that leads to never-ending arguments over what reality really means. If being human entails being interwoven into many different stories whose meaning can be read in several different ways, then, Marquard says, the mission of the humanities is to multiply the stories about human experience and to interpret them in various ways.

### Democracy

In *Not for Profit. Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*<sup>6</sup>, Martha C. Nussbaum argues that contemporary democracy needs citizens equipped with three basic traits: “the ability to think critically”, “the ability to transcend local loyalties and to approach world problems as a «citizen of the world»” and “the ability to imagine sympathetically the predicament of another person”<sup>7</sup>. These three basic abilities, necessary for the success of contemporary and future democracy, must be taught by the modern university, mainly at arts and humanities departments. When she speaks of “searching critical thought, daring imagination, empathetic understanding of human experiences of many different kinds, and understanding of the complexity of the world

5 Marquard, “On the Unavoidability”, 98.

6 Martha C. Nussbaum, *Not for Profit. Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

7 Nussbaum, *Not for Profit*, 7.

we live in”<sup>8</sup> Nussbaum mentions “the spirit of humanities”. If democracy, she argues, demanded such traits since the day of Socrates (although, naturally, it did not necessarily realize them) and those traits constitute the teaching basis in the humanities, then clearly human studies have a strictly political dimension and all politicians who fail to see their significance in the lives of democratic societies are shortsighted (or suicidal). Nussbaum essentially repeats Marquard’s argumentation, except that instead of modernization she speaks of the neoliberalization of contemporary society concentrated only on increasing the GDP (of course, it is easy to prove that the neoliberal narrative is one of the most important modern narrations). She asks: “What will we have, if these trends continue? Nations of technically trained people who do not know how to criticize authority, useful profit-makers with obtuse imaginations”<sup>9</sup>. Human sciences should prepare the coming generations to think about themselves and about the others (empathy), about what is and what could be (imagination) as well as about how it is (common sense) and how it could be (criticism). In this sense, they should also compensate for the damages caused by the greedy capitalism.

### Stimulation

If Nussbaum believes that philosophy should precede democracy, Richard Rorty believes the exact opposite. His thesis about the priority of democracy over philosophy<sup>10</sup> leads to another one: about the superiority of solidarity over objectivity. In *Solidarity or Objectivity?* published first in 1985, Rorty outlines the following alternative: “There are two principal ways in which reflective human beings try, by placing their lives in a larger context, to give sense to those lives”<sup>11</sup>. The first one is by telling stories about the ways people relate to the community they belong to – this community may be actual (family, culture, society etc.), actual but distant in time (tradition), or just imagined (literary characters, cultural symbols etc.) The second way is about describing oneself in relation to nonhuman reality. Nonhuman reality is a kind of “reality” unmediated by human perception or a reference to what other people said about it. Rorty calls the first way “a desire for solidarity” (the basis for democracy) and the second one – “a desire for objectivity” (the basis for philosophy).

8 Ibid., 7.

9 Ibid., 142.

10 Richard Rorty, “The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy”, in *Philosophical Papers*, Vol. 1 *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 175–196.

11 Richard Rorty, “Solidarity or Objectivity”, in *Philosophical Papers*, Vol. 1. 21–34. 21.

The desire for objectivity makes the subject continuously move beyond his or her own historical entanglements while the desire for solidarity – on the contrary – strengthens the sense of belonging to a historical or only imagined though well-established (in his or her opinion) community.

Rorty complements this useful dichotomy with another, equally important one. He opens *Philosophy as a Kind of Writing*, one of his most famous essays, by contrasting two different ways of talking about physics, morality and philosophy. One of them assumes that we want to know “what things really are”, to reach for a hidden content covered by numerous prejudices and convictions. Rorty calls this approach “vertical” and sums it up as a “relationship between representations and what is represented”<sup>12</sup>. The second approach has a much humbler goal: it wants to understand how people have so far subordinated the world using various tools in order to – perhaps – draw a lesson from this. This approach is called “horizontal” and it is a way of re-interpreting the already existing interpretations. There are different preliminary assumptions behind these two ways. The first one – vertical, metaphysical, realistic – assumes the existence beyond the network of changing appearances that we ourselves produce of an independent being that we should strive for, that we should recognize and whose parameters we should relate. The second – horizontal, historical, nominalist – does not care about that which exists beyond our empirical life, in other words, beyond language.

Bearing all that in mind, we can now move on to the humanities. These would be located, of course, on the horizontal, nominalist, democratic, historical and communal side, against all philosophical longings for the truth about what the world would look like if we went beyond confusing, individual points of view. Due to this fact Rorty presents an interesting vision of the humanistic intellectual in a short but substantial essay from 1989, entitled *The Humanistic Intellectual. Eleven Theses*. He believes we should not focus so much on the common features of various departments within the humanities but rather on the difference between the humanities and the natural or social sciences. We should not (by induction) search for the essence of the humanities, since the true line of division runs across the “disciplinary matrices” which “divides people busy conforming to well-understood criteria for making contributions to knowledge from people trying to expand their own moral imaginations”<sup>13</sup>. The same line divides the expert or the specialist

12 Richard Rorty, “Philosophy as a Kind of Writing. An Essay on Derrida”, in *Consequences of Pragmatism. Essays 1972-1980* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press: 1982), 90-109, 92.

13 Richard Rorty, “The Humanistic Intellectual. Eleven Theses”, in *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Penguin Books, 1999). 127-130, 127.

focused on meticulously following the scientific protocol, convinced that only methodical activity may lead to establishing an objective truth, from the intellectual who does not believe in the objective, ahistorical root of the truth. An intellectual is defined here not as someone who takes part in the public debate presenting definite truths but as someone who reads various books not to be restricted to a single, reduced and inept jargon. An intellectual is opposed to the idea of expertise if the latter is to be understood as the use of language worked out by a particular discipline. An intellectual is not a specialist (and a specialist is not an intellectual), as the dream of a closed dictionary that motivates the actions of the specialist is in direct opposition to the intellectual's dream of endless broadening of the boundaries of one's existence with the help of new languages. Someone who dreams of reading all books from one discipline inhabits a different world from someone who dreams of reading as many various books as possible. The first one wants to close the circle of knowledge and seal it, the other – to open and poke holes in it. The specialist believes that all books in his or her discipline create a set that faithfully represents reality as their idea of their discipline (as well as the idea of any other specialist) is built upon the notion of adequacy. The intellectual supports no other discipline than the discipline of thinking in specific, highly concretized circumstances of life. The main goal and desire of the intellectual is to deregulate the dictionary of his or her own discipline and at the same time (this equation is important here) to broaden the limits of his or her own existence by other possibilities of being.

Do the human studies have a mission to fulfill? They do, Rorty says. It is not the transmission of knowledge (which would turn the intellectual into a specialist) but “stirring the kids up”<sup>14</sup> by “instilling doubt” and “stimulating imagination”<sup>15</sup>. Placing imagination over argumentation and intersubjective knowledge over objective truth allows Rorty to believe that the humanities are a community of people who believe that by reading various books we can “change the way we look at things”<sup>16</sup>. We read, Rorty says, not to broaden our knowledge (so that we now better “how things are”) but “in order to enlarge ourselves by enlarging our sensitivity and our imaginations”<sup>17</sup>.

14 Rorty, “The Humanistic”, 127.

15 Richard Rorty, “Education as Socialization and as Individualization”, in *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 114–126, 118.

16 Richard Rorty, “Worlds or Words Apart? The Consequences of Pragmatism for Literary Studies. Interview by E. Ragg”, in *Take Care of Freedom and Truth Will Take Care of Itself. Interviews with Richard Rorty*, ed. E. Mendieta (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 120–147, 122.

17 Rorty, “Worlds or Words Apart?”, 124.

### Autonomous Good

Although Stanley Fish refers to himself as a pragmatist, his views on the humanities differ radically from Rorty's. I will discuss them referring to Fish's *Will the Humanities Save Us?*, two texts published in The Opinion Pages of *The New York Times*.<sup>18</sup> Fish concentrates predominantly on the question of finding an external justification for humanities.

It is quite obvious what justification one cannot rely on. It cannot be argued that arts and humanities can survive on their own basing only on grants and private donations. It cannot be argued that the state's economy will gain anything from a new reading of *Hamlet*. It cannot be argued – well, it can, but with poor results – that a graduate who is well-versed in the history of Byzantine art will attract potential employers (unless the employer happens to be a museum).

Fish goes on to argue against the theses presented in Anthony Kronman's *Education's Eden. Why Our Colleges and Universities Have Given Up on the Meaning of Life*, where the author discusses the key role of the humanities in overcoming the “crisis of the spirit” brought about – an echo of Marquard – by the expansion of the scientific world view and – an echo of Nussbaum – by careerism. We must, Kronman says, turn to the humanities to “meet the need for meaning in an age of vast but pointless powers”. The task of the humanities is to reveal sense in a world that is devoid of it, create enclaves of sense in the wasteland. Fish completely rejects such reasoning, which means that he also disagrees with Marquard and Nussbaum, even with Rorty. Are human sciences ennobling? If reading literature was an ennobling act, the noblest individuals could be found in the corridors of literary departments, which – obviously – is quite unlikely. Do the humanities save us from the sense of meaninglessness?

The texts Kronman recommends [classical texts of Western civilization] are, as he says, concerned with the meaning of life; those who study them, however, come away not with a life newly made meaningful, but with a disciplinary knowledge newly enlarged.

This is Fish in a nutshell. The humanities do not make life better, do not compensate for anything, do not have any moral nor political mission to fulfill<sup>19</sup>. What do they do then?

18 Stanley Fish, “Will the Humanities Save Us?”, *New York Times* 6 January 2008, [http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/01/06/will-the-humanities-save-us/?\\_r=0](http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/01/06/will-the-humanities-save-us/?_r=0)

19 He presents the same view in *Save the World on Your Own Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

They don't do anything, if by "do" is meant bringing about effects in the world. And if they do not bring about effects in the world, they cannot be justified except in relation to the pleasure they give to those who enjoy them.

Fish is very clear. Asked "of what use are the humanities?" he answers: none whatsoever. This is because the humanities are their own good, autonomous and unrelated to any external purpose.

This, of course, had to provoke a heated debate. There are 485 commentaries under Fish's entry, both harshly critical, accusing the author of a lack of faith (in the humanities), and eagerly agreeing with him. Since his opponents were in the majority, the author decided to restate his controversial view in more precise terms (controversial at least in the eyes of the NYT readers)<sup>20</sup>. Firstly, he says, the issue is not whether literature and art can change someone's life but whether university courses on literature and art can do it. If – Fish continues – they cannot (as the only thing that the students should learn is the technique of reading and writing about what they had read), then looking for a justification for the humanities outside the classroom is pointless.

All of this should not be taken to mean, as it was by some, that I am attacking the humanities or denigrating them or declaring them worthless. I am saying that the value of the humanities cannot be validated by some measure external to the obsessions that lead some (like me) to devote their working lives to them – measures like increased economic productivity or the fashioning of an informed citizen, or the sharpening of moral perceptions, or the lessening of prejudice and discrimination.

What is the use of the humanities according to Fish? There are two: studying literature and art allows for "moments of aesthetic wonder", and also gives hope that there are people in the world, maybe not far away, who can talk about something other than football at dinner.

This both is and is not a joke. The humanities, according to Fish, are a certain interpretative community that communicates using the same language, shares the same convictions about literature and art, and can express them using a similar idiom, but do not relate anything that literature and art have to offer, to the world directed by any kind of purposefulness. This community is based on the Kantian division of the faculties of judgment and defines the exceptionality of the humanities by appealing to the disinterested judgment

20 Stanley Fish "The Uses of Humanities: Part Two" 13. 01.2008, <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/01/13/the-uses-of-the-humanities-part-two/>

of taste that – in Kant – excludes the application of moral categories relating to the practical reality. Fish seems to combine two Kantian faculties of the mind – speculative reason and aesthetic taste – with one goal, excluding morality: the humanities are to provide us with tools that will enable us to discuss things that are important to us and to those who are similar to us. Although Fish does not say this openly, he would probably say that the humanities need to be supported “because they simply do” as they are “their own good”. Needless to say, this argument is rarely used in the ongoing debate on the state of contemporary humanities, particularly by those who paid for their education.

### Legitimization

I agree with Nussbaum and Rorty (and I disagree with Fish): the humanities have a political significance. Not in the narrow sense but in the broadest one possible. The effects of studying the humanities are of consequence to the community where the studies are undertaken, regardless of the opinion of rectors, directors and ministers from various universities, departments of education, ministries, parties and cabinets. The problem lies in the difficulty of revealing the interdependency of the humanities and politics, and then justifying this connection. On the other hand, however, I also agree with Fish who leads a very intensive media campaign against turning university classrooms into cells of political propaganda. I will return to this point later on, after I attempt to explain how I understand the relationship of politics and the humanities.

As we all know, in the neoliberal society focused on maximizing profit, the university is a gain-producing factory. Money is invested mostly in scientific disciplines – abbreviated to bio-techno-info – that promise a quick return of the investment with a high rate of profit. On the “market of ideas”, as the field of university education has come to be described, those ideas win whose market application brings highest profits and that are easiest to program and control; among the losing ideas are the one whose chances to be “implemented” (a term also used in the social realism of the 70s), in other words, applied in various branches of economy, cannot be justified by anyone. The crisis of the humanities, resulting mostly from the state or private institutions cutting the expenses for their development, is in fact a crisis of legitimization, that is, the ability to convince the majority (the society and the politicians that represent it) by the minority (the academia within the humanities)<sup>21</sup>.

21 I would like to emphasize this point strongly: the crisis of legitimization is not a real event but a rhetorical or discursive one. The issue boils down not to how things are now but how they could change if the methods of argumentation changed. In fact, this is the crux of the mat-



In a neoliberal society, whether Polish or American, it is impossible to find a justification for anything that does not increase profits, and consequently it is impossible to justify the necessity for the protection of the humanities by assigning to them the status of a disinterested search for truth as it is most commonly done. It is impossible because their disinterestedness is a category rejected by the neoliberal society: what does not serve the social interest – in other words – does not increase profit (because that is how social interest is defined), will not find support in such a society. One cannot convince anyone to anything if the two sides use different languages. An agreement simply cannot be reached here, which can be clearly seen from the hopeless ruffling of feathers in the humanities, their representatives surprised that no one wants to finance their research on the medieval syntax of lost texts or the 18th century ode or elegy or what not. Neoliberal society has no wish to spend public money on useless things and it is right, except its being right (in accordance with the rules of neoliberal economy) opposes the argument of the humanities, based on entirely different principles that here – by definition – are on a losing position.

What solutions do we have then? There are a few. The first – lofty – one comes from the rather popular belief that one does not enter a debate with fools and the representatives of humanities should not soil their hands in the public space taken over by politics. The second, more pragmatic although also a pessimistic one, assumes that the war of the humanities and the market is inevitable and already lost by the first, and so we should be glad about having what we do, be thrifty with the scraps from the master's table and simply somehow try save ourselves in the hard times that have come. The third, utopian one, hopes that a wise statesman (Barack Obama, Donald Tusk) will step up as a generous donor whose intelligence and sensitivity will allow them to see the trouble of the humanities and who will let their representatives nurture, for good money, their incomprehensible and rather amusing – at least for everyone else – activities. All three solutions are based on the same premise: the world of politics contradicts the world of the academia. Or, more precisely, that the public space and the

---

ter: the crisis of the humanities is a crisis of the means of their justification, in other words, of the institutional word game. Let us change the game and the reality will change. I have devoted to this matter my new book, *Polityka wrażliwości. Wprowadzenie do humanistyki* [The Politics of Sensitivity. Introduction to Humanities], to be published as volume no. 100 of the *Horyzonty nowoczesności* [Horizons of modernity] series. I propose there my own vision of the humanities, but I am also fully aware of the insufficiency of this project for as long as it is not supported by other ones bearing similar message. We must enforce a new language of debate about the humanities, different from the language of confrontation with the natural sciences whose domination has put the humanities in insurmountable trouble.

academic space are inevitably divergent and there is no chance for a common ground. This belief becomes very clear when the generous donor (Obama, Tusk) reveals himself to be a simple entrepreneur looking after the interests of the rich or when the minimal external support becomes even more minimal.

### **Politicization Good and Bad**

The situation seems to be completely different when we remove the demarcation line dividing the public and the academic space, politics and the humanities, which is a difficult gesture, especially as the representatives of the humanities themselves are not interested in making it. However, when the boundaries are suspended and the academia begins to use the language of politics, the situation, paradoxically, does not change at all. Politicization of the academy assumes adopting the language of politics within its realm, in other words, adopting the rule of political interestedness normally applied outside. A head of the university who uses the language of neoliberal economy to justify budget cuts (i.e. supporting exact sciences at the cost of the humanities) and a professor who sees in the criticism of his feeble academic achievement an attack on their race or gender identity and demands a condemnation of the racist or sexist critics of his work, both use the same biased, political blackmail: a language that brings immediate advantage and at the same time excludes any discussion. The university head gets an alibi to assign resources in a way that brings profit, the professor keeps a prestigious position protected by the gender or race immunity that no one dares to touch not to be accused of discrimination. Politicization of the academy may – speaking emphatically – put a muzzle on it, or – speaking more euphemistically – restrict the freedom of academic debate that I hold to be the most important element of university culture.

However, the politicization of the academy does not have to entail its becoming partial; the political does not have to be partisan. I assume everything that happens in the public space (*polis*) to be political, and I understand the public sphere not so much as a defined, physical space accessible to everyone (a classical definition of public space such as a city square or park) but as a set of languages (discourses) defining the existence of a certain community. Everything that takes place in the public sphere has a linguistic character (even images in this space have their syntax and semantics) for the existence of the individual within the community is linguistically determined. Each of us uses several languages: we speak differently at home, with our family, differently at work (naturally, sometimes these languages overlap, to the detriment of both), differently on television and at the university. In each of these micro

spaces the languages are subject to further differentiation: we use a different language talking to our grandmother, a different one when talking to the grandchild, different ones at a conference and in the seminar room. Different language is used when we talk to a colleague about the rector's recent decision, and a different one when asking the rector to finance our research project. The ability of social adaptation relies on the ability to assimilate a foreign language, even if it is a language of everyday clothing or table manners. As can be seen, I understand language in a very broad context, as a set of signs using a syntax readable to others. When Michael Pollan says that "eating is a political act," he means not only that what we eat and how we eat is a testimony to our cultural identity (culture is thoroughly political) but also that a change in the paradigm of nutrition (for instance, reflecting on the life conditions of the farm animals that we eat) contributes to a reshaping of the social imaginarium. Jacques Derrida says that we enter the political each time we open our mouths by which he means that each act of speech is a certain social promise related not so much to the content of the utterance but to the attitude of the speaker (I shall speak the truth, I shall not lie etc.; of course this promise is frequently subject to manipulation possible only because the promise is taken seriously<sup>22</sup>). The sphere of the political is not a struggle of opposing partisan interests (right versus left, republicans versus democrats, liberals versus conservatives) but first and foremost the sphere of the social imaginarium or conceptions of the world that we share or disagree about. These conceptions do not exist hidden in the depths of our minds but are formulated in various languages that we use to define our position in a narrower (family, work) or broader world (continent, world). The fate of more specialized languages, for instance theoretical idioms used for the development of science, is also political. There are no politically neutral languages in the sense that each language, from the one we use to communicate with a baby to the language of nuclear physics, has its social dimension (both of these languages have something in common: they are incomprehensible to outsiders) and each is a different way to tame the world, to tear away another of its shrouds of incomprehensibility. Each is based on different assumptions regarding the nature of the world, the language used to describe this world, and the person using it. Those assumptions resurface in the form of different, finite varieties upon which language users build freely and rather instinctively aggregations

22 The so-called "Sokal hoax" is the best example of such manipulation. It unfolded after Alan Sokal, a New York physicist, sent to the editors of *Social Text* a fake article entitled "Transgressing the Boundaries. Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity", compiled from mismatched pieces of various discourses. See: Editors of "Lingua Franca", *The Sokal Hoax. The Sham that Shook Academy* (Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska, 2000).

known as community<sup>23</sup>. The difference between a religious community (regardless of its detailed characteristics) and a scientific community is that their language cannot be reconciled (the instances of priests who are also astrophysicists are not a counter-argument: professor Heller uses a different language writing about the Quakers and a different one writing about quarks), similarly as in the case of broad philosophical language where one cannot reconcile the language of analytical and hermeneutic philosophy, and in the realm of culinary language – the language of Polish and Thai cuisine (i.e. the languages by which a Polish and a Thai cook explain the meaning of what they do.) Richard Rorty refers to the languages that we use to explain the world as vocabularies. Since the day Wittgenstein provided serious proof for the lack of existence of private vocabularies (languages), it has been clear that each vocabulary functioning in a given culture has a political meaning, that is, it binds the community together. Philatelists use a different language than the cardiologists but they find a common one when they change the community and together cheer for the same football team. Changes of the local dictionaries are frequent and mean only that our social identities vary and they are determined by various idioms that we adapt for our own use. In fact, no one speaks one language and this multilingualism describes every person who functions in the public sphere. Those who shun it, moving away from a conversation with others toward their own, narrow private space, risk entering a sphere of complete incomprehensibility.

There are, however, attempts to thwart this multilingualism, to prevent the multiplication of incompatible languages in order to prevent the Babelic cataclysm (which, in fact is not a cataclysm but a metaphor of our everyday condition). Their aim is to close the used vocabularies, to declare that they constitute a finite explanation of reality or that they reflect reality in the most adequate way. These attempts are rooted in the primeval dream to return to the time when things were equal to words, when words matched objects perfectly and there was no space of deflection between them. Of course this dream of a perfect language entwining reality inevitably denigrates itself as a language identical to reality stops being a language, that is a tool created by man in order to deal with it somehow. Language is undoubtedly one of the elements of reality but it is not reality in its entirety, neither are our emotions and thoughts. But when language users begin to exclude languages based on other premises, convinced that their own speaks the truth about reality, or

---

23 For me, personally, me, such a community, in other words, people that I would like to meet at a party, will consist rather of the enthusiasts of Monty Python than Alan Badiou, Seinfeld rather than Žižek, Larry David rather than Leo Strauss. To put it shortly, I prefer the community of comedians to the community of ontologists and political philosophers.

even that it is reality, the politicality of the language reveals itself very clearly. If someone believes that the Bible is a text providing answers to all possible questions, or proves that all metaphysical problems derive from a faulty use of language, or if someone says that Satan or America (or the Great American Satan) are responsible for all that is wrong with the world, they use a language excluding all others that describe the world differently or provide a different explanation. Curiously, in the last case one observes a surprising proximity of two languages one would never expect to be related: the language of radical evangelization and the language of radical left. Radical languages are not very different from one another.

### Theses, Hypotheses, Prostheses

Those simple explanations were meant to introduce a few similarly simple theses that form the basis for my *Polityka wrażliwości*, where I argue that the main task of the humanities is to reshape the social imagination, in other words, to influence what and how people think about the world. As it is a task normally ascribed to politics, I attempt to show that the task that the humanities set for themselves is thoroughly political. But it is not the goal of the humanities to convince people to this or other position, to this or other set of convictions. The humanities do not lean toward a particular element of the social imagination. They have an opposite task. The humanities show that there is no single vocabulary to explain the world, there is no single superior ideology (from the left or from the right side, or from the middle, or the polar ends) to rely on, there is no privileged set of symbolic representations more adequate than other sets. The humanities sensitize us to the fact that none of the popular vocabularies is finite and they can always be changed for other ones, more useful to our purposes, better reflecting not the reality (as no language reflects reality better than other ones) but our beliefs, our convictions, our dreams. I agree with Louis Menand who believes that “historical and theoretical knowledge, which is the kind of knowledge that liberal education disseminates”, (which also implies the humanities that lie at the core of liberal education,) reveals “the contingency and constructedness of present arrangements”<sup>24</sup>. The humanities make us aware of the relativity of what we do with the world and in this sense they are closest to ourselves, as fragile and accidental as the institutions we establish. It is also why they could take the place of basic sciences, as they take as their object not this or that (Romantic literature, cubist painting or the complement) but human existence in its diverse, more or less institutionalized manifestations. I say “could” as there is

24. Menand, *The Marketplace of Ideas*, 56.

no one extraordinary place from where one should speak with one language about the human existence, because human existence can only be discussed in various ways, using various languages, from various perspectives, within various disciplines. Consequently, the humanities that I am trying to envision here are neither a separate science, nor a separate discipline, not even a meta-discipline and foundation for every other discipline (although such dreams have been resurfacing since their emergence). The humanities are only a certain *critical disposition*, by which I understand what Aristotle referred to as *hexis*, and Bourdieu as *habitus*: an attitude of the individual toward the surrounding world<sup>25</sup>. It is a critical disposition since they put the established vocabularies used by particular disciplines in a state of crisis (i.e. potential transformation), or instill doubt in the purity of each particular vocabulary serving as a basis for the separateness of particular disciplines<sup>26</sup>. The humanities are not an umbrella term for various disciplines (literary studies, philosophy, art history etc.) but their academic framework. This framework may be treated provisionally, as a certain taxonomic practice allowing for an easy structural division of a given institution (human sciences here, natural sciences there, social sciences elsewhere; of course this classical division has long been quite archaic, but that is a different story) but we can also approach the humanities as an unfinished project whose existence is necessary for us to be aware of what we do. Not only in the academia but in every sphere of public life.

*Translation: Anna Warso*

---

25 See: Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); *The Rules of Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press: 1996); *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979).

26 Naturally, what opens here is the vast issue of interdisciplinarity. I am a strong opponent of the interdisciplinary confusion that does more harm than good but I cannot discuss it here in more detail. I have presented my views on the matter, among others, at the conference organized by the Center for Advanced Studies in the Humanities in Cracow: Interzones (June 2010).

---

Ryszard Nycz

---

## **Towards Innovative Humanities: The Text as a Laboratory. Traditions, Hypotheses, Ideas**

---

DOI: 10.18318/td.2015.en.1.3

### **Preliminary Remarks**

I am formulating these remarks convinced about the need for the development of an operative theory of the text in the humanities, one grounded in my experience in Polish Studies (i.e. the study of Polish literature and discourse of the local cultural environment) but inspired by the international state of research and leading to more universal consequences, related to the place and role of the humanistic text as well as the need for the new theoretical conceptualization. The latter is meant to, among others, produce a tool enabling a transfer (and the necessary remaking) of the indigenous goals and challenges of humanistic studies to the environment of contemporary scholarship and cyberculture.

Such an approach to these central issues may seem an anachronistic attempt to go back to the so-called textual turn in the humanities, especially today, when linguistic-autonomist methodological assumptions are abandoned in search of tools that can provide access to the possibly direct, empirical, as well as cognitive and practical dimension of the object of the human studies. I do not believe, however, that such a goal may be achieved without a critical analysis of the text's status in the humanities so far, nor without a consideration of the possibility of its

---

**Ryszard Nycz** – professor, director of the Department of Anthropology of Literature and Cultural Studies at the Jagiellonian University, an employee of IBL PAN. Editor-in-chief of *Teksty Drugie*. Corresponding member of the PAN and PAU, KNoL PAN and KNoK PAN. President of the Editorial Committee of the series "Nowa Humanistyka". His recently published work is *Poetyka doświadczenia. Teoria – nowoczesność – literatura* (2012). Contact: ryszard.nycz@uj.edu.pl

reworking. I also do not believe that it is possible, or worthwhile, to reject the “texto-centric” specificity of not only literary or linguistic research but also of the humanities as a whole (although in the case of the latter, to a varying degree).

Incidentally, we are currently witnessing not a decrease but a profusion of textual practices, new genres, styles and textual conventions, as well as techniques of their analysis and processing – in the private and public spaces, old and (particularly) new media. This does not mean, naturally, that texts have remained the key object of research; in contemporary visual culture or in cyberculture they function as equal to research objects of different types, or are part of hybrid multimedia constructs (alongside pictures, photographs, films, animations, artwork etc.) In each of these cases, however, texts remain inherent components of the contemporary cultural reality, and the method of “reading culture” modeled upon them has retained the status of a cognitively privileged tool of analysis and interpretation.

The crux of the problem lies, I think, in the fact that the text (and, through a metonymical relation, text-oriented program of research) is viewed today as both the source of marginalization of the humanities (in the eyes of its critics) and as the refuge for their non-obsolete value (in the eyes of the majority of its defenders). At the same time, in both cases we are dealing with a very particular, modern concept of text as an autonomous, finite product of sense-making human activity – one of many possible concepts, and an insufficiently supported one.

As we know, the contemporary debate on scholarship and academic policy conducted from the perspective of the so-called “techno-university” (the current model of research and education, see: Bińczyk) lead to the growing marginalization of the humanities deemed as a knowledge only somewhat (or even completely un-) usable since they result neither in innovation nor in real influence (effecting change) in the cognitive, social, political or cultural sphere. Such a critical evaluation is usually based on the premise that research in the humanities focuses solely on the text understood in the traditional manner as something objective and autonomous (in relation to the social and “practical” realities). One must, I believe, agree with the formal categorization of the specificity of research in the humanities (but not with its content and assessment). The text, in its broad cultural sense and myriad shapes and functions, indeed continues to remain the common object, center and research result of the disciplines within the human studies.

I propose to acknowledge the text (textuality, discursiveness) as the shared foundation and object of the humanities. I also believe that its understanding must be modified. A humanistic text is not only a standard object and should not be treated as such; it should not be treated as a neutral vehicle for finite



results of cognitive and creative work carried out elsewhere and at a different time; a re-presentation of something preexistent and independent. The text is also a process, accumulating within itself (and regulated by professional procedures), of creation, cognition, investigation, including also the technical-disciplinary, cultural and experience-based environment activated as a result of the process that, and following Latour, is “the functional equivalent of a laboratory. It is a place for trials, experiments and simulations”. Only when those three dimensions are considered together, we may learn, as I think, the nature of our “discursive” object.

A preliminary outline of an operational theory of the humanistic text which is proposed here is neither aimed to fortify the barricades surrounding the humanities’ traditional “autotelic” model of research and education, nor to subordinate itself to the criteria of strict sciences (for instance, by attempting to show that it respects their standards). Instead, it is meant as a positive response to a contemporary problem and an attempt to provide a remedy for the crisis of the disciplinary identity – leading to a rethinking and remaking of the identity of the humanities as a result of their critical confrontation as much with their own tradition as with the criteria, standards, tasks and goals of contemporary scholarship. Taking into account this strategic goal, I will be consciously using the following terms: “innovation” – used to denote “science” in the jargon of the education administrators; “humanities” (including also Polish Studies) – with a modified formula of disciplinary identity; finally, the metaphorical description of “text as a laboratory” borrowed from Bruno Latour as a figurative premise of the following argumentation.

### **Three Models of Academic Research and Education, Their Defenders and Dysfunctions**

The reflection on the history of the humanities and the ideas associated with their practice within the institution of university in the West which was recently expressed to such a fervent extent (see: Bloom, Culler, Gumbrecht, LaCapra, Nussbaum, Readings, Said; also in Poland: Domańska, Koziński, Markowski, Rewers, Sławek, Zeidler-Janiszewska and Czerepaniak-Walczak), enables us to identify and present, in a necessarily simplified manner, three basic models of academic research and education, each exhibiting a decidedly different focus with regard to their underlying assumptions, goals and the means to achieve them.

The first model may be labeled *formative*. It centers primarily on the *subject* – not only its education but also formation (and it dates from the antiquity until the beginning of the 20th century). This was the goal of the ancient *studia liberalia* and the modern *studia humanitatis*, of the Kantian

“university of reason”, that assumed the formation of the individual based on the Enlightenment model of universal humanity, and later of the Humboldtian “university of culture”, aiming to educate the citizens not only into learned people but also ones imbued with the spirit of national culture. In this model, high standards of “personal” culture were the goal (or “attribute”, to use S. Pietraszka’s term) of university education and they manifested themselves via the reproduction of the man of culture (the nation’s elite). This formative model, aimed to shape the subject, became gradually replaced from end of the 19th century by the subsequent one.

The second model – the professional one – concentrated on the study of the *object* and on teaching the competence of its humanistic cognition (from the second half of the 19th century until the second half of the 20th century, and in Poland – until the present day), for in this model, the culture, its products and processes have become an autonomous object of research equal to all others. The process was parallel to the establishment of *Geisteswissenschaften* (human sciences, cultural sciences) in the day of the so-called “anti-positivist turn”. This led to a professionalization and division of humanistic knowledge into disciplines that later further divided into separate, isolated sectors of scholarship, a consequence of the fact that their autonomous identities were legitimized by their ability to prove the existence of a separate object and method of study. Culture became one of such objects, and within it the text – as a material-semantic device used to contain, store, transfer and convey meanings, while expert analytical knowledge transformed into a specialized methodology of identifying, expressing and explaining the authentic (and fundamentally unchangeable) meaning of the message.

I propose to call the third model *innovative*, as it places the greatest emphasis on *technique* (in the source sense of *techne* as a method of discovery), consequently, on discoveries (in the basic sciences) and inventions (in applied sciences) – at the cost of basic research (since the 60s, dominant today). It is also referred to as the “market” university model (for the market dictates research preferences and establishes funding priorities) or as the “university of excellence” (as it introduces a universal system of evaluation and competition with the use of homogenizing quantitative criteria). The “techno-university” would be, perhaps, the most fitting name for this model, as it promotes techno-scholarship, in other words, striving toward innovation. Generally speaking, it seeks a constant improvement of methods and techniques of data processing and a production of results of practical, social and civilizational importance.

Within the scope of this model, human studies have apparently found themselves in a stalemate: it was stated that these studies were devoid of techno-innovative potential, pushed to the margin, tolerated with increasing

reluctance by the administrators of science. One should add, however, that while a similar stalemate affects both the traditional and modern humanities, this cannot be said of its two new varieties. On the one hand there are the *cognitive humanities* (sometimes also called *neuro-humanities* or *new humanities*), searching for techniques and methods of access to the pre-discursive and pre-conceptual activity of the embodied mind as the source of human creation and culture (Gottschall, Singerland, Wilson); on the other hand, there are the *digital humanities* where precisely the technique or craft, i.e. digital technology, become the hotbed and the source of changes bearing widespread (although, so far, rather proclaimed than proven) practical, methodological, epistemological and ontological consequences (Burdick, McGann, Presner).

Although those different emphases of university research and education models could constitute complementary dimensions of acquiring education and the practice of scholarship, their history indicates that they are competitive and center on seemingly incompatible goals. The forming of the subject, the study of the object, technical efficiency (and agency) in the sphere of broadly understood practices and processes of mediation are all diverse (although deeply connected) types of activity. All seem equally important, both historically and today, however, they have always been mutually hierarchized; throughout the history of science, evolution of knowledge models assigned primacy to the newer ones.

The defenders of the value and social importance of the contemporary humanities position themselves – which is symptomatic – within the range of the above-mentioned models. Some view the humanities as, primarily, the last and irreplaceable locus for the shaping of individuals – their culture, self-knowledge, identity – into insightful, critical, open, creative citizens and members of community and society (Bloom, Gadamer, Nussbaum, Readings). Others hold it to be, first and foremost, a place to develop, implement and spread professional knowledge about human sense-making activity and its creations. It is a knowledge subordinated to the rules of disciplinary specializations, as well as strict standards of verification and falsification; knowledge of permanent value whose acquisition ensures also the possession of autonomous professional competences (Fish, Gumbrecht, Said, Waters). Others yet, (whose numbers are still low but growing) see it as a place of the return of the repressed. I am talking here, naturally, about technique (*techné*): once located at the heart of the Platonic myth of culture's creation (in *Protagoras*), a divine art stolen by Prometheus, later held to be the opposite of culture – that returns today as the most important ally of the evolving humanities in their struggle for survival in the contemporary horizon of knowledge and media environment (Stiegler, Hayles, Debray, Berry).

The strength of the first model, focused on the formation of the subject, was also recognized relatively early as the source of its weakness. As Jonathan Culler notes, if the goal of the university is to develop a man of culture, then the man of culture would be instantiated in the professor. Hence the popularity of anecdotes such as that of “a dowager accosting an Oxford don during World War I: ‘Young man, why aren’t you in France, fighting to defend the civilization.’ ‘Madame,’ came the reply, ‘I *am* the civilization they are fighting to defend”<sup>1</sup>. Therefore the point is that in the eyes of the common man, the autotelic model of education not only reproduces social inequality but also, first and foremost, promotes the production of “asocial” individuals with a sense of entitlement; disinterested as they have no interest to engage in the needs or subordinate to the imperatives of the collective.

The advantages and disadvantages of the second model, where culture (and by extension, a text) become the object of research, similarly to the third model, where culture and technology shape the media space and govern the processes of mediation (and the media are not simply a carrier of the message, having a significant impact on our relation with the world), are broadly discussed today. I would like to mention just one aspect of the issue: that of the innovative character of textual research and text-producing scholarship, conceptualized not directly (which, as we know, is a difficult matter, if at all possible) but *via negativa*, as surely it is a little easier to say what innovation is *not* than what it is... I believe, although I am relying for now on my own observations and hypotheses, that among the most widespread research practices that are likely to be deemed as legitimate, even to a certain extent valuable, though definitely not innovative, one will find the following five trends:

1. the reproduction or ordering of the cognitive results of others (instead of arriving at one’s own);
2. proclaiming one’s own position (without sufficient supporting argumentation or outlining its connection to the contemporary state of knowledge);
3. concentration on methodology and perfecting one’s craft (without acknowledging the need for its verification or its usefulness with regard to the empirical material);
4. extensive practice of disciplinary scholarship based on filling “gaps” (concerning a previously overlooked object or features of the already known object) by applying a routine research procedure;
5. concentration on solving only elements of research problems or perceived problems (while omitting fundamental issues).

---

1 Jonathan Culler, *The Literary in Theory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 249.

If the above observation is correct (or at least worth consideration), two conclusions may be drawn. Firstly, non-innovative practices characterize a large share of research in the humanities (including, surely, also the Polish humanities). Secondly, innovative practice – defined tentatively as a symmetrical opposite of the above-mentioned trends – would involve a preference for: transdisciplinary research with a clear empirical footing (appropriate for the discipline), closely tied to a new theoretical conceptualization (one well rooted in the state of research) and leading to a formulation (or a re-interpretation, or solution) of a problem of fundamental importance to a given discipline, and (by extension) to the entire discipline of knowledge. But this characterization, although it identifies important conditions for the emergence of innovation within the humanities, still fails to capture their specificity.

### **The Specificity of the Humanities, or on the Three Meanings of Stefan Czarowski's One Sentence**

One could, naturally, elaborate endlessly on the specificity of the humanities, but in the following paragraphs and with the help of just one example, I would like to identify its three crucial and rather generally accepted meanings. A renowned Polish sociologist, religion scholar and cultural anthropologist, Stefan Czarowski closed the preface to his last, posthumously published book (*Culture*, 1938) with the following simple sentence: "Because the study of culture also is culture". Naturally, one may reflect on it in the context of the entire preface, especially its connection to the preceding sentence that includes a conventional invocation to the reader: "It is up to the readers to decide about the extent of the result of our attempts has enriched culture"<sup>2</sup>. Interpreted within this frame, the last sentence is a kind of rhetorical finish for the preceding appeal to the readers, an ornament, additional decorative expression that adds nothing new, closing the argument with a general reflection. However, the logic of supplementation (as we have learned from contemporary philosophers and theoreticians) is governed by its own laws, and when it is applied, that which looks to be a simple ornament may fundamentally change the surface meaning.

Firstly, let us note that the proposition contains a clear *d e m a r c a t i o n*. This becomes very apparent when we realize that the study of nature (one should add: by following standard practices and approaches of nature scientists) is not a part of nature. The study of culture, on the other hand, is a part

2 Stefan Czarowski, *Kultura. Dzieła T.I: Studia z historii kultury*, ed. N. Assordobaj, S. Ossowski (Warszawa: PWN, 1956), 23.

of culture – and this is one of the features that clearly differentiates this type of studies from the so-called strict sciences; the study referred to as *Geisteswissenschaften*, cultural studies or simply humanities. The former deal with things that simply are, the latter with things that carry meaning. A more recent tradition allowing to capture the consequences of this distinction is rooted in the so-called anti-positivist turn that brought about the emergence of the humanities; a more distant one develops from the ancient and modern reflection on the “growing” of meaning and its effects in form of products of culture.

If the first context pointed to the differentiating and identity-related sense of the proposition, the following one reveals an internal diversification of the field of knowledge in question. If “the study of culture also is culture” then there must be an underlying assumption that study as such is not culture (in the narrower sense) and culture is not studying (understood more strictly). However, both are interconnected and influence each other within the framework of a broader or more special notion of culture. One can see here a division into cultural creation (products of culture) and the knowledge or processes of cultural study. It is a division that today resurfaces in the form of a dualistic concept of culture, described on the one hand phenomenalistically (culture as a system of products and practices that result in them), and on the other hand, idealistically (culture as a system of meanings and symbols, patterns, an axiological-categorical network). Culture certainly is both – that which we see and that through which we see – but the debates among philosophers and theoreticians of culture show that it is difficult to combine these two approaches or to unite them under some sort of a broader category.

An analysis of the above sentence in a yet different light allows to enrich its characterization and to see in it an expression of an even more pronounced position than the descriptive-typological perspective. “The study of culture is also culture” also means that the knowledge of the object and the means to achieve it become a part (an aspect, a dimension) of the studied object. Cultural creation includes a cognitive dimension, and cultural study – a creative component, as it “forms” or “enriches”, and consequently changes (at least to some degree or extent) the studied object. And this new object must demand a new cognitive operation, which turns the process into a never-ending, everlasting endeavor. Generally speaking, it is a process in which what men do in their cultural environment refers both to the objects and to men themselves and through that feedback, their self-knowledge and the described states of things are modified and acquire new depth. And if so, then one could also say that the most characteristic feature of inventive study in the humanities is the fact that it forms or co-shapes (consequently, changes) that which it refers to (which, by the way, connects cultural texts of this kind to the records of pre-conceptual states of the primary level, of similar

properties; to the attempts at a discoursivization of the “primary experience” or the “emotives” – see: Petitmengin, Reddy).

I have attempted to extract from Czarnecki’s seemingly purely rhetorical formulation three meanings of culture. The first one separates and differentiates the study of culture (the humanities) from natural (strict) sciences, endowing it with a relative identity. The second one indicates an important internal diversification within this field of knowledge, stretched between alternative (and frequently competitive) approaches: one that defines culture as a network of patterns and symbols, and the other that views it as a system of practices and products. The third meaning highlights the mutual influence of the idealistic and phenomenalist dimensions, rooted in the reflexive, reflective character of research within the humanities. And if its cardinal feature is the fact that it forms (changes) that which it refers to, it also has an importantly innovative or creative – or, to use a more appropriate word, inventive – character.

It is, however, a clearly different type of innovation. At a risk of a far-reaching simplification, one could say that discoveries in basic sciences change (multiply) our knowledge, not the world. Inventions, on the other hand, enrich (change) the “furnishings” of the world (and of man) adding technical artifacts and ways to manage its resources or properties, and their productive use and processing. Meanwhile, successful inventions proper to the humanities penetrate, to an extent, both of these spheres: through their creative practices (*techné* – *ars*) they produce artifacts constituting media for cultural senses that provide access to overlooked features or aspects of the world of human experience; and this way, while creating – they make discoveries.

Relating the discussed models of knowledge and properties of humanist cognition to the textual research and practices, one notices that each of them results in the different profiling of the latter. In the traditional model of the humanities, centered upon the forming/educating the subject, classical texts appeared in a de-contextualized (and frequently fragmentary) form and were treated, first and foremost, as reservoirs of conceptualizations of universal issues allowing to penetrate key philosophical, moral, social or political problems. Commenting on Durkheim’s observations on the matter, Pierre Bourdieu notes that throughout the 19th century, as a result of a merge between the universalist humanism and “a reading which is attentive solely to the properties of form”<sup>3</sup> there emerges an autonomous field of humanist knowledge where this model begins to surrender to the subsequent one, centered upon creation, reading and study of texts as an autotelic object:

3 Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art. Genesis and Structure of Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 301.

Pure production produces and presupposes pure reading, and *ready-mades* are just a sort of an extreme case of all works produced for commentary and by commentary. To the extent that the field gains autonomy, writers feel themselves increasingly authorized to write works destined to be *decoded*, hence subject to repeated reading necessary to explore, without exhausting it, the intrinsic polysemy of the work<sup>4</sup>.

The same process is described from a different perspective by David Olson. Olson believes that *The World on Paper* of the literacy era, and then of print era, becomes gradually de-empiricized by eliminating all non-textual factors that condition the sending and receiving of sense (such as the author's intention, the situation of utterance, contextual relations, anchoring in experienced reality). This results in an autonomous reality of the text with a self-sufficient meaning, the text is a kind of a container used to store, convey and share (with all who can read) the intact deposit of sense. According to Olson, this is how a modern, autonomous text provides not only a model for speech but also for the constituting of the modern, autonomous subject<sup>5</sup>. One could take this a step further; in its extreme form, such a concept of the text (seen as a field or network of meaningful elements), textual writing and print are no longer technical devices but become what Lewis Mumford calls a *machine*: an autonomous order of functions, a device to annihilate time and space, a process separate from objects or substances (although embodied in an artificial device)<sup>6</sup>. In contemporary virtual space, this process has surely only intensified and taken new forms.

Latour's formulation of "text as a laboratory" may appear as a risky and inadequate metaphor for the specific practices (and their conceptualizations) within the humanities, which is perhaps why Łukasz Afeltowicz judged it to be of little use to describe them<sup>7</sup>. I must disagree. If Latour's formulation is to be treated as a metaphor of an "isolated closed system" (the basic methodological procedure in natural sciences) that the humanities develop using their own means, then the modern model of an autonomous text fulfills – wishes to fulfill – the criteria of modern science. The "device"

4 Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, 305.

5 David R. Olson, *The World on Paper: The Conceptual and Cognitive Implications of Writing and Reading* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

6 Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

7 Łukasz Afeltowicz *Modele, artefakty, kolektywy. Praktyka badawcza w perspektywie współczesnych studiów nad nauką* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 2012).



of the autonomous text: (a) reduces the complexity of the object's features (by isolating them from the conditions of their emergence, intentions of the subject, contextual, historical and social meanings as well as the non-textual environment and experience of the receiver); (b) assumes a systematic standardized analytical procedure (rules for a competent, professional interpretation); (c) produced repeatable results ("correct" interpretation of the work's meaning); (d) results agreed upon and legitimized by the "interpretative community" (a certain equivalent of the criterion of teamwork in strict sciences, although the tendency for teamwork has become noticeable also in the humanities).

According to the ethnologists of science, the difference between what sciences proclaim within the standard theory and what they actually do in the laboratory also characterizes the relation between this modern ideology of the text and the actual textual practices among the humanists. The contemporary view of the textual laboratory (in the general and more tangible sense: a library, archive, workshop...) – and here I am about to point to the status of the text in the third, innovative or technical model – does not rely on the idea of autonomy, nor on the notion of the text as a container, but rather sees the text as a nexus of relation networks that penetrate and shape the historical, social and cultural environment. The intention remains a crucial element of meaning, just as the situation of the utterance (both created by the text and represented by it), and the contextual relations, tested through the process of reading that cannot succeed without a significant engagement of the experience and knowledge of the receiver. The meaning is not a "ready" datum represented by the text but a relational feature written onto the technical (textual) instruments of cognition and mediation, through them forming and sharing its shape.

In fact, this concept of meaning is nothing exceptional; it is broadly accepted, among others, among cognitive linguists. According to Gilles Fauconnier, for instance, linguistic expressions have no stable, ready meaning, instead they are a kind of instruction with a potentiality of meaning actualized and concretized as the discourse develops and is understood through the attempts (acts) of placing it within the frame of contexts and discursive as well as non-discursive environment constructing the network of "mental spaces" where the meaning of the message is located and developed<sup>8</sup>. However, in her description of the literary text, conducted from the perspective of critical discourse analysis, Dominique Maingueneau says that to see the literary text as discourse means:

8 Agnieszka Libura (ed.) *Amalgamaty kognitywne w sztuce* (Kraków: Universitas, 2007).

to reject the fantasy of the work in *itself*, in the double sense of a work of autarchy and a work from the depths of creative awareness; to return the work to all spaces that make it possible, spaces where it is produced, evaluated and where it is managed. The conditions of speaking permeate that which is said, and that which is said relates to its conditions of being said (the status of the writer connected to the ways he or she is located within the field of literature, the functions ascribed to genres, the relations to the receiver created by the work, material medium and the methods of circulation of the utterance). [...] The context is not located outside the work like subsequent layers of the work, the text itself governs its context. Yes, texts speak about the world but the acts of their utterance partake in the world they are meant to represent. We do not have a universe of silent objects and actions on the one hand and on the other, with separate representations meant to portray them. Literature is also an act; it not only speaks about the world but also organizes its own presence in this world<sup>9</sup>.

### Three Types of Textual Practices in the Humanities

Work on texts, a crowning discipline of not only literary studies, means working with texts and “using texts” (or “through texts”). The latter is of paramount importance and, in my opinion, specific to the humanities because it complements the former but also absorbs and transforms them. In the humanities, the text is more than an object or partner, it is first and foremost a guide: more than a medium or transmitter – a mediator that, positioned in between, somehow also produces that which it mediates (Debray); it shows the direction and paves the way; finally, it serves as a kind of Baedeker through the newly discovered routes and tracts of experience. It is a guide leading to an understanding of the other, provided that at the same time it allows, as Bakhtin suggests, for an understanding of itself as the other.

Extrapolating these remarks onto the territory of poetics, one could say (with a necessary simplification) that each of these types of interest in the text will profile differently the tasks of the poetics of the text in the humanities (and, by extension, of the literary and artistic text):

1. the model of working with texts – rooted in the spiritual-hermeneutic tradition (as well as its theological branches) where the text (work of art) acquires the features of the subject; it asks questions

<sup>9</sup> Dominique Maingueneau, *Le Discours littéraire. Paratopie et science d'enunciation* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2004). Based on the Polish translation by H. Koniecka prepared for print in the *Horizonty nowoczesności* series and used by R. Nycz. (AW)

or provides answers, looks at us (but at the same time, according to Benjamin, draws attention and enforces auratic distance), it is a maker, it exerts influence etc. The text is the Other that we encounter, a partner in a conversation through which it opens itself to our understanding, submits to interpretation and presents (represents) that which on “the other side” is to an extent potentially already given, worked out and deposed in the work: the spiritual world of the author and the historical sense of the work.

2. the model of working on texts that focuses primarily on the study of the text (work of art) as an artistic object – closed, formally finite and separate (autonomous) – and aims to capture the rules of its internal organization, the deeper order of its sense, which is a distinctive feature of the entire philological-structuralist tradition, classical editing as well as archival and source studies, etc.
3. the model of “using texts” which activates and emphasizes another aspect of the heritage of poetics; one where poetics is first and foremost a technique (in a diversity of its historical senses, however, centered upon the cardinal one, as a method of discovery). From *technaksein kai theorein* (“inventive thinking” – so that something may be created out of things that may be or not be, following Aristotle) and the art of inventive search for the “missing word” (Steiner) to Bakhtin’s notion of “exotopic” poetics (based on the premise of necessary temporal, spatial and cultural distance between that which is comprehended and the comprehending agent) and Adorno’s concept of the text as an idiosyncratic procedure of finding networks of linguistic-conceptual relations where things form their shape available to human cognition.

I have listed these rather commonsensical and tentative models of textual practices performed within the contemporary textual laboratory of the humanities also in order to highlight different directions of the possibilities of inventive (innovative) acts. In the first model, the text is a kind of a partner (assistant, tool) in solving a task or issue different from the one that provoked the text; features of the text become analytical categories providing access to phenomena or problems of non-textual nature. In the second model, the text becomes an object of analytical, experimental inquisitiveness by the way of which a change of questions posed to the text, the conceptual network where it is located, the experienced frames of reading, results in different answers, activates dimensions of sense that had been hidden so far, reveals the repressed of unconscious layers of the record of experience.

In the third model the text is conceived primarily as an inscription of the process of its development and a simultaneous construction of meaning. The questions of producing knowledge (generally speaking), and particularly the traditional question of creative process, destined (or so it would seem) to be forgotten or disregarded (as it takes form of non-scientific deliberation) must undoubtedly claim its rightful place as a part of the humanist reflection, especially as it has already regained its academic status in cognitive neurophenomenology.

This can be seen for instance in the work of Claire Petitmengin who in her analyses of first-person testimonies of the creative process (by scientists, philosophers, artists, writers) managed to reconstruct the main stages of constituting, profiling, negotiating and narrowing down of sense in the process of developing texts: from “source thoughts”, a residual, pre-conceptual and pre-discursive fermentation threshold of the semantic amalgam in the form of multi-sensorial and transmodal “felt meaning” of the experience – to a conceptually and discursively formatted meaning that, nonetheless, does not repress the residual stage but, on the contrary, can be properly read only in relation to it and from it draws its energy (intensive stimulation) for further transformations.

This invention of sense, captured in the textual “experiential protocols”, allows to uphold a:

dynamic, enactive view according to which cognition, far from being the representation of a pre-given world, is a process of co-construction of the inside and the outside, the knower and the known, the mind and the world [...] If our ideas draw their meanings from the preverbal dimension of our experience, then there is no real understanding which does not attain such depth. Understanding an idea means accessing the felt meaning which is at its source, thanks to specific gestures<sup>10</sup>.

But the point here is also about sanctioning the value of more pragmatically and practically oriented research leading to an analytical and theoretical reflection on the techniques (patterns, procedures) of creation/construction of the text in humanities. Because a developed inventive text partakes in the solving of the problem, becomes the operator of reorganization – attuning all elements of the research procedure and integrating them into parts of a methodically constructed discourse. A development of an effectively organized analytical text (of one’s own) also activates the network of meaningful

---

<sup>10</sup> Claire Petitmengin, “Towards the Source of Thoughts. The Gestural and Transmodal Dimension of Lived Experience”, *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 14, No. 3 (2007): 77 and 79.

relations between the elements of the studied text and allows to develop systems (regularities, orders) thanks to which the text gains a place and meaning in culture, while the researcher – a new form of sharing also their own experience.

Emphasis on the development and research of techniques, or even technologies, of producing texts, processing data, logistics of transmission and managing reception grows significantly in the field of the new, digital humanities perhaps highlighting at the same time its central interest. This is how Schnapp and Presner describe this evolution in their manifesto:

Like all media revolutions, the first wave of the digital revolution looked backward as it moved forward. Just as early codices mirrored oratorical practices, print initially mirrored the practices of high medieval manuscript culture, and film mirrored the techniques of theater, the digital first wave replicated the world of scholarly communications that print gradually codified over the course of five centuries: a world where textuality was primary and visuality and sound were secondary (and subordinated to text), even as it vastly accelerated the search and retrieval of documents, enhanced access, and altered mental habits. Now it must shape a future in which the medium specific features of digital technologies become its core and in which print is absorbed into new hybrid modes of communication.

The first wave of digital humanities work was quantitative, mobilizing the search and retrieval powers of the database, automating corpus linguistics, stacking hypercards into critical arrays. The second wave is qualitative, interpretive, experiential, emotive, generative in character. It harnesses digital toolkits in the service of the Humanities' core methodological strengths: attention to complexity, medium specificity, historical context, analytical depth, critique and interpretation<sup>11</sup>.

I have cited these two examples of “using text”, of interest in the processes of the creation of texts and the production of knowledge also because they reveal two key liminal areas or, perhaps, posthumanist wings, between which contemporary humanities have found themselves: neuroscience – reaching into the pre-conceptual and pre-linguistic, corporeally experienced level of communication that connects the human being to all other beings, and digital technology – that signals the “computational turn” in the developing

11 Jeffrey Schnapp, and Todd Presner, “The Digital Humanities Manifesto 2”.  
[http://jeffreyschnapp.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Manifesto\\_V2.pdf](http://jeffreyschnapp.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Manifesto_V2.pdf)

“machine-centered” and “postperceptual” (since it is disembodied) cyber-culture. It will depend on the elasticity and strength of contemporary humanities if they are going to be absorbed by those two, becoming a component of other fields of knowledge (perhaps even an important one, but one without the right to autonomous existence) or if the humanities attempt to absorb and use them for their own purposes, re-defining their identity and right to exist among the fields of contemporary science and “technoculture”. A third option – a return to the old *status quo* – is probably (no longer) possible.

### Conclusions

I propose to abandon the modern ideology of text as a container, separated from the world, an autonomous laboratory of standard procedures of representation, preservation, transmission and reception of meaning. I also propose a move toward a contemporary (and Latourian in spirit) notion of the text’s laboratory as a nexus of open network of translational operations between the natural, social, discursive, mediatory and inventively transforming the relations between the mind, the body and the environment. This operational concept of the cultural text combines the knowledge of strictly disciplinary character (knowing that) with the causative knowledge (knowing how) and is of mediatory nature, conciliating between oppositional models of knowledge and types of textual practices; it allows a transition from modern to new humanities (posthumanities? neurohumanities? digital humanities?) that today search for a place between the empirical and the virtual.

In a text constituting a *locus classicus* for the traditional education in humanities, Seneca the Younger encourages a young student to abandon blind obedience to the authority of “great books”:

“This is what Zeno said”. But what have you yourself said? “This is the opinion of Cleanthes”. But what is your own opinion? How long shall you march under another man’s orders? Take command, and utter some word which posterity will remember. [...] But it is one thing to remember, another to know. Remembering is merely safeguarding something entrusted to the memory; knowing, however, means making everything your own; it means not depending upon the copy and not all the time glancing back at the master. “Thus said Zeno, thus said Cleanthes, indeed!” Let there be a difference between yourself and your book!<sup>12</sup>

12 Seneca, *Epistles, Volume I*. (A Loeb Classical Library: 1917) trans. Richard M. Gummere. [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Moral\\_letters\\_to\\_Lucilius](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Moral_letters_to_Lucilius)

Although we are decidedly more skeptical today about the neutrality and effectiveness of memory techniques (remembering things as they really were), Seneca's key postulate – that doing is the ultimate test of knowing, about the primacy of “knowing how” over “knowing about” – still remains true. Two millennia later Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela coined from this postulate – in their formulation stating that all doing is knowing and all knowing is doing – the credo of the new, united and holistic concept of the mind, matter and life<sup>13</sup>.

Transforming the humanist knowledge into a tool of causative action, successful change, effective influence, continues to remain a challenge for the humanities, more pertinent today than it possibly ever was. Perhaps we may approach this goal by reminding ourselves of the traditions of operational treatment of texts, by making an attempt at an operational reformulation of their concept and by striving to design research and education programs adjusted to the environment of the humanities of the future. The environment and the humanities that we already find ourselves in, that, after all, surround us already.

*Translation: Anna Warso*

---

<sup>13</sup> Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela, *The Tree of Knowledge. The Biological Roots of Human Education* (Boston-London: Shambala Publications, 1998), 26.

---

Włodzimierz Bolecki

---

## A Different Take on Humanities

---

DOI: 10.18318/td.2015.en.1.4

**M**ore and more often a “crisis of humanities” becomes the main theme of various books and articles. It has not entered public debate yet, but it is increasingly difficult to ignore the subject. However, one could say that questions about humanities are as old as its history. One could also state, with a degree of legitimacy, that the “crisis” is a fundamental subject of the tradition of modernism, understood as the 20th-century reflection on contemporary culture. But even that broad context, explored with the help of an increasing number of concepts and models, fails to explain the intensity of today’s attempts at describing problems haunting the humanities. Most importantly – it does so in the context of changes connected to a search of new formulas for higher education and research institutions. Without a doubt there are many reasons for that situation, and it is impossible to reduce them to a single cause. One should also remember, however, that the diagnoses are influenced by different contexts, in which they were formulated (social, political, civilizational, historical ones etc.).

However, one could safely say that several reemerging issues connect all those statements about humanities (I am not including their close relationship with social sciences here). I will list them randomly: the first issue is

---

**Włodzimierz Bolecki**

– professor at IBL PAN. Specialises in the theory and the history of the literature of the 20th/21st c. His recent publications include: *Inna krytyka* (2006; K. Wyka Prize); *„Inny Świat” Gustawa Herlinga-Grudzińskiego* (1994; 2007); *Ptasznik z Wilna. O Józefie Mackiewicz* (1991; 2007, 2014, “Kultura” Prize); *Modalności modernizmu* (2013; nominated for the Jan Długosz Prize). Author of many editions of critical studies about *inter alia* W. Berent, S. I. Witkiewicz, A. Wat, B. Schulz, W. Gombrowicz, G. Herling-Grudziński. Contact: [www.bolecki.eu](http://www.bolecki.eu)



concerned with a question about the specificity of the humanities, about the markers of their separateness from the so-called experimental sciences; the second one is concerned with their social justification and its place within scientific research; the third one – with their position within today's higher education structure; fourth – with their “crisis” (whatever that means); fifth – with problems of their particular domains, and ways in which those domains are practiced; sixth – with a general perception of their depreciation; seventh – with their insufficient funding; eighth – never mind, let us stick with seven.

A common characteristic of all of the above listed issues is the asymmetry between the general character of the theses (spanning the entirety of humanities) and a usually modest representation of humanistic disciplines seen in those discourses. A description of the “importance” of the humanities is most often concerned with philosophy, cultural studies and philology (particularly, literary studies) – disciplines with a unique tradition of, and a potential for interpretative and theoretical reflection, and especially with theoretical-epistemological and methodological ones, notional rather than empirical.

What strikes one the most, however, is the uniquely monolithic image of the “external enemy” – all of those who, without understanding and needing humanities, have come together and agreed to work towards its demise. The list of “enemies” seems repetitive as well: commercialization and infantilization of contemporary culture, poor education, non-humanities sciences attempting to take the “spot” of the humanities, merciless fight of other (non-humanities) departments for the biggest slice of the university's cake (sacrificing budgets of different humanistic disciplines), for the assigned hours, for the faculty, office space, etc.

The identification of obstacles and dangers faced by the humanities is always formulated in a language directed to “one's fellow people” is symptomatic. It is almost exclusively an internal discourse, often within one discipline, or several closely connected ones at best. But what is the benefit of discussing them among ourselves, if the dangers are external? What is supposed to be the practical outcome of such “humanistic autism”?

Contemporary humanities are proud of their categories, with which they describe the world: “dialogue” (and its “philosophy”), “difference” (and “diversity”), the “Other” (and “alien”) – to name just a few. Within the range of individual discourses, within different areas of the social world and cultural phenomena, these categories (and interpretative languages founded on their basis) seem razor-sharp and stunning like a thunderbolt. However, when the question is concerned with presenting the specificity of the humanities in the public debate, its civilizational indispensability, and its relationship

with other areas of sciences – the razor blade turns into a baseball bat, and thunderbolts into cheap fireworks. When reading letters and proclamations, protests and manifestos “in defense of the humanities”, I always have the sensation of a ‘sudden wake-up call’ syndrome: “I jump to my feet suddenly, but I don’t know where I am. I want to rush somewhere, maybe to the train station, maybe to work, I mistake my left hand for the right hand, my pants for my sweater, «what’s that person in the mirror doing in my house?», etc.”. Several decades of polishing those subtle notions, and a complete inability to communicate with “alien” and “other” disciplines, or to explain its own “otherness”, as a result. Am I exaggerating? Of course I am, but it is difficult to negate the fact that the result of the jeremiads of humanists on the cult of experience, comparisons, bibliometric factors, indexes and calculations, applicability, innovation, pragmatic approach and commercialization in contemporary sciences resulted in... further alienation. Thus the particular disciplines of science, which should be connected by the concept of *universitas* – a community of all sciences – seem to be dialects of different tribes, which do not know how to communicate because they did not discover that a translator is missing.

Contrary to appearances, these forces are not equal, and both sides are not on leveled positions. The “hard sciences” do not need to justify their existence (and their ever-increasing funding), and they do not need a translator. The humanities, on the other hand, constantly try to prove – with pavonine pride, although most often without results – that it can also boast the status of a science, only a “soft” one, impossible to be compared with anything else, but most importantly (and *ex definitione*) – better, because reflexive and value-generating, disinterested because impossible to be reduced to some narrow, objective-driven tasks of other particular disciplines. In the eyes of “hard” sciences, such explanations do not make the situation of the humanities any better. According to “hard” sciences, a science should be concerned with what is concrete and not undetermined, with what is empirical (verifiable), and not “because-I-said-so”. A science should be interested in what is inter-subjective and not solipsistic, with what can be compared. If something cannot be compared with anything else, it might potentially be art – but it is not a science.

In an excellent essay entitled *Humanities: an Unfinished Project* by Michał Paweł Markowski, which can be found in this very issue of *Teksty Drugie* (*Second Texts*), the author states (following Marta Nussbaum) that “the humanities reveal to us the relativity of what we do with the world [...] Because of that, it could take the spot of a primary science, since its subject is not that or the other, that object or the next one (literature of romanticism, cubism in painting, or an adjunct), but a human existence in its different, more or less institutionalized manifestations”. That thesis must be close to every humanist’s

heart, however it is a concept which could serve as a foundation for a separate college or a department, and not an entire system of contemporary science, or higher education. Contrary to another thesis, also authored by Nussbaum, from that same excellent work: “the humanities are merely a certain critical disposition [...], since it introduces well-established lexicons used by particular disciplines into a state of crisis (or potential change), or plants doubt in the purity of every lexicon, designed to uphold the separateness of particular disciplines. Therefore the humanities is not a collective name for those various disciplines (literary studies, philosophy, art history, etc.), but an academic framework, within which those separate areas of research exist” – I believe that without negating the validity of this concept, one could act entirely in reverse.

Without questioning the subtlety of “internal” calibrations within the humanities and their disciplines (and the absolute necessity for those calibrations to last), I would like to stress only one issue – a rather obvious question of the ontological, cognitive and functional difference between the humanities and other branches of science.

Primarily, it is composed of the following assumptions: (1) the humanities, let us assume, focus on the products of human culture (works of art, actions, social phenomena, ideas, values), while non-humanities sciences focus on what is external to a man (nature, matter, etc.); (2) the humanities are, to a great extent, dependent on languages and national cultures, while for non-humanistic sciences language and culture are entirely irrelevant (language, today it is English, is a cognitively irrelevant platform of communication). Neutinos, proteins, acids, black holes and white nights remain indifferent towards the language in which they are being described; *ergo*: (3) the humanities perpetually require translations into other systems of cultural meanings, while for non-humanistic sciences translation is unnecessary; (4) humanists can conduct their research together but a basis for the presentation of the results is individual expression (an article, or a book), while non-humanistic sciences are characterized by team work, and there are instances of numerous authors assigned to a single article; (5) in the humanities, the process of writing constitutes a foundation of research and cognitive processes, and is individualized, while in non-humanities writing of an article is detached from research, and takes place after its completion. For the humanities, expression is a crucial element of content, while in other sciences it does not exist as a research question – it might occur only as a question of grammatically correct form of expression in English (or congress) language; (6) for the humanities, the history of a given discipline is not only an integral element of all its subjects and means of its research, but also – as *historicity* – it is a fundamental problem of the entire field. Whereas in the non-humanities,

the history of a discipline has no necessary connection with present research, and rarely becomes an object of research interest. What is more: (7) publishing in the humanities (periodicals, publishing houses) is polycentric (multitude and diversity), and quality of a publication is most often not connected to the outlet, while in other sciences, publications are monocentric, which means that the outlet (a particular periodical) is a universally accepted marker of the high quality of a publication. In the humanities, a published book (monograph) is considered a measure of achievement, while in non-humanities an article plays that same role. The humanities hold the collecting of articles written over many years into a single book (*finis coronat opus*) as its standard, while in the non-humanities the publishing of the same article once again is unacceptable. (8) In the humanities novelty can mean a return to works of the past, and their reinterpretation (or even simply their recollection), however there is no need to go back to the past in non-humanities, since discoveries are ruled by the principle of “first come, first served”. That is enough.

The point is that these differences are as much obvious as they are banal, and have been formulated at different times, and in different circumstances. OK, well, – somebody might ask – but what is the practical conclusion coming from such a division? As far as the issues associated with the peculiar nature of the humanities and their particular disciplines, this division has marginal importance. However, this division might be a strong argument, particularly for comparisons with “hard” sciences, and particularly for the thesis about the (non)sense of financing humanities and social studies (together with the practical results of those theses) that are currently debated.

The thesis about man-created works (ontologically different than the “works” of nature), and the linguistic entanglement of the humanities, turns them into a “hard” foundation for describing their autonomy. These are not “imagination”, “sensitivity”, “disinterestedness”, “poeticism”, “talent”, “ideas”, “inexpressibility”, “historicity”, “duty”, “thinking”, “critical disposition”, (and sometimes non-critical...) and other similar, but always justified, descriptions, but rather the ontological, cognitive and methodological differences firmly anchored in the linguistic nature of the entire field of disciplines, which creates a *limes* between the humanities (and social studies), and the non-humanities. This polar division fits popular practices in both fields of science, but the problem lies in the fact that it is not obvious. Are we not dealing with works of man in the, so-called, “hard sciences” (for example, in biology, chemistry, mechanics)? Are chemical compounds, materials, machines, etc. not man-made, just like a poem or a painting? Such confusion, however, turns out to be helpful. Wherever man-made objects come into the picture, the humanities and experimental sciences are “hard” all the same, since they ask about

the same thing: how are the creations of man's cognitive activity made, and what are their social functions?

Internal differences (huge ones) between particular disciplines within the range of each of those fields are secondary in respect of that primary division. If we were to agree with such a polar division between "hard" and "soft" (here: hardened) disciplines of science, and simultaneously with their "identicality" in respect of examining human creations, the next step – to finish this introduction – would be to pose two theses.

The first one: for more than a century the humanities were not able to firmly establish its discoveries concerning the system, functions and meanings of language in all spheres of human activity in the broad social consciousness (in this case: in the consciousness of "hard" scientists). The "linguistic turn" became an irrelevant and meaningless label for the fads in the humanities, just like all the other ones. As a result, today, while every schoolchild knows what does the discovery of proteins, chromosomes, genes, atoms, elemental particles, DNA, etc. mean for science, the common knowledge about language and the discoveries of linguistics (from distinctive features and phonemes, through semantics and syntax, to questions of ethno-linguistics, cognitive science and neurolinguistics, or even more importantly the cultural, mental, linguistic and communicative determinants of semantics) is reduced to a statement that ... well, "people talk", somehow. When, for example, chemistry, biology, physics, mathematics, etc. were establishing their image as the most important branches of cognitive search for man, and necessary for the civilizational progress, humanists (maybe with an exception for historians) kept affirming the image of their disciplines as spaces for activities, which are civilizationally irrelevant, unproductive and *de facto* obsolete. For that, all humanists should wear sackcloth and ashes, and flog themselves until their circulation (of thoughts) gets better. The decision of many years ago, made by the Polish government, to dedicate funds from the European Union (the so-called structural funds) solely towards Info-Bio-Tech disciplines was an effect of that honestly earned, permanent depreciation of humanities, and simultaneous nursing of barren jeremiads ("they took it away, kind sir, they cut our funding, took our post-doctoral degree"), as well as of self-satisfaction and "autism of argumentation", or "autism of presence" in matters crucial for the very foundations of the existence of the humanities and social sciences in Poland. As a result of this (accompanied by a complete silence of the scientific community and all of its representative bodies), not a single dime from over four billion zlotys received for scientific research from Brussels (for all sciences), have been spent on humanities and social sciences (as well as on mathematics and theoretical physics). Within a year, or two, new decisions will be made, regarding another tranche of structural funds.

And now for the second thesis: the humanities, in order to be revitalized (in every sense of the word) and to redefine their position, need a renewed model (if it ever had any to begin with) of research – not only an interdisciplinary model, but also an inter-domain one<sup>1</sup>.

“The horn, [...] bore the music into the forest and an echo repeated it”.

*Translation: Jan Pytalski*

---

<sup>1</sup> I write about that model with Przemysław Urbańczyk in a separate article that is being prepared for publication.

---

Maciej Maryl

---

## F5: Refreshing Philology<sup>1</sup>

---

DOI: 10.18318/td.2015.en.1.5

The article was written in the course of the project *Blog jako nowa forma piśmiennictwa multimedialnego*, founded from the means provided by the National Science Center on the basis of decision no. DEC-2011/03/N/HS2/06232.

---

“Digital Humanities involves the use of computers, the internet and related technologies to enable the creation and sharing of humanities scholarship in ways not possible in traditional humanities practice. Digital Humanities challenge the traditional understanding of the Humanities by fostering interdisciplinary collaborations and providing new perspectives on the objects of humanistic inquiry”<sup>2</sup>.

**T**hat is the official definition from the *whatisdigital-humanities.com* website; one of five hundred. And now we punch F5 (refresh website) and a new definition appears on our screens... Created by Jason Hepler, the website contains statements by participants of the *Day of DH* from the years 2009–2012. Every time we visit the site

**Maciej Maryl** – Ph.D., assistant professor and Deputy Director of the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences; founding head of the Digital Humanities Centre at the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Literary scholar, sociologist, and translator. He recently published a book on literary life on the Internet (in Polish). More information and publications: <http://maryl.org/> Contact: [Maciej.Maryl@ibl.waw.pl](mailto:Maciej.Maryl@ibl.waw.pl)

---

1 I employ the concept of Grzegorz Kurek in the title of this essay, which he designed as the name for an overview of contemporary “genre cinema”, which I hope will take place one day. This article was first published as a foreword to the issue 4/2014 of *Teksty Drugie*, entitled *New (?) Philology*. The description of the issue’s content, which constituted the second part of the Polish text, was omitted.

2 Jason Boyd (definition without a title) *What is digital humanities*, ed. J. Hepler, <http://whatisdigitalhumanities.com/>, accessed: 04.01.2014.

a different definition appears, which is supposed to be a sign, and an example, of emerging research field's ambiguity.

## F5

Is digital humanities truly some kind of a new approach, a research current, or a discipline? If that is the case, as the above-mentioned Boyd wishes, then digital humanities have been cultivated at the offices of *Second Texts* for years, or at least since the beginning of the nineties, which is when the chief editor brought a big Macintosh machine from his scholarship residence at the Yale University. Later on, the optical fibers arrived at the gates of the Staszic Palace, and our editorial office went online. Then it was time for wi-fi, and the internal circulation of articles (this happened only a few years back) was seamlessly transferred to our email system. The last genuine letter, an April Fool's Day joke typed out on a typewriter, was received by us in 2013. And today? Today we keep our files in the cloud, and we use software designed for teamwork. Our printer collects dust, and is used only for its built-in scanner. We sit at our editorial staff meetings with tablets... Are these elements of digital humanities? We may be on to something if we were to recall numerous thinkers who make us realize how various writing technologies influence the way we think<sup>3</sup>.

## F5

Digital humanities is the refreshed humanities. "Digital" makes it appealing (if not: "trendy"). It makes humanities seem fresh, mysterious (not everyone, after all, is an expert in the digital), or even "geeky". "Digital" means "new". The digital is sexy. Gregory Crane, a historian of antiquity and one of the pioneers of digital humanities (as the chief editor of *Perseus Digital Library* among other things) asks pertinently why we never speak of digital physicists, digital biologists, or (this phrase is arguably the best one) digital mathematicians<sup>4</sup>. The answer is simple – new, digital methods have become so embedded in those disciplines that it is impossible to separate one from the other. From that perspective, "Digital humanities" is a pleonasm, because everything we do is, to an extent, digital. Writing in a text editor, copy-paste, undo, redo, search... every such operation requires digital technology in which – whether we like it or not – we are completely immersed.

3 See *Second Texts*, 3 (2014).

4 A statement made at a conference (*Digital Humanities Revisited*) (Hannover, 5-7 December, 2013).



**F5**

One can still go away, hide with a book somewhere in the mountains without any reception, without a phone, or email access. We can try to reject novelties, read only printed works, and write in a notebook... We can even try to limit our computer use to word processing and e-mails (no apps and cat pictures!). We can reject all of that, but it will always and forever be an escape FROM. It has become impossible to practice science in an analog.

**F5**

Digital humanities is not (only) about researching the “digital”. This is not a discipline, nor a research current, but rather a movement or a collection of values common to researchers of various disciplines of humanities. However, opinions differ (F5). For example, Piotr Celiński situates the “digital turn” next to other turns (linguistic, visual, postmodern, post-humanist), while treating it as the digitalization of the researcher’s workshop, which is rather – in my opinion – a question from the sphere of meta-methodology of humanist sciences<sup>5</sup>. Put simply, I cannot see any major change in the research approach (a “turn” should assume such a change), but rather an evolution of methodology. Digital humanities does not require a rejection of the prevailing methods, approaches, state of knowledge, but are based on practicing research in a completely (or maybe: “slightly”) different way. Let the second part of the *Companion to digital literary studies* serve as the best example. It is significantly entitled *Traditions* and is dedicated to digital methods of conducting research by historians of literature of various periods<sup>6</sup>. On the other hand (the theme about which we will learn from other parts of that above-mentioned publication), we are concerned here with the examining of new forms of textuality (such as blogs, e-mails, websites) using traditional categories of literary studies (narration, authorship, reception, the represented world, the perfect reader...).

**F5**

Let us employ the methods of digital humanities to talk about them themselves. Below, you shall find a word cloud created using the wordle.net

5 Piotr Celiński, “Renesansowe korzenie cyfrowego zwrotu” (“Renaissance roots of the digital turn”) in *Zwrot cyfrowy w humanistyce. Internet/Nowe Media/Kultura 2.0. (Digital Turn in Humanities. Internet/New Media/Culture 2.0)*, ed. A. Radomski, R. Bomba, (Lublin: E-naukowiec, 2013), 13.

6 Ray Siemens, Susan Schreiban, ed. *A companion to digital literary studies*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), <http://www.digitalhumanities.org/companionDLS/> (accessed 09.16.2013).

platform, and composed of all definitions included on the *whatisdigitalhumanities.com* website (21.028 words). Words which appear more frequently are relatively bigger (popular words, such as conjunctions and over-represented ones – ‘digital’ and ‘humanities’ – have been removed, in order to avoid the upsetting of the scale of the remaining words).



Terms which are central to the issue are fairly easy to spot: (new) research, methods, tools, technologies, and information... Digital humanities, I believe, is not about a specific set of research questions but rather about the method of scientific inquiry. In the introduction to this volume I will attempt to discuss a set of main assumptions of thus understood digital humanities in this way, which could be applicable to the field of literary studies<sup>7</sup>.

## F5

**Tools.** The key to understand digital humanities is their applicability, stemming from close cooperation with the applied sciences (social and information technology sciences). A text is treated not so much as an object of research, but as a tool enabling us to gather knowledge about itself and the broader cultural context. We are enabled to present previous versions or variants of a particular text, to conduct certain technical operations on it, using text editing software (for example, lexical analysis) and to tie that very work with its context materials via hyperlinks.

<sup>7</sup> Apart from the source literature, I am dwelling on the experience drawn from two conferences: *(Digital) Humanities Revisited* (Hannover, 5-7 December 2013) and *Achieving Impact. Socio-economic Sciences & Humanities (SSH) in Horizon 2020* (Athens, 26-27 February 2014).

Referring back to the three types of interest in a given text suggested by Ryszard Nycz – working with a text (hermeneutics), on the text (philological analysis), and by means of the text (text as a field for meaning-making processes) – we would be facing the latter type in this case<sup>8</sup>. The metaphor of a “text as a laboratory” developed by Nycz finds its embodiment in the work of digital editors (for example, by Jerome McGann), or creators of collections (for example, the *Curarium*<sup>9</sup> project) – cultural artifacts become objects of the recipient’s manipulation. Specifically, we are talking here about the so-called second wave of digitalization, in which digitized heritage becomes an object of further transformations performed using software. Only in such circumstances can one say that digitalization serves a different purpose than simple storage, and the provision of access to the facsimiles of a text; only then texts become fully digital. A deep level convergence of materials is involved in that process – today, we are able to transform texts and images in a similar manner as the analyses of Manovich, referred to below, show. A prime expression of that process would be the new incarnation of the digital library of Polona, which was turned from a collection of scans, which were difficult to search through, into a research tool. Tools become our research infrastructure, which requires continuous updates and maintenance<sup>10</sup>. The concept of “long-term research” acquires a new meaning – it is no longer only about finishing a project (for example, a dictionary), but about enabling it to be regularly updated and to make it accessible within the next ten, twenty, thirty years in a perpetually changing digital world.

## F5

Data. Texts become tools, and information they carry becomes data. New tools bring new challenges to the research process: texts should be processed according to some international standards for meta-data (e.g. the Text Encoding Initiative), so they could be later compared and analysed together. The large amount of data provokes researchers to reach out for quantitative methods from other disciplines. Because of that, the very practice of “reading” acquires a new meaning:

8 Ryszard Nycz, “W stronę humanistyki innowacyjnej: tekst jako laboratorium. Tradycje, hipotezy, propozycje” (“Towards innovative humanities: text as a laboratory. Traditional hypotheses, proposals”), *Second Texts*, 1-2 (2013): 249.

9 See <http://www.curarium.com/>

10 See the conclusions of the report by the European Science Foundation – *Research Infrastructures in the Digital Humanities*, September 2011, [http://www.esf.org/fileadmin/Public\\_documents/Publications/spb42\\_RI\\_DigitalHumanities.pdf](http://www.esf.org/fileadmin/Public_documents/Publications/spb42_RI_DigitalHumanities.pdf), (accessed 04.07.2014).

Statistical and quantitative methods of analysis have brought close reading of texts (stylometrics and genre analysis, collation, comparison of versions for author attribution or usage patterns) into dialogue with distant reading (the crunching of large quantities of information across a corpus of textual data or its metadata)<sup>11</sup>.

Although *close reading* in Polish literary studies is understood literally as “attentive reading”, a proxemic reference is incredibly important here, and the difference between “close” reading, focused on specific words and sentences, and “distant” reading – performed from a higher plane, discovering relations between different texts, or collections (corpora) of texts – in particular<sup>12</sup>.

The same applies to the meta-data of literary studies. A “tool-oriented” approach leads to a change of status of traditional forms of auxiliary research tools, such as dictionary or bibliography, which not only facilitates research, but can be also used to conduct it. Let us mention as an example this year’s project of the IBL PAN, funded by the National Program for the Development of Humanities – “The Polish Literary Bibliography (PBL) – a knowledge lab on contemporary Polish culture”. The name itself suggests a change in perspective. It is no longer about a source of bibliographic listings, but about a tool which will enable us to compare data of the period covered by PBL and other, secondary bibliographies (dating back to 1939). Researchers will be able to compare entries, and answer research questions ranging from the history of literary life, or sociology of reception (for example, the number of reviews of particular works, connections between selected writers, chronology of interest in a given work, etc.). In the perspective of things to come, such an attitude will influence the research process itself. I am thinking about the entire problem area of Big Data and the circumstances in which researchers should be able to reject the choosing of a single sample, and work on the entire available population instead. In the case of literary studies, this could mean further appreciation of the so-called lowbrow literature (popular, mass, paperback, pulp literature...), since the research process will be able to encompass all texts from a given time period<sup>13</sup>.

11 Anne Burdick, *et al.* *Digital Humanities*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2012), 18.

12 See Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading*, (London: Verso, 2013).

13 As an example let us mention semantic research conducted on about 3000 British novels from the period between 1785-1900. See Ryan Heuser and Long Le-Khac “A Quantitative Literary History of 2,958 Nineteenth-Century British Novels: The Semantic Cohort Method” *Literary Lab Pamphlet*, 4, (Stanford: 2012).

## F5

Visualization. It is an important aspect of digital humanities understood as, on the one hand, a presentation of results (of, for example, stylometric statistical analyses), and on the other hand – as a tool for analyzing and exploring data<sup>14</sup>. In the second case, “cultural analytics” moves away from scientific research model of social sciences (theory-hypothesis-verification-theory) for the sake of “explorative visualization”. It is based on qualitative research conducted on large quantities of data. Research by Lev Manovich can serve as an example: elements such as the visualization of individual shots from Vertov’s movies, a series of covers of *Time* magazine, or a comparison of photographs of New York and Tokyo posted on Instagram. It is important to highlight the fact that, according to this approach, visualization becomes a phenomenon at the intersection of the research process and new media art<sup>15</sup>.

## F5

Laboratory. The way of conducting research in digital humanities is worth paying close attention to, particularly the building of interdisciplinary research teams that combine members of different disciplines: researchers of culture, statisticians, IT specialists, archivists and documentalists<sup>16</sup>. It is not so much about creating a research team in order to solve a particular problem, but rather about developing a lasting collaboration in various interdisciplinary projects. This interdisciplinary character has a “practical” dimension as well – it is not concerned with asking questions that rest on the boundary between disciplines, but about searching for answers to discipline-specific questions using new tools, often requiring additional competences.

14 See D.A. Keim, et al. ed. *Mastering the information age. Solving problems with visual analytics*, (Bad Langensalza: Druckhaus Thomas Müntzer GmbH, 2010), electronic version: <http://www.vismaster.eu/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/VisMaster-book-lowres.pdf> (accessed 04.07.2014). See Michał B. Paradowski “Wizualizacja danych – dużo więcej niż prezentacja” (“Visualizing data – more than presentation”) and “Dekalog analityka danych i infografika – quid, cur, quomodo” (“Data analyst and info-graphic designer Decalogue: quid, cur, quomodo”) in M. Kluza, ed. *Wizualizacja wiedzy. Od Biblia Pauperum do hipertekstu*, (Lublin: Portal Wiedza i Edukacja, 2011).

15 See Radosław Bomba, 3 February 2013, the article “Eksperymentalna wizualizacja. Połączenie nauki i sztuki” *Bomba.blog*, <http://radoslawbomba.umcs.lublin.pl/archives/1598> (accessed 04.06.2014).

16 We could point to Stanford Literary Lab, Trope Tank at MIT, or MetaLab at Harvard.

## F5

New forms of scientific communication and open scholarship. Another important characteristic of digital humanities is its insistence on deformalizing forms of scientific expression (that is, broadening the scholarly discourse with genres not present in it before), adjusting them to the new media facilities, and making them accessible to a wide audience. Organizing THATCamps (The Humanities and Technology Camp) – or non-conferences – is a part of that effort. They allow showcasing projects to everyone who works with digital media: researchers and practitioners (including artists). The main goal of these meetings is to popularize research and integrate the community.

Being a digital humanist is often connected with one's increased visibility on the web by means of publishing short popularizing texts on research blogs, or specialized websites, putting one's own texts in various repositories (pre-prints and post-prints of publications, conference presentations, research reports), as well as building multimedia narrations<sup>17</sup>. Digital humanists (even though such classification seems to be singling out that particular group from among other humanists... I mean researchers employing digital methods in a broad sense) also make the tools they are using accessible – they publish lists of their tools, along with user's manuals, give access to data which was used for the analysis, or specific lines of code they have written, which add certain functions to existing, freeware software<sup>18</sup>. However, we should remember that initiatives of this kind constitute an avant-garde in humanities, and are still not reflected in employee evaluation systems used by administrative boards, which certainly negatively influences the popularity of practices aiming at popularizing scientific knowledge<sup>19</sup>. As a result, we are faced with a paradoxical situation where it is far more "advantageous" to publish a text in a paper conference monograph with a small circulation, than it is to post it on a website (even on a reviewed one). Monographs are, of course, a basic form of research expression in humanities. However, they do not need to be made accessible in their printed form exclusively, which greatly limits their range.

17 Andrzej Radomski, "Digital storytelling. Kilka słów o wizualizacji wiedzy w humanistyce" ("Digital storytelling. Some remarks on the visualization of knowledge in the humanities") in *Zwrot cyfrowy w humanistyce. Internet – Nowe Media – Kultura 2.0*, ed. Andrzej Radomski and Radosław Bomba (Lublin: e-naukowiec, 2013).

18 See, for example: <http://programminghistorian.org/>, <http://www.clementlevallois.net/lab-softwarestudies.com/p/software-for-digital-humanities.html>.

19 See also: Radosław Bomba "Narzędzia cyfrowe jako wyznacznik nowego paradygmatu badań humanistycznych" ("Digital tools as markers of new research paradigm in humanities") in *Zwrot cyfrowy w humanistyce*, 66.

It should be emphasized that the digital environment in the humanities is often connected to postulates concerning open access to the scientific knowledge, licensing and opening archives. Let us mention in passing that *Second Texts* sympathize with those postulates, and as you are reading these words, the archival issues of our periodical (excluding six of the latest ones) are already accessible for free in the bibliographical database of humanist and social periodicals BazHum<sup>20</sup> as well as at the repository of the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences<sup>21</sup> (you are cordially invited to consult them).

## F5

The new role of the researcher. Digital humanists situate themselves in a space between two worlds – scientific traditions of the humanities and a new, dynamically developing digital culture. Therefore the task of researchers is to understand both worlds and mediate between them, while transmitting ideas and viewpoints (in both directions). An example of such actions directed at researchers could be the above-mentioned divulgation of postulates about the open access to scientific content, and in a reverse direction – teaching the rudiments of the standards of editing to people uploading literary texts online. Viktor Mayer-Schönberger, the author of a book on Big Data, even defines this new kind of researcher as a data scientist:

The data scientist will need a multidisciplinary background that spans math and statistics, to computer science, design and the humanities. This is because one needs to be fluent in the language of data — how to run regression models and double-tailed T tests. But also possess coding skills to write programs to scrap data, clean data, or simply collect data. Then, one needs to eye of a designer to present the data visually. And storytelling skills to have the data reveal a narrative. Finally, one needs a deep sense of humanity — to ensure we are not beguiled by data's false charms, and we keep our common sense amid the spreadsheets<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> <http://bazhum.pl/bib/journal/302/>

<sup>21</sup> <http://rcin.org.pl/publication/63380>

<sup>22</sup> Niaz Uddin, Viktor Mayer-Schönberger: *Big Data revolution*, eTalks, <http://etalks.me/viktor-may-er-schonberger-big-data-revolution/>, 03.31.2013 (accessed 04.06.2014).

A data scientist, curator, corpus editor<sup>23</sup> – the range of digital researchers' roles not only reaches beyond the boundaries of a discipline, but also greatly broadens the area of activities which heretofore were reserved for researchers.

## F5

The audience. On the basis of the characteristics of digital humanities that were discussed here we may clearly infer the very last question that I would like to point our attention to – the broadening and change of the role played by the audiences. One could say that as a result of new technologies for scientific communications we could apply “the long tail” thesis, which assumes that Internet sales are revolutionized by access to virtually unlimited variety of cultural goods, allowing producers to profit from non-hit products, since they can make all of them accessible at once, but with minimal operational costs<sup>24</sup>. The accessibility of knowledge, and the above-mentioned new forms of scientific communication (including the open access to texts) facilitate easier access for the audience interested in particular scientific inquiries, even the less popular ones. The role of the recipients changes as well. They not only familiarize themselves with the results of research, but also take advantage of tools created by us. This allows the authors of the *Digital Humanities* (text) book to develop their vision of omnipresent science (*ubiquitous scholarship*), “marked by an ethic of collaboration and interconnection on levels that move (almost effortlessly) between the global and the local, the library and the public square, the pen and the smartphone, the millennia-long histories of humankind and the real-time feeds of the now”.<sup>25</sup> The role of researchers is to work for a society that holds knowledge as its foundation, because it is right now when that phrase ceases to be an empty slogan.

## F5

I am writing here about the digital humanities as a form of refreshing philology. This refreshing has no pejorative character (it does not stand for a ground-up “renovation”, for example), nor is it overtly positive (I am far from

23 Gregory Crane, David Bamman and Alison Jones “ePhilology: when the books talk to their readers” in *A companion to digital literary studies*.

24 Chris Anderson, *Długi ogon. Ekonomia przyszłości – każdy konsument ma głos*, trans. B. Ludwiczak, (*The Long Tail: Why the Future of Business Is Selling Less of More*), (Poznań: Media Rodzina, 2008).

25 Burdick, et al. *Digital Humanities*, 60.



uncritical enthusiasm). I believe that these changes support the research work of a philologist, but do not alter its purpose, which is reading a culture through its texts. While I write this brief description I begin to lose my confidence as to what those distinguishing elements of digital humanities (as compared to humanities as such) should be. After all, we are digital humanists, both as the creators of new tools and digital collections, as well as by virtue of using them. I rub my eyes (F5) and still cannot see any major differences. Digital humanities is a scientific lifestyle, in which we all partake.

*Translation: Jan Pytalski*

---

Olga Cielemeńska

---

## Angelus Novus Looks to the Future On the Anti-Humanism which Overcomes Nothingness

---

DOI: 10.18318/td.2015.en.1.6

**T**he question of the human being's relation to the non-human might be the most important of all those that contemporary philosophy has to answer. The non-human is a broad category: machines and new technologies, animals along with the whole natural world – all have their place within it. In the era of late capitalism, ruled by technology and information, a change is occurring that no longer allows us to perceive man (sic) as the master of nature or technology. Rather s/he is surrounded on all sides by that which is non-human; what s/he herself or himself produces, and by which s/he herself or himself is produced.

Until recently the non-human constituted a necessary point of reference for the emergence, in opposition to it, of that which is genuinely human. Whether it was God, a superhuman entity, or Nature, the part they played was the same: they provided a differentiation point for the sphere of the human, which diverges from both the natural and supernatural. Since the times of ancient Greece until modernity efforts were undertaken to determine some kind of trait, ability or quality that would enable the discovery of a human *differentia specifica*. This trait was supposed to delimit a borderline beyond which a privileged space of human existence begins, which is

---

**Olga Cielemeńska** – a postdoc at the Unit of Gender Studies, Department of Thematic Studies, Linköping University. She holds a PhD in philosophy from Warsaw University in Poland. She was a research assistant at the Wirth Institute at University of Alberta in Canada, and a visiting researcher at ICON, Utrecht University. She brings together research within the domains of contemporary philosophy, feminist theory, and posthumanism, in an effort to re-think the concepts of the subject, community, and collaboration in the times of advanced capitalism and environmental change.

different from the life of animals and inanimate entities. Different periods in the history of ideas and science determined this strictly human feature to be, among many others, the possession of either the mind or the soul, being the creation of God made in his image and likeness, the ability to produce language, create tools or accumulate knowledge. Giorgio Agamben sees in a fragment from Aristotle's *On the Soul* the foundation for the kind of thinking about man that must necessarily establish some trait that is strictly human. Aristotle enumerates three kinds of souls, of which only one is essentially human and is not possessed by any other creature. It is all about "that human beings be human and not inhumane"<sup>1</sup>, and for this to happen, they must detach and differentiate from that which is non-human within themselves.

The shift we are currently witnessing is an outcome of the realization that the difference between the human and non-human is not solid enough to shield that which is human from the non-human. The non-human destabilizes previous concepts of subjectivity, forces questions addressing the human being's place in the world. But what exactly do we have in mind when we talk about the non-human?

First of all, the non-human encompasses the broad category of machines, not only the technological ones like robots, cyborgs, networks of virtual communication and flow of capital, but most of all the machines of power. The non-human is also an ethical category, inclusive of those who are marginalized, those who are dehumanized or those deprived of human rights. Finally, the non-human refers to the animal. The issue of animal rights and human obligations towards them derives from a much more fundamental realization: that the difference between the human and the animal is possibly an arbitrary one, it undergoes shifts and changes up to the point of dissolution.

These three fields, to which I narrow down the concept of the non-human, are accompanied by three corresponding types of anxiety. The first is the anxiety of dehumanization of man by machinery. Not only by emerging technologies, for example cellular phones of which Giorgio Agamben was so critical, but by the power itself, the social structure, that which transcends humanity and produces it and at the same time is imagined as a kind of machine. Secondly, the social exclusion, ethnic cleansing, colonization, slavery and concentration camps – the whole baggage of cruelty in the administering of which the twentieth century was so adroit, leads to the conclusion that simply acknowledging that a being is human does not protect it from violence. Moreover, it arouses a kind of suspicion that the term "human" is an

1 Martin Heidegger, *Letter on 'Humanism'*, in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998), 244.

instrument of control and exclusion of those who have been denied their humanity. Classical philosophical and ethical concepts: man, humanity, human dignity, the sanctity of human life, progress, all become useless and discredited. What exposes their disgraceful inadequacy is primarily the experience of Shoah that is fundamental for the entire twentieth century philosophy. Thirdly, facing that which is animal reveals the fear of mixing the human with the animal (or machine), of blurring the borderlines separating them from one another.

In reaction to the crisis of faith in the human, the “death of man” has been proclaimed. At first the concentrated attack of the non-human, from which there is no escape, causes philosophy to wave a white flag by declaring the end of history, the destruction of metaphysics, the death of subjectivity and finally the end of man. Postmodern thinkers delight in this beautiful catastrophe by shattering notion after notion that philosophy relied upon until now. Nevertheless one cannot equate anti-humanism with decadence, or nihilism. Pessimism arising from the realization that nothing shields the human from the influx of the non-human, that the notion ‘human’ in the present form cannot be saved, is opposed by another mode of thinking, one which regards the death of man as a chance for liberation, and the non-human, instead of being perceived as a threat and catastrophe, is recognized as a creative, productive and sometimes even potentially liberating area. This affirmative and militant anti-humanism not only opposes humanism, but can also keep up its tradition. As Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt write:

Once we recognize our posthuman bodies and minds, once we see ourselves for the simians and cyborgs we are, we then need to explore the *vis viva*, the creative powers that animate us as they do all of nature and actualize our potentialities. This is humanism after the death of Man: what Foucault calls “le travail de soi sur soi,” the continuous constituent project to create and re-create ourselves and our world<sup>2</sup>.

It is precisely this shift in attitude that will be the object of my consideration.

I will delineate three areas wherein it takes place. The starting point in each case will be the intertwinement of the human with the non-human: life with power, the organic with the mechanical and the human with the animal. The sheer impossibility of their clear differentiation inspires the idea of a new kind of figuration of subjectivity.

The weakening of the subject, taking place in the twentieth century in the works of thinkers most prominent of whom are perhaps Michel Foucault

2 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 92.

and Jacques Lacan, leads to the placement of the mechanisms of power or language, that are responsible for the production of human beings, in the spotlight of theoretical deliberation. The subject becomes subdued to their rule, reduced to a mere derivative of non-human mechanisms: a product of power or an effect of language. The notion I will examine within this context is biopolitics. Imagined in the form of machinery that produces subjectivity in an oppressive manner, it is an expression of the subsumption of the subject under that which is non-human; biopolitics is a system, a network, a machine within which the subject is submerged. Contrary to this viewpoint I will attempt to present biopolitics in its creative aspect that allows it to become a synonym for creative resistance within the apparatuses of power.

The death of the subject might have been merely a consequence of the struggle against the enlightenment “myth of liberation through rationality” that was in progress since the Second World War. The critique of instrumental and technical reason, shaped by Heidegger, Adorno and Horkheimer, and the following despondency in the face of mass society’s growing idiocy, a society controlled by the media and the advertising industry, leads to the conviction that technological progress is the sole culprit responsible for every misery, from the Holocaust to the complete disregard for Being. Media, machinery and technology bring about inhumanity, oppression and stultification. In opposition to the dominant anti-technological attitude there emerged a theoretical reflection on contemporary reality, positing that the ever-present creations of technology and human beings must not necessarily engage in conflict, but can cohabit and reshape their world. In consequence, a cyborg or hybrid – creations blending the human with the non-human – have become a model for human subjectivity.

Finally, the issue of the relations of that which is human to the animal. The monolithic, auto-assertive and self-conscious subject, the master of nature and creator of technology, turns out to be an inadequate model of subjectivity for the purpose of describing the place and role of the human being within the universe. This crisis opens a possibility of perceiving the human being not as residing within a privileged space beyond or above the animal kingdom, but within its borders. To this peculiar transfer of the human being into the sphere of the non-human, the decentralization that “places man back within the animal, within nature, and within a space and time that man does not regulate, understand or control?”<sup>3</sup>, I will dedicate the final part of this paper.

---

3 Elizabeth Grosz, *Becoming Undone. Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics, and Art* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011) 25.

### Biopolitics and Its Discontents

'Biopolitics' is an important notion that helps describe the invasion of the non-human that is a cause of shift in the perception of the human subject. Biopolitics equals a mix of life and power, one where technology of power not only takes human life into its grasp but also remodels it and finally becomes responsible for its production. In the form Michel Foucault gave to the term in the seventies biopolitics denotes an essential reshaping of politics at the end of the eighteenth century, when biological life was introduced into the mechanisms of state rule. From then on governments took upon themselves the responsibility for the life of both the individuals and the human multitude. This results in a state of affairs where, on the one hand, biopolitics disciplines the individual body and through norms, which are the basic form of exercising biopolitics, "had assigned itself the task of administering life"<sup>4</sup>. On the other hand, the population as a whole comes to the forefront of political attention. It will be governed by means of birth and mortality control, the control of health, hygiene, sexuality, nutrition and housing conditions, all of this is accompanied by advancements in specific forms of knowledge and scientific disciplines, such as statistics, demographics or epidemiology: "biopolitics will derive its knowledge from, and define its power's field of intervention in terms of, the birth rate, the mortality rate, various biological disabilities, and the effects of the environment"<sup>5</sup>. Namely, the main goal of this new type of power will be the issue of "regulating populations"<sup>6</sup>.

Biopolitics is, as Foucault writes, "what brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life"<sup>7</sup>. Power envisioned this way seems radically non-external and this means there is no escaping it. A human being tightly entangled by the web of power is situated within its very center and through normalizing operations, which s/he is subjected to, s/he eventually becomes indistinguishable from it. Power transcends life, absorbing the minds and bodies of its subjects. Biopower rules by proxy of institutions and mechanisms, but embeds itself deep within the very core of subjectivity and corporeality. "The control of society over individuals is not conducted only through consciousness or ideology, but also in the body and with the body.

---

4 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York: Random House, 1990), 137.

5 Michel Foucault, "Society Must be Defended". *Lectures at the College de France, 1975-76*, ed. Mauro Bertani et al. (New York: Picador, 2003), 245.

6 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 146.

7 Ibid., 143.

For capitalist society biopolitics is what is most important, the biological, the somatic, the corporeal”<sup>8</sup>. This makes biopolitics not only a politics of administering bodies, but a procedure of producing them, trimmed and fitted according to its needs.

The notion of biopolitics became crucial in late twentieth-century thought, as it framed anxieties stemming from the ongoing political, economic and societal changes of the time. The fall of the Soviet Union paved the way for an uninterrupted procession of capitalism, a system for which there seems to be no alternative. The developments in the field of medicine, overshadowed by racist and eugenic experiments of the Nazis, gave rise to fears of a new advanced form of eugenics. Novel and perpetually perfected technologies, that are supposed to guarantee safety, have become a source of growing anxiety about our lives and health. The dense, suffocating web of biopolitical power, engrossing and controlling every aspect of human life, brings about the premonition that there no longer are any areas of freedom, a blank space free of the omnipotence that has cunningly, nearly unperceived, claimed the whole realm of human existence. Man ceased being a slave only to become a debtor – as Deleuze proclaimed.

If Foucault has assigned the birth of biopolitics a place in time, associating it with the dominance of capitalism and modern racism, then the development of this notion, in the form given to it by the Italian thinker Giorgio Agamben, came with the realization that every power is already biopolitical. Rule over life constitutes the irremovable core of power, and the modern state that has the biological body for its central object “therefore does nothing other than bring to light the secret tie uniting power and bare life, thereby reaffirming the bond [...] between modern power and the most immemorial of the *arcana imperii*”<sup>9</sup>.

According to Aristotle, man is *zoon politikon*, a free citizen, who beside the biological dimension of life is granted the specifically human – political mode of existence. The political dimension of life is synonymous with human freedom, equality and dignity. However, biopolitics acknowledges only the animalistic, biological side of human life that forms the object of power, becomes politicized. If “for millennia, man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question”<sup>10</sup>.

8 Michael Foucault, *La naissance de la médecine sociale*, after Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 27.

9 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 6.

10 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 143.

In ancient Greece the division of forms of life into *bios* and *zoe*, where *zoe* referred to the form of life common to all living creatures, and *bios* referenced a particular, defined form of life that can be properly attributed only to a certain individual or group; meant that *bios* was specific only to the life of human beings and possessed a certain quality. According to Giorgio Agamben, this ancient distinction between *bios* and *zoe* is the cornerstone of biopolitics. The Italian thinker is interested in the splitting of the meaning of the word 'life' in two: in its aftermath not every man's life is a truly human life, as not everyone is granted a *bios politikos*. Precisely this division into diverging, incompatible forms of life is the source of the emergence of the biopolitical body, of the bare or sacred life, as Agamben calls it. The philosopher claims: "It is as if every valorization and every «politicization» of life [...] necessarily implies a new decision concerning the threshold beyond which life ceases to be politically relevant, becomes only «sacred life», and can as such be eliminated without punishment"<sup>11</sup>. Inner tension and inconsistency thus enter the definition of "life" and "human". Agamben identifies the form of life that is common to all people – the bare life, as a field of political play, and a space of enslavement. In itself it is not subject to any kind of protection, it is not granted any rights, dignity or sanctity. Chronicling the delineation of borders between the bare life and the political existence might be the most ambitious task Agamben sets out to accomplish through his works, where he attempts to reach deep into the "uncertain and nameless terrains, these difficult zones of indistinction"<sup>12</sup>, where the human and non-human, politics and life, *bios* and *zoe*, *physis* and *nomos* mix together. Eventually the line separating them "moved inside every human life and every citizen. Bare life is no longer confined to a particular place or a definite category. It now dwells in the biological body of every living being"<sup>13</sup>.

Each life turns out to be subjected to power that, being biopolitical, reveals simultaneously its thanatopolitical dimension. The concept of biopolitics exposes the subject's lack of autonomy, its subordination to the mechanism that rules life and death, and which includes or excludes her, him or them from the set consisting of what is human. It constitutes an uncertain division between human and non-human that is the source of the violence of exclusion. According to Foucault, biopolitics is about producing and controlling docile bodies, for Agamben it is about being excluded from or being included in humanity. Recognizing the biopolitical character of power seems to enclose that

<sup>11</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 139.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.



which is human in a vicious circle of exclusion, enslavement, subordination, death. Contrary to this pessimistic reflection upon biopolitics the theories of both Foucault and Agamben have within themselves seeds of resistance to the biorule exerted over human life. In both cases these emancipatory themes reveal points of friction within the dense structure of biopower.

In *The Will to Knowledge* Foucault leaves a clue to a possible strategy of resistance to power: "Where there is power, there is resistance [...] so too the swarm of points of resistance traverses social stratifications and individual unities"<sup>14</sup>. In the network structure of power there are points of possible intervention, cracks inherently present in the system. Although there is no area beyond power, the subject is capable of a momentary revolt against it. At the end of the eighties an American theorist – Judith Butler – further developed the Foucaultian theories with a focus precisely on these points of resistance within biopower. Butler proposed a strategy of political emancipation based on the practice of parodic repetition of the repressive norms ruling human life, through which the whole system of power becomes disrupted<sup>15</sup>. Likewise, Agamben in his formulation of biopower sees a certain weak possibility of resistance. In the division between bare life and political existence he introduces an irreducible point, which is governed by a different kind of logic than biopolitics, and for this reason "turns into an existence over which power no longer seems to have any hold"<sup>16</sup>, becoming a point of resistance, which biopolitics cannot overpower. Bare life, on the one hand, expresses the tragic impossibility of escaping power, but on the other hand, although it remains absolutely passive, it brings hope for its deactivation.

These weak forms of resistance against biopower, which are hinted at by Foucault and Agamben, are derivative of the structure of power itself, they are its effect. At the same time they are a kind of a crack or a "glitch" in the system. Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, the authors of *Empire*, conceptualize the possibility of emancipation differently. They wish for the kind of resistance that is not situated in the margins, within the cracks of the system, but one that looks beyond the "horizon of destruction and death that still smolders behind us"<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 93.

<sup>15</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>16</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 153.

<sup>17</sup> Antonio Negri, "The Italian Difference" in *The Italian Difference. Between Nihilism and Biopolitics*, ed. Lorenzo Chiesa and Alberto Toscano (Melbourne: re.press, 2009), 21.

They differentiate between biopower and biopolitics – both terms were not precisely distinguished by either Foucault or Agamben – and offer a completely new, affirmative, articulation of the notion of biopolitics. “Biopower stands above society, transcendent, as a sovereign authority and imposes its order. Biopolitical production, in contrast, is immanent to society and creates social relationships and forms through collaborative forms of labor”<sup>18</sup>. Biopolitics according to Negri and Hardt unexpectedly becomes a useful tool in the development of a political ontology of a revolutionary subject. A way of overcoming the inertia of the suffering, submissive *homo sacer* and of construing a new subjective figuration expressing a certain kind of a power of being.

Biopolitics becomes a creative and productive field wherein the angel of history, Angelus Novus, that looks to the past and “sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet”<sup>19</sup> can now trustingly turn his gaze towards the future<sup>20</sup>.

This kind of looking forward is impossible, according to the authors of *Empire*, on the grounds of Foucaultian biopolitics, where it remains an in-human machine of ruling that claims its right over human life, gorging on subjectivities<sup>21</sup>. Negri and Hardt accuse Foucault of proposing an excessively static view of biopolitics, one that does not take into account the shift from its modern to its postmodern form or, as Deleuze saw it, from a disciplinary society, where power is exercised over bodies through discipline, supervision and training, to a much more subtle society of control. In the postmodern society of control the “mechanisms of command become [...] ever more immanent to the social field”, and the normalizing apparatuses “that internally animate our common and daily practices”<sup>22</sup> exercise control that, in contrast with the disciplinary society, reaches far beyond institutions such as schools, clinics, prisons or factories. Negri and Hardt named this new form of power *Empire*.

In the transition from a disciplinary society to the society of control, that is situated completely in the biopolitical paradigm, the nature of resistance to power undergoes a change. In the face of this transformation Negri and

18 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude. War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004), 94.

19 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 2008), 257.

20 Negri, “The Italian Difference”, 21–23.

21 Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 22.

22 *Ibid.*, 23.

Hardt, just as Deleuze had done, set for themselves a task of “finding new weapons”<sup>23</sup>, new strategies of resistance and liberation.

In the disciplinary model an individual’s subjugation to the institutions of power is opposed by individual resistance. In the model of control this is no longer possible, as power no longer rules, but rather produces subjectivity. This results not only in more efficient means of controlling life, which eludes power in isolated points of resistance, as Foucault would have it, but the resistance itself is transferred into the center of the network of power. “Civil society is absorbed in the state, but the consequence of this is an explosion of the elements that were previously coordinated and mediated in civil society. Resistances are no longer marginal but active in the center of a society that opens up in networks; the individual points are singularized in a thousand *plateaux*.”<sup>24</sup> According to the authors of *Empire* Foucault misdiagnosed the dynamics and transformations of the system that he described. This particular aspect is in turn addressed by Deleuze and Guattari who “discover the productivity of social reproduction (creative production, production of values, social relations, affects, becomings), but manage to articulate it only superficially and ephemerally, as a chaotic, indeterminate horizon marked by the ungraspable event”<sup>25</sup>.

The task Negri and Hardt set before themselves is the description of the productive side of a biopolitical society. It has at its source the *multitude*, the human collective present within the network of power; “within Empire and against Empire. New figures of struggle and new subjectivities are produced in the conjuncture of events, in the universal nomadism, in the general mixture and miscegenation of individuals and populations, and in the technological metamorphoses of the imperial biopolitical machine”<sup>26</sup>. Biopolitics administers the life of the *multitude* and produces it, but at the same time it remains dependent upon it – the *multitude* can oppose biopolitics by revealing its creative, disruptive and potentially revolutionary character. In consequence of the pressures, exerted by a global market, that force migrations and globalization which in turn facilitate the mixing of cultures and races on an unparalleled scale; and of the emerging computerized networks of communication that augment the formation of previously unknown languages; the phenomena associated with the dispersed, technologized and ubiquitous model of power are combined with the productive power of the *multitude*.

23 Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations. 1972-1990* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 178.

24 Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 25.

25 Ibid., 28.

26 Ibid., 61.

Deleuze demonstrated how different kinds of machines reflect the transitions that societies undergo – as they express the social forms that have created them. “Old sovereign societies worked with simple machines, levers, pulleys, clocks; but recent disciplinary societies were equipped with thermodynamic machines[...]<sup>27</sup> contemporary postmodern societies have at their disposal information machines and computers. They reveal the omnipresence of power and capital, which circulates unrestrained – ignoring and nullifying borders present in the world. At the same time the biopolitical global society, just as the World Wide Web, is a democratic band of channels, highly susceptible to mutation and change, roamed by both the power and the discontent aimed against it.

The way of thinking employed by Negri and Hardt is well suited for the investigation of the character of changes contemporary societies undergo. Unfortunately they are not immune to error, particularly when they attempt to distinguish within biopolitics its negative, mechanical side: “[an] empty machine, a spectacular machine, a parasitical machine”<sup>28</sup> and the positive, creative *multitude* that animates it. All things considered, Negri and Hardt merely alter the hierarchy: it is not the global, imperial biopower that rules the *multitude*, instead it is supported by and it relies upon it. However, the authors of *Multitude* open a possibility of avoiding the grim outlook on biopower, that being our reality is also the worst, because almost unnoticeable, prison. The constituted network of biopolitical power is the very same one that is inhabited by resistance and creativity; it is the force defining the paths of communication and the ways of constituting subjectivity.

Choosing the notion of biopolitics as a starting point might turn out to be an inspired move if, instead of succumbing to the hopelessness accompanying the recognition of the omnipotence and inhumanity of the power that creates us, we will view it as a necessary condition for producing the revolutionary subjectivity. Both Foucault and Agamben place resistance on the margins of power. In Foucault’s case the resistance is akin to an electric discharge, manifesting itself suddenly and passing just as swiftly within the dense biopolitical network of power. Agamben discovered the blind spot, independent from power, to be a by-product of the machine of power itself, that can nevertheless nullify its political agency. The real challenge is the description of the structure of global power which produces the body, and allows it to retain its productive, creative capabilities. It would shed new light upon the mechanisms of power: as the force controlling life, but also facilitating the creation of new networks

---

27 Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 180.

28 Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 62.

and configurations of bodies, new forms of corporeality and subjectivity. In this case the non-human creates the human in the form of a prisoner and an eternal rebel at the same time.

### **Machines, Cyborgs, Hybrids**

One of postmodernism's achievements was the unmasking of the binary oppositions that gave structure to the Western philosophical tradition. Some of those dichotomies are: culture/nature, male/female, center/periphery, human/animal, civilization/barbarity, truth/falsehood, I/Other, whole/part. These pairs are not mere antonyms, but due to the first term's privileged position over the second, they constitute a hierarchy. On the basis of these binaries a form of ruling emerged that is responsible for the exclusion of the opposing elements in the hierarchy. Postmodernist thinkers discovered the oppressive nature of a structure that by praising one part of the opposition (culture, male, human, center, civilization, truth etc.), causes the repression of the other, deeming it worthless. They have recognized the dialectic act that eliminates the difference, so as to subsume it under the unifying property of the One. The postmodern project tried to oppose this logic of reducing everything to oneness, through reconstituting the overlooked counterparts of binary oppositions and the affirmation of difference. One of the effects of this endeavor was the emergence of a figure of the Other – the incomprehensible stranger, who does not belong to the familiar order of things – for whom the postmodern thinkers demanded respect and appreciation.

Negri and Hardt demonstrate that this kind of thinking is already anachronistic. The assumption that power acts through opposing binaries and dialectics, reducing the different to the identical, is simply wrong in the face of a power that is itself a hybrid, variable and decentralized. The postmodern project proved ineffective for the purpose of adequately describing the character of contemporary forms of power and for providing means of liberation from them. Dominant meta-narratives ceased to exist, so there is nothing to overpower anymore, there no longer are any enduring differentials, shattering of which could lead to liberation.

Binaries can no longer serve as a starting point, neither can attacking them for that matter. Rather, the new starting point comes from the perception of a gap, present where previously there was a line of separation. From the point of view of advanced technologies, represented in the works of the American theorist Donna Haraway, binaries have not only been subverted, but *techno-digested*.

Haraway points to three boundaries which were previously established and that seemed inviolable. Today we must view them as considerably

tarnished, and draw lessons from this observation for the future. First and foremost, there is no hiatus between the human and the animal, as scientific experiments prove by exposing the familiarity between the two. I will expound on this insight in a moment. The second division lays between the space of living beings and machines. It is now under siege from technological aberrations that put to the test our certainty about the difference between the artificial and the natural, that which is born and that which is manufactured. The third line is crossed by the means of the ubiquitous miniaturization and pervasiveness of technologies. In every place and at every moment technology pervades human life and experience, to the extent where the human being is permanently and discreetly accompanied by the non-human – mixing, modifying and transforming it. The model representing the relations of the animate – inanimate, organic – mechanical, human – machine can no longer be seen in the assembly line, the alienating property of which has been ironically depicted by Charlie Chaplin in the motion picture *Modern Times*. Now it can be rather found in the inseparable composite of the human and the mechanical – a hybrid – in the super prosthesis of a limb or the heart-lung machine, that transposes human life beyond the corporal boundaries of the body and grants it a chance for survival in that realm.

Blending the human with the mechanical might seem a violation of taboo. The technological intervention into human life and the transformation of that which is human, by means of technology seems to pose the greatest risk. These anxieties, Heideggerian in their nature, are firmly opposed by authors who are more than happy with breaking the taboo. Bruno Latour deposes the dualities of culture and nature, subject and object, human and thing. In their place appears a “common world of humans and non-humans”. The strict distinction made between the human and the non-human is a mirage, according to the French philosopher. The more we long for a separation of these two spheres, the more hybrid entities emerge that are halfway between human and machine. “Modernity – the thinker tells us – is often defined in terms of humanism, either as a way of saluting the birth of ‘man’ or as a way of announcing his death”. In both cases what is overlooked is the “simultaneous birth of ‘nonhumanity’ – things, or objects, or beasts – and the equally strange beginning of a crossed-out God, relegated to the sidelines”<sup>29</sup>. To describe the human being and his/her/its existence in the world one cannot disregard humans as being-machines, their coexistence in the non-human. Latour, who obviously addresses a more widespread transformation occurring within contemporary philosophical anthropology, does not assent to the proclamations

---

29 Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), 13.

of the Death of Man, as “nothing is sufficiently inhuman to dissolve human beings in it and announce their death”<sup>30</sup>.

The goal is therefore the pursuit of a new place for the human in the realm of the non-human. Previous formulations of subjectivity: “the free agent, the citizen builder of the Leviathan, the distressing visage of the human person, the other of a relationship, consciousness, the *cogito*, the hermeneut, the inner self, the thee and thou of dialogue, presence to oneself, intersubjectivity”<sup>31</sup> are not able to explain man’s being in the world, as they all overlook his /her/their share in things. Neither can anti-humanism, for that matter, as it dissolves the human in the network of power, language games or discourse. In their place Donna Haraway puts the figure of a cyborg, which enables her to see the figuration of modern subjectivity.

The cyborg as a product of technoculture, perceived as a hybrid, a frightful creation crossing the line of human and non-human, for Haraway became a key figure that allowed her to rethink the relation of the human to other entities in a constantly changing, technologized and mechanized world. The cyborg is a figure that ends the struggle for upholding boundaries, for subordinating nature to cultural production, the war between man and machine, at the same time it exposes the pleasure derived from the blurring of lines. In place of the opposing nature and culture there emerges a new element – the culture-nature; instead of a human being distinct from the machine we get a perverse intertwinement of the two – a cyborg.

The ambiguous character of the cyborg is among the numerous reasons Haraway chooses it to serve as a metaphor for the human condition. The creation of the cyborg is an effect of an arms race, of Western militarism and patriarchal domination, it is their illegitimate child: it represents a rebellion against culture which brought it to life, symbolizing in this respect a new configuration of culture/nature, political/personal, human/non-human. The paradox contained in the figure of the cyborg comes from the fact that while being a threat, a synonym of the paranoid arms race, it is at the same time a promise of a new form of the human being’s functioning in a materialistic, corporal world, that allows humankind to cease fearing its kinship with the animal and the machine, as well as his partial, unfinished and incoherent identity. According to Haraway, as organic, corporal, human entities, we can enter close and intimate relationships with machines, so that they are recognized as something kindred, co-constituting human life.

---

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 136.

The goal the American thinker sets before herself is not a description of a new kind of machines called cyborgs, but a diagnosis of the changes underway in contemporary society, in which “we are cyborgs”, the illegitimate children of the patriarchal, militarized power. The cyborg is most of all a figure that compels us to reconsider the complexity of our time, and to become aware of the ragged borders separating the human and the mechanical, the animate and organic from the inanimate object. In the world described by Haraway as a world of webs, interlinks and communication, the cyborg is a “figure of interrelationality, receptivity, and global communication that deliberately blurs categorical distinctions (human/machine; nature/culture; male/female; oedipal/nonoedipal)”<sup>32</sup>.

Negri and Hardt point out that Haraway carries on Spinoza’s project in her attempt to create a vision of the world where the human laws are not distinct from the laws of nature. Reconfigurations of the body, the transitions of sexuality, and the transformations of desire are possible in the space of freedom, where humankind is not subject to laws different to those governing animals and machines, and is not separated from them in a strict way. Thus an affirmation of mixing, flowing and change becomes possible.

The praise for the machine, mutation and hybridism marks the end of a certain phase in critical thinking that lasted from the time of Heidegger, Adorno and Horkheimer until Derrida, that “is now a closed parenthesis and leaves us faced with a new task: constructing, in the non-place, a new place; constructing ontologically new determinations of the human, of living—a powerful artificiality of being”<sup>33</sup>.

Donna Haraway’s cyborg fable is a symbolic passage from the philosophical thought that perceived technology, the technological-instrumental reason as a source of impending doom, to a more nuanced concept of the computerized, technologized structure of the contemporary world. This affirmative aspect that supplements the critical and skeptical viewpoint on technology, allows a more adequate diagnosis of the changes contemporarily taking place in the world, changes that go beyond dualities and refuse to take part in the process of purification and subjugation. Finally relinquishing the besieged stronghold of the human and consenting to the fusion of the human with the non-human, culminates in the embedment of the human subject within the hybrid, human-non-human reality, where there is nothing neither pure nor static.

32 Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects. Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 105.

33 Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 217.



### The Return of the Animal

The transposition of the human into the realm of the non-human occurs as a two-phase process. At first the realization that non-human powers are at play in the production of subjectivity, to which it is subordinate, results in a crisis. But afterwards this crisis becomes a source of acknowledgment that the proper space for the human is precisely the sphere of the non-human.

The attributes of humanity such as: the soul, reason, consciousness, morality were tasked with differentiating man (sic) from all other animals. They secured his (sic) privileged position among other living beings. This position in turn granted him the right to rule over the animal world. The loss of this right opens new possibilities, as "the human, when situated as one among many, is no longer in the position of speaking for and authorizing the analysis of the animal as other, and no longer takes on the right to name, categorize, the rest of the world (...)"<sup>34</sup>.

The relation between man and animal will be analyzed in two configurations: first the relation of that which is human *to* that which is animal, and then the animal *within* the human. These two perspectives enable a reconstruction of the movement that substitutes an opposition with a creative, productive and generative relation.

The Australian philosopher Elizabeth Grosz proposes a return to Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, as it is he who discovered that the difference between the human species and the animals is quantitative, not qualitative. Darwin places humans within an evolutionary process, the nature of which is constant change from one form of life into another. The human being is placed in this drift of eternal becoming, of perpetual change and passage. He/she/they turns out to be a temporary species, that emerged from preceding forms of humanoid animals and is heading for a transition into some new, yet unknown, species. Man is that, what is in the process of becoming an animal.

Properly human traits have their basis in the early forms of animal life from which the human being evolved: language – in the calls animals use to communicate, reason – in the preceding forms of animal rationality. It is to a large extent due to Darwin's investigations that man can now be thought of as one among many animal species. Non-human animals do not differ significantly from humans; they develop forms of community, language, taste, attractiveness, utility or rationality appropriate for their kind, just as the human being does.

According to Grosz, accepting these facts leads to the creation of a project of a "fleeting" humanity that transcends itself. This project enables a transformation of its own subject and paves the way for a procession of questions

---

34 Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 24.

that propel the humanities into previously uncharted territory. "How open-endedly must we understand language, representation, and art (...) if we are to problematize the opposition between animal and human, and fully immerse the human in the worlds of the animal? What is distinctively human in the humanities if man is again, in the light of Darwin's rearrangement of the universe, placed in the context of animals and animal-becomings?"<sup>35</sup>, how will our perception of language change, if we take into account languages descending from that which is animal? Where are the boundaries of the humanities? What shape will the humanities assume when humans become post-human?

Rearranging the relation between the human and the animal results in deposing man (sic) from his privileged position that until now permitted him to describe and hierarchize the world, to appropriate the human and dominate the animal. Instead, situated among other animals, s/he can transcend himself or herself and proceed with his scientific endeavors in the unknown, extraordinary and fertile territories.

The second of the relations, that I have mentioned earlier, reveals the dividing line between the animal and the human within the human. A composite of body and soul, matter and spirit, vegetative power and reason – the human is a permanently divided being, through which runs the line dividing human and animal traits. What connects man to the animal world: corporeality, materiality, sensuality is separated from the distinctly human traits. Giorgio Agamben labels this logic of producing man as "humanism's anthropological machine": its primary aim is to conceal the fact that there is no such thing as a core or nature of humanity, only a chain of cuts and differences that introduce a superficial distinction between the animal and the human elements that humanity consists of. The anthropological machine produces a definition of what man really is that is mediated by that which is non-human.

The process of delineating, by means of this dynamic mechanism, distinct areas of *humanitas* and *animalitas*, creates a gap between the two – this is an area of ongoing negotiations about which life will be considered human and which, deemed as animal, will be cast away from the human community. Because the dividing line between the human and the animal is not set in stone, each society decides for itself who will be denied human traits and banished. For this reason the anthropological machine is not only capable of producing that which is human, but also disposing of what ceases to be human from the community of man.

Through the manufacturing of notions such as reason, language or consciousness that refer only to human beings and that attest to the human

---

35 Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 14.

being's exceptional place among living beings, "philosophy has attributed to man a power that animals lack (and often that women, children, slaves, foreigners, and others also lack: the alignment of the most abjected others with animals is ubiquitous)"<sup>36</sup>. This introduces a disconcerting paradox into the notion "human being" – it is bestowed upon those, whose existence is deemed human and in consequence is considered dignified and worthy of protection. For this reason the problem of defining a human being and human life was always the center of attention for emancipatory, anti-racist, post-colonial and feminist movements. They all try to comprehend the relationship between domination, violence and the imposed definition of the human being, and reveal "what categories of human are classified as borderline, less than human, or already on the animal-side of the human"<sup>37</sup>. The crisis of subjectivity, the category of "man" as an instrument of rule and subjugation coincides with the point in history, when the demands of emancipatory movements, colonized nations, ethnic, racial and sexual minorities are beginning to be met. Because members of these groups have never identified with the autonomous and regal enlightenment subject, they do not strike apocalyptic or nihilistic chords in face of its proclaimed crisis or death, as some would have it. Quite the contrary – this crisis opens a possibility of finding new figurations of subjectivity that would be capable of talking in the voice of those who have been denied their own until now. This novel redefinition of the human subject courageously begins with the act of mixing it with the non-human.

In *The Open* Agamben introduces a metaphor for this mixing of spheres. It is a miniature from a copy of the Hebrew Bible from the collection of the Ambrosian Library in Milan. It represents the messianic banquet of the righteous on the last day – they are the God-fearing Jews who have observed the prescriptions of the Torah for their whole lives, and on the final day partake in a feast, consuming the meat of Behemoth and Leviathan, impure, mythical, biblical animals. The depicted silhouettes have human bodies, yet animal heads. This fulfilled humanity represented through animal heads, illustrates a novel relation between the human and the animal within man. This relation is no longer based on subjectifying the animal, but rather on reconciling with it. The meat feasted upon is no longer trefa, as the division between clean and unclean has ceased to exist. The same applies to the division between the human and the animal, if it were to be a reason for banishment of those considered non-human.

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 15.

The reaction to the fear that arises when one crosses the boundary between the human and the non-human: machine or animal, is a fervent attempt to cleanse the notion “human” of all traces of the non-human. The strategy of isolation and purification ultimately fails. The categories charged with safeguarding the preordained structure and preventing humans from becoming non-human, stopped being impermeable.

Another reaction to the confusion, to this ritual impurity, might be laughter. The very same that led Foucault to write *The Order of Things*:

This book first arose out of a passage in Borges, out of the laughter that shattered, as I read the passage, all the familiar landmarks of my thought – our thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography – breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things, and continuing long afterwards to disturb and threaten with collapse our age-old distinction between the Same and the Other. This passage quotes a ‘certain Chinese encyclopedia’ in which it is written that ‘animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies’<sup>38</sup>.

The laughter that does not fear a confusion of categories can give rise to a new way of thinking that surpasses predefined borders. A way of thinking, which in a cyborg, monkey or machine discovers a kinship with humanity and draws conclusions from that. The human fear of losing his/hers/their humanity gives way to hope for the human being’s salvation in spite of their proclaimed “death”.

*Translation: Rafał Pawluk*

---

<sup>38</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things. An archeology of the human sciences* (London: Routledge, 2002), XVI.

---

Magdalena Popiel

---

## The Avant-Garde Artist: Between the All-Too-Human and the Inhuman. Towards an Anthropological Aesthetics

---

DOI: 10.18318/td.2015.en.1.7

The whole man is an author.  
Paul Valéry

### Anthropological Aesthetics

"There really is no such thing as Art. There are only artists"<sup>1</sup> – states Erich Gombrich at the beginning of one of his works. This is neither an obvious nor a universally accepted claim within the field of contemporary art history, but it does exhibit an interesting coherence with the aesthetic thinking prevalent in various areas of the humanities.

During the course of the twentieth century philosophy of art has put the aesthetic object in the center of its interest. Questions addressing the work of art have been placed from within different methodologies, and have outlined the main investigatory horizon of aesthetics. This rather restrictive way of defining the investigative field coincided with the proposition of scientific objectivism, especially among the formalist branches within aesthetics. Literary criticism's abandonment of the nineteenth-century biographism and psychologism resulted in peculiar stance of resentment that in turn led to the resolute proposition of the emancipation of the work of art. Reception of art framed in terms of interpersonal

---

**Magdalena Popiel** – professor at the Department of Anthropology of Literature and Cultural Studies in the Faculty of Polish Studies at the Jagiellonian University. She is engaged in the study of the aesthetics of modernism, the theory and history of the novel and Italian literary criticism. Author of the following books: *Historia i metafora* (1989), *Oblicza wzniosłości. Estetyka powieści młodopolskiej* (1999), *Wyspiański. Mitologia nowoczesnego artysty* (2007, 2009); author of chapters published in Volume 1 and 2 of *Kulturowa teoria literatury*. A member of the editorial board of "Przestrzenie Teorii". Chairwoman of the International Association of Polish Studies. Contact: mpopiel@interia.pl

---

1 Ernst Gombrich, *The Story of Art* (London: The Phaidon Press, 1950), 5.

relations has been deemed naive by professionals. The odium incurred by the artist resulted in his exclusion from any serious discourse of art, as he became someone who bears the least rights to speak about his creations. Paradoxically the more the artist rose in the ranks of public life, and was shaped by means and institutions of mass culture into a figure of authority, also within non-artistic fields, the more steadfast was academic aesthetics at silencing his voice or treating him merely as a dubious witness to the artistic process<sup>2</sup>.

An analysis of the work of art that neglected the persona of its creator ceased to be the predominant analytical procedure with the weakening of the key concepts of the logocentric worldview. Concurring with Nietzsche's claim that the control of science is possible only by means of art<sup>3</sup>, postmodernism has crowned aesthetics as "first philosophy" and in many ways dignified the terms derived from the realm of art. The whole Areopagus of postmodern philosophers: Lyotard, Welsch, Baudrillard, Sloterdijk, Kamper, has underscored, by divergent means, the single conviction that "postmodern thinking is defined by aesthetics"<sup>4</sup>. No wonder then that with such a principle at its base the category of an artist became a kind of a founding myth within this field. It is notable that the concept of a modernist artist became a point of reference for defining the condition of the participants of post-modern culture. In the views and creative actions of the artists of the great avant-garde and the neo-avant-garde Lyotard and Welsch sought the anticipation of late twentieth-century philosophy. The modernist artist and the post-modernist philosopher share an experimental mindset; a propensity for repetitive trials, and an aptitude for subverting and exposing the universalizing rules of metanarratives and aesthetic systems, with the hope of ensuring pluralism and freedom. According to this view, the avant-garde artist became a prefiguration of the post-modern man, who through the "increase of being and the jubilation which result from the invention of new rules of the game"<sup>5</sup> creates himself and the world.

2 Literary theory in the 20th century, as is well known, was rather inclined to annex the deep analysis of the reception of a work of art in the form of German aesthetics of reception and the Anglo-American reader response theory.

3 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Unpublished Writings from the Period of Unfashionable Observations*, trans. Richard T. Gray (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 13.

4 Wolfgang Welsch, "Narodziny filozofii postmodernistycznej z ducha sztuki modernistycznej" in: *Odkrywanie modernizmu*, ed. Ryszard Nycz, (Kraków: Universitas, 1998), 455.

5 Jean-Francois Lyotard, "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?" in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Regis Durand, vol. 10 of *Theory and History of Literature* ed. Wlad Godzich and Jochen Schulte-Sasse, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 80.

The concept of the artist occupies an equally central space within contemporary neopragmatism. Richard Shusterman, who considers himself a descendant of the aesthetic thought represented by such thinkers as John Dewey and Nelson Goodman, opposes the elitist and fetishistic concept of art that is fixated on the artistic object. The author of *Pragmatist Aesthetics* methodically exposes the deceptiveness of barriers that separate high art from popular art in contemporary culture (this also holds true for the culture of past ages, i.e. of Antiquity or the Renaissance). A hallmark of post-modern times can be found in the highly symbolic dimension bestowed by culture upon the rapper, who in his art is part dancer, part poet, and part philosopher<sup>6</sup>. Richard Rorty explains the rise of the artist's prominence by referring to traditional, archetypal models of personality:

The point is that the priest, the philosopher or the scientist are accustomed to ascribing to themselves the knowledge that stands in a certain relation to the universe, accurately presenting it. But if we make the poet or artist to be the exemplary models of human existence, then the point is no longer about thinking about them in terms of correctness about the universe. They are considered to have the courage and talent to create themselves, to be their own masterpiece; this shift in relation to modernity culminates in conceding: do not assume that knowledge is the essence of human existence, self-creation is important for man, not knowledge; let the poet embody the human abilities to the highest degree...<sup>7</sup>.

In Rorty's view the artist, defined as the "paradigm of human accomplishment", becomes the pinnacle of post-modern philosophy of man that has placed in its center a mythologized concept of the creative genius.

These philosophical considerations resonate through contemporary anthropological and sociological thinking that is preoccupied with the artist as its subject. If we ascertain that what we are witnessing nowadays is a process of the coming of a society of individuals (Norbert Elias), then, as the French anthropologist Daniel Fabre claims, it is the artist who is given the title of

6 Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 139-236.

7 This fragment comes from an unpublished interview with Richard Rorty that was conducted by Lech Witkowski, and was made available by Lech Witkowski to Tadeusz Szkołut for use in his paper: Tadeusz Szkołut "O perspektywach estetyki w dobie kultury postmodernistycznej" in *Sztuka i estetyka po awangardzie a filozofia postmodernistyczna*, ed. Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska (Warszawa: Instytut Kultury, 1994), 197. The interview was also published in: Lech Witkowski "Liberalizm, lewica i mądrość powieści" in *Edukacja wobec sporów o (po)nowoczesność* (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych, 1997).

“the avant-garde of modern individualism”<sup>8</sup>. The Culture of Narcissism, in the course of becoming a vital component of contemporary culture, acquired several descriptive characterizations in the narratives of modernist artists<sup>9</sup>. A historical analysis of the cult of artists in modern times that touches upon the topics of sacralization and desacralization of the artist, as well as his embodiment and disembodiment, demands posing a series of new questions that address the ways in which a creative individual functions within the confines of cultural institutions, and the collective imagination. Popular culture’s rise to prominence created conditions for the transference of the aura from works of art onto the artists themselves (Walter Benjamin mentioned this phenomenon in his essay *The Work of Art in the Times of Mechanical Reproduction*, after he first noticed it in the moving pictures of the thirties). This process was assisted by the proliferation of new genres in literature, journalism and film (interview-fleuves or film biographies) and the forms of public life (festivals, contests, author readings), which allowed the artist’s voice to be heard.

It seems that these voices, coming from different corners of the humanities and culture, signal a need for a project of a new interdisciplinary anthropological aesthetics, one which by combining different investigatory perspectives (such as artist aesthetics, artist anthropology, literary anthropology, psychology of art, sociology of art, history of ideas) would shed a new light upon the understanding of the artist as an aesthetic category. Akin to philosophical anthropology, which Odo Marquard characterizes as philosophy speaking of “man human and all-too-human”<sup>10</sup>, the term possesses certain tautological traits; as it is evident that from its very inception traditional aesthetics exhibited an interest in the “human world”. Nevertheless it was predominantly focused, in the area of *aesthetica artificialis*, on manufactured objects, artifacts. Anthropological aesthetics would reverse this point of view, it would bring to the foreground the creative human being, and describe its existential condition.

The primary interest of anthropological aesthetics is ‘artists’ aesthetics’, which was previously neglected by twentieth-century theory of

8 Paweł Rodak, “Czym jest antropologia literatury? Pytanie o początek literatury. Rozmowa z Danielem Fabre” *Teksty Drugie* 4 (2009): 256. Compare: Norbert Elias, *Involvement and Detachment* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987); Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000); Norbert Elias, *Mozart: Portrait of a Genius* (Cambridge: Polity, 1993).

9 Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (London: Warner Books, 1979); Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man*, (New York: Knopf, 1977).

10 Odo Marquard, *Szczyćście w nieszczyćściu* (Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 2001), 158.



art. Artists' aesthetics was mainly perceived as an auxiliary discipline for other aesthetic endeavors: those oriented in philosophical or scientific directions, as well as those serving mainly ideological purposes. It was tasked with providing a base of material for more systematic and organized research, mainly through the edition and analysis of artistic works, which were mainly viewed as a source of facts and knowledge about the author's life. Already in the second half of the twentieth century this traditional approach ceased to be sufficient. It is made evident by the evolution of the theoretical thought of Stefan Morawski<sup>11</sup>, one of the foremost Polish philosophers working in the sub-discipline of aesthetics. At first he believed that the artists' aesthetics is tasked with "discerning the theoretical principles, which in a syncretic juxtaposition would allow to draw a rough picture of new artistic aesthetics of our times, and its connections to and disconnections from academic aesthetics"<sup>12</sup>. In this case the rationale behind using texts of artists was either to form a certain aesthetic theory on their basis or to reconstruct a history of artistic schools and doctrines. In the *Postscript* to the 1989 edition of *Main Aesthetic Schools* the author confessed that if he was to follow his own proclivities then he would write a history of philosophers working in the field of aesthetics, these would include above all such "thinkers-visionaries" as Berdyaev, Bloch, Heidegger, Adorno, Ricoeur, Read, Maritain and Dewey. Morawski's late confession to his predilection for investigating the individualities of the "lonesome riders" of aesthetics is at odds with his previous methodological preferences. The thinker adds that if he was to write a historical synthesis of twentieth-century aesthetics anew then he would give much more prominence to considerations on the nature of artists' aesthetics: "In my opinion this is the most prominent phenomenon in the light of contemporary cultural shifts"<sup>13</sup>. It can be presumed that this idea might have been one of those projects, transcending the boundaries of traditional aesthetics, which the thinker hoped to, but did not, complete during his lifetime.

The project of anthropological aesthetics opens before artists' aesthetics a possibility of a dynamic and substantial reorientation of research, bringing forward three distinct sets of problems.

11 It is worth mentioning that Władysław Tatarkiewicz, to whom the discipline is indebted for introducing the distinction between *implicite* and *explicite* aesthetics, in his summary of the three-volume synthesis pointed out that his history of aesthetics was mostly a history of individuals, writers and artists (Consult the introduction to: Władysław Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics: Vol. I Ancient Aesthetics*, trans. Adam and Ann Czerniawski (The Hague: Mouton, 1970).

12 Stefan Morawski, *Główne nurty estetyki XX wieku: Zarys syntetyczny* (Wrocław: Wiedza o Kulturze, 1992), 13.

13 *Ibid.*, 114.

First of all, while restoring the voices to artists from diverse artistic fields, it is worthwhile to analyze their statements with the tools provided by contemporary narrative theory. The primary material is obtained from autobiographical accounts found within private documents: journals, diaries, letters, memoirs. An equally prominent place is held by writings that deal with art itself in the form of manifestos, proclamations and essays, in which the artist takes up the role of a literary, artistic, music, or theater critic. A particularly important sphere is constituted by the opinions of artists about artists that often take on the shape of portraits into which a self-portrait is inserted. And additional resources can be found within artists' biographies, in all their culturally sanctioned variety: from the scientific to the popular, from strictly factual to fictionalized accounts; ones personally engaged with the subject, or constructed as impersonally objective; those that make their subject a familiar person and those that make it a mythical creature. Finally the attention of anthropological aesthetics turns to those works that make up a specifically structured system, wherein artifacts traditionally associated with a distinct concept of an artist, such as a novel about an artist or self-portraits, are of utmost importance.

The borders delineating these investigatory fields are blurry; the subject emerging from these three forms of activity is a sylleptic construct, ambiguous and shimmery, it juggles social roles, switching masks of fiction and authenticity. Autobiographies – we are all well aware of it – are creations of language, narrative and the world; and works of fiction all possess a more or less noticeable autobiographical dimension.

The goal would be to distinguish such an anthropological aspect of the 'discourse of the self' that would allow, in the words of Ryszard Nycz, the perception of texts as: "indispensable testimony to the presence and evolution of personality patterns that are dominant in the culture of a particular time and place, and by means of which contemporaries used to describe their own identity"<sup>14</sup>. The image of the artist that emerges in the light of anthropological aesthetics is a result of the interplay of tensions between a certain human condition and the concept of art that constitutes itself within the boundaries of narrative identity. The constitution of the subject and the creation of identity plays out to the tune of a specific narrative rhythm: a narcissistic tale, aimed towards self-discovery, and an eccentric tale, aimed towards creation.

Following Marquards theory, which attempts to restore luster to the tarnished philosophical anthropology, in the form given to it by Helmuth Plesner (*Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch* 1928) and Arnold Gehlen (*Der Mensch*

<sup>14</sup> Ryszard Nycz, *Literatura jako trop rzeczywistości* (Kraków: Universitas, 2001), 58.

1940), it is worth introducing the theme that the author of the *Glück im Unglück* names the “skeptical theme of coming round”:

A human – as it [philosophical anthropology] shows is not a triumphant being, but a primarily compensating one: he is not the “crowning” – but as Stanisław Jerzy Lec said – “the thorny crown of creation”. Man is not simply an acting being, but also a sensing one; the better part of him consists more of what he experienced than of what he accomplished, that is why man is made up of his stories<sup>15</sup>.

This important conviction, which echoes many schools of the twentieth-century philosophy of man can be considered an important premise for the project of anthropological aesthetics, which will describe the artist by means of his own stories: those that he tells to himself and those that are being told about him. Only by such means can an image be formed that will have the capability of encompassing both the sphere of actions and that of sensations.

The artists' narratives are double-layered also in another sense. They are, as George Steiner notices in *The Broken Contract*, “narratives of formal experience”. They tell stories of thought<sup>16</sup>. By referring to such texts as the treatise of Pseudo-Longinus on the “sublime”, Coleridge's *Biography*, Ruskin's *Modern Painters*, Proust's *Contre Saint-Beuve*, he argues that they are a kind of “mythologies of the comprehensible”, “fables of comprehension” – and the hermeneutical thinking is in the case of an artist permeated with creative energy. Energy that flows from within art itself, which was described by Friedrich Nietzsche in these words:

art is by its nature affirmation, a blessing, a deification of being...

– What is the meaning of pessimistic art? ... Isn't it a contradiction in terms? [...] in case of an artist representing horrible and disturbing things is in itself a manifestation of the instinct of power and control: he does not fear them. There is no pessimistic art... Art only affirms<sup>17</sup>.

And this is the second crucial reference point for anthropological aesthetics. It addresses the discipline of poetics, which after Aristotle is conceived as the theory of human action. This new perspective would entail adopting the view presented by Giorgio Agamben:

<sup>15</sup> Marquard, *Szczęście*, 156–157.

<sup>16</sup> George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 86.

<sup>17</sup> Michał P. Markowski, *Nietzsche. Filozofia interpretacji* (Kraków: Universitas, 1997), 348.

The central experience of *poiesis*, production into presence, is replaced by the question of the “how”, that is, of the process through which the object has been produced. In terms of the work of art, this means that the emphasis shifts away from what the Greeks considered the essence of the work – the fact that in it something passed from nonbeing into being, thus opening the space of truth (ἀ-λήθεια) and building a world for man’s dwelling on earth – and to the *operari* of the artist, that is, to the creative genius and the particular characteristics of the artistic process in which it finds expression<sup>18</sup>.

According to Agamben, the idea of genius, and the creative process, introduces to contemporary society a vision of a real openness to experience, that manifests itself not through the framework of heteronomous relations, but through a self-identifying space of possibility. The constant confrontation with endless potentiality causes the *self* to become capable of infinite creativity. The idiosyncrasy of Agamben’s claim that art after Duchamp has lost its power of *poiesis* becomes evident through his search for an ideal work of art in Titian’s *The Three Ages of Man* and the analysis of this work that fills the last pages of his work *Aperto*.

And finally the third referential sphere for anthropological aesthetics results directly from its setting between anthropocentrism and its negations. The idea of a genius constitutes one of the focal points within this area. Considerations on the nature of individual genius reach far beyond the realm of art itself, but they have a notably prolific representation in the aesthetic tradition. Furthermore, a multitude of ideas introduced in the humanities at the turn of the twentieth and the twenty-first century is reason enough to revisit this subject<sup>19</sup>.

Julia Kristeva in her inspiring book on *Female Genius* defines this central term this way:

Let us agree here to use the term “genius” to describe those who force us to discuss their story because it is so closely bound up with their creations, in the innovations that support the development of thought and

18 Giorgio Agamben, *The Man Without Content*, trans. Georgia Albert (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 70.

19 See i. a.: Harold Bloom, *Genius: A Mosaic of One Hundred Exemplary Creative Minds* (New York: Warner Books, 2002); Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations* (New York: Zone Books, 2007); Paul Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); Bernard Smith, *The Death of the Artist as Hero: Essays in History and Culture* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1988).

beings, and in the onslaught of questions, discoveries, and pleasures that their creations have inspired. In fact, these contributions touch us so intimately that we have no choice but to moor them in the lives of their authors<sup>20</sup>.

The paradox contained within Kristeva's apparently obvious thesis, defining genius by its compulsive demand for becoming the object of a story, can be traced to a fundamental claim. It states that the true legitimization of a genius is based upon the work itself, but also on the *doxa*, the public opinion that applies its own criteria in the process of validating and affirming him.

Kristeva's trilogy, honoring three women: Hannah Arendt, Melanie Klein and Colette, is an interesting attempt at revitalizing the concept of genius. Although the central investigatory focus on the term's transformations is governed by the concept of gender, many of the analyzed themes concern the general idea of an exceptional individuality.

Kristeva perceives Arendt's genius as unity of work and action, the modern *phronesis* is accomplished by responsible action. An extraordinary synthesis of the theories of Arendt's three teachers: Aristotle, Augustine and Heidegger, has inspired her theory of the human being, one which equates thought, action and speech. Nevertheless a sole heroic act of a genius – Kristeva claims – does not make the action magnificent. The action becomes heroic only when it demands thoughtful consideration. And what might be even more important: the action itself cannot be encapsulated in a single petrifying word, it should be acted out, recreated each and every time: "only then can *muthos* remain *energeia*"<sup>21</sup>. The process of creating a genius, as illustrated by Kristeva, leads from a "narrated action" to an "acting narrative". This is why the therapeutic role of the idea of genius becomes so important in the modern world:

Suffice is to say that "genius" is a therapeutic invention that keeps us from dying from equality in a world without a hereafter. [...] In our day it would appear the word 'genius' stands for paradoxical occurrences, unique experiences, and remarkable excess that manage to pierce through an increasingly automated world. The troubling, even formidable, emergence of such phenomena helps us understand the meaning of human existence. [...] my geniuses displayed qualities that, while no doubt exceptional, can be found in most of us. And they (the geniuses, which in this case are three

20 Julia Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt*, trans. Ross Guberman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), XI.

21 Ibid., 74.

female geniuses) did not hesitate to make mistakes and to let us know their limitations. What distinguishes these geniuses from us is simply that they left us to judge a body of work rooted in the biography of their experience. The work of a genius culminates in the birth of a subject<sup>22</sup>.

For this reason the discourse reintroducing and renewing the idea of genius becomes an important voice calling for the safeguarding of subjectivity in a world of progressive unification and anonymity.

Summarizing, as a discipline anthropological aesthetics refers to several areas of research and determines three major investigatory fields:

1. the poetics of narrative, that determines the artist's model personality;
2. the experience of *poiesis*, that defines the boundaries of human potential;
3. the problem of genius: an exceptional individual who creates and is created in the reconstructive ritual of storytelling.

In the subsequent part of this article I will address one of the themes of anthropological aesthetics which focuses on the figure of the modern artist. Through the gradually constricting analytical perspective certain mechanisms of creation and self-creation of the avant-garde artist will be brought to light.

### Genius – the All-Too-Human and the Inhuman

Considerations on the nature of the creative individual have become much more significant and dynamic in modern times. The humanist tradition has undergone critical revision, so has the idea of genius, as one of the cornerstones of modern anthropocentrism.

Antiquity did not possess any concept of an ingenious artist, although many ideas expressed in the works of Plato, Aristotle or Horace have influenced the subsequent formation of the category of an exceptional creative individual. The question of the roots of poetic inspiration and the theory of the divine poetic madness, which can be traced to Plato's *Phaedrus*, will come to inspire philosophers, critics and the artists themselves for eternity. However, the nascence of the idea of genius came in the time of the Renaissance; aesthetic deliberations on the subject focused on a cosseted group of favorite heroes: within the visual and fine arts – Leonardo da Vinci, in literature – William Shakespeare. The Renaissance vision of the poet as *alter deus* will evolve into a figure of a divine "architect in the kind"<sup>23</sup>. In the eighteenth

22 Kristeva, *Arendt*, X.

23 Meyer Howard Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 201.

century numerous and in-depth studies on the concept of genius have been inspired by anthropological philosophy and by the aesthetics which was being developed at that time. The theory of two kinds of genius: the natural and the "formed", was at first purely typological, not qualitative. Joseph Addison talks of natural geniuses as those who are "the prodigies of mankind, who by the mere strength of natural parts, and without any assistance of art or learning have produced works that were the delight of their own times, and the wonder of posterity" – and those of the other kind – "the second class of great geniuses are those that have formed themselves by rules, and submitted the greatness of their natural talents to the corrections and restraints of art"<sup>24</sup>. Over the course of time the first kind of exceptional individuals has become a sum total of human capabilities, an embodiment of human wholeness that was cultivated throughout the nineteenth-century European idealism. The artist became only one of numerous aesthetic categories that have been placed at the foundations of modern philosophy in its quest for the restitution of the unity of mind, human existence and society<sup>25</sup>. The concept of an ingenious creator has come to act as a lightning rod in the concurrent struggle with the philosophical premises of unity, completeness and wholeness.

What seems especially interesting from the perspective of twentieth-century art, and its noticeably anthropocentric tendencies, is the fact that from the very beginning the discourse of genius encompasses the relation of that which is all-too-human with that which is inhuman. This protean face of a genius becomes crystal clear in the organicistic theories of the creative process. This inhuman character has been fervently underscored by poets well before Eliot. John Keats has described the poet's nature in such words:

As to the poetic character itself, it is not itself: it has no self – it is everything and nothing. The Sun, the Moon, the sea, and men and women who are creatures of impulse, are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute – the poet has none: no identity<sup>26</sup>.

24 James Addison "There is no character..." [No. 160, Monday, September 3, 1711] in *The Spectator: A New Edition with Biographical Notices of the Contributors* (London: William Tegg, 1866), 182.

25 This thesis was put forward by Wolfgang Welsch in an article: Wolfgang Welsch: "Filozofia i sztuka – wzajemne relacje. Tematyka i cel" in *Estetyka poza estetyką. O nową postać estetyki* (Kraków: Universitas, 2005). For an English version of the corresponding conference lecture see: Wolfgang Welsch, "Philosophy and Art – an Ambiguous Relationship" in *Aesthetics and Beyond* (Changohun: Jilin People's Publishing House, 2007).

26 Wystan Hugh Auden, "Genius & Apostle" in *The Dyer's Hand and other essays* (New York: Vintage, 1968), 436.

Shelley assumed that a poet and a man are two different natures; although they coexist, they can perfectly well be ignorant of each other and incapable of influencing their corresponding faculties and intentions<sup>27</sup>. The concept of the artist reaches beyond the presupposed natural abilities of a human being. The artist's unique status results from transcending human limits and defeating the dichotomies that philosophical inquiry could not overcome. From the groundwork of German philosophical tradition arose a concept of a remarkable individual that reconciled the divide between reason and nature, the conscious and subconscious, the sphere of freedom and necessity. From the aesthetics of Friedrich Schelling, Jean Paul Richter, also Goethe and Friedrich Schiller, comes a new theory of inspiration. The category of the "unconscious" is used to describe the dark side of the creative process, which defies comprehension by the artist himself, as well as by others. The suddenness, contingency and involuntary fortitude intrinsic to the act of creation determine the existence of the artist as influenced by the act of divine power or a natural instinct.

Three basic components of the concept of genius, which reoccur in the deliberations of artists themselves, as well as art critics and philosophers, in the course of the seventeenth through the nineteenth century are creative power or creative drive; the crossing of the existential boundaries defined by human nature; the aporetic dimension of the creative process (mystery, serendipity, whim).

In the nineteenth century the transition from a metaphysical to a psychological interpretation of the creative process allowed to treat art mostly as a template of the artist's personality. A growing focus on what Carlyle described as "individual peculiarities" of the author has significantly altered the concept of genius.

The changes within aesthetics at the time of modernism's second wave (1850-1912)<sup>28</sup> were determined by a specific duality of tendencies. On the one hand, the individual, who creates his identity by constantly differentiating himself from the ever-self-unifying world, sees his status in society rise. Novelty and originality become values in both anthropological projects and aesthetic theories. On the other hand, there are those concepts that would have the artist's personality wiped clean from the work, be it canvas or paper. The emergence of this process, described as the phenomenon of depersonalization, is traced by literary theorists to the works of Baudelaire and

27 See: Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Shelley's literary and philosophical criticism*, ed. John Shawcross (Folcroft: Folcroft Library Editions, 1977).

28 Hans Robert Jauss, "The Literary Process of Modernism from Rousseau to Adorno", *Cultural Critique* 11 (1988): 27-61.



Flaubert<sup>29</sup>. The evident intention to differentiate between the empirical “I” and the textual “I” within the personal documents of both writers delineates a pivotal moment in the aesthetics of modernist literature. The depersonalization of Baudelaire’s lyric poetry, as described by Hugo Friedrich, was conceived as a gesture of an anti-Romantic Romanticism, the choice of the “sensibility of imagination” over the “sensibility of the heart”<sup>30</sup>. A passage quoted from a letter written by the author of *The Flowers of Evil* on the “deliberate impersonality of [his] poetry” resonates with the writer’s idiosyncratic confession: “My task is extrahuman”<sup>31</sup>. According to Friedrich, who constructs a structuralist description of contemporary poetry, depersonalization will become one of the crucial components of twentieth-century poetry in both of the variants identified by him: the line of Rimbaud and the line of Mallarmé.

The “departure of the author” in literature is commonly exemplified by *Madame Bovary*, the “first modern novel”, together with Flaubert’s well-known confession exposing the author’s intention of choosing such a form of narration that would allow him to exist within the work in the same way God exists within the universe – omnipresent and concealed at the same time.

It is worth noting that the analogy that Flaubert’s concept and his vision of the modernist novel are based upon has an interesting tradition. Shakespeare’s genius was a subject of a fierce discussion that went on for many decades of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The two primary theories explained it by employing either the concept of radical subjectivity or objectivity. In the second case Shakespeare’s presence in each and every text, and each and every character, created an impression of a certain de-corporation, shedding of any noticeably personal attributes commonly ascribed to a single auctorial entity on the basis of a unified style. There is a fine line between this kind of thinking and the questioning of the very need for the existence of the author of *Hamlet*. This proves the point that the problem of “the de-humanization of art”, that caused José Ortega y Gasset so much anxiety and inspired his well-known essay from 1925, is much older than avant-garde art. Nevertheless, it is the art of the first decades of the twentieth century that by means of its radicalism became an extraordinary amalgam of contradictions, a space of conflict between the polarized aesthetic traditions, which gained representation through the anthropological and social dimension of art. This

29 An apt description of this tendency is presented in Ryszard Nycz, “Osoba w nowoczesnej literaturze: ślady obcości” in *Literatura jako trop rzeczywistości: Poetyka epifanii w nowoczesnej literaturze polskiej* (Kraków: Universitas, 2001), 50–87.

30 Hugo Friedrich, *The Structure of Modern Poetry: from the mid-Nineteenth to the mid-Twentieth Century* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974).

31 Ibid., 21.

kind of genius, one who spells his own doom, will turn out to be a particularly appealing model for many artists of this generation.

### **Avant-Garde Narratives of the Artist. The Anti-Anthropocentric Tradition**

A closer look at the best known manifestos of the European avant-garde, from the early years of the twentieth century, reveals that no matter how much their aesthetic programs differed, they all took up the fundamental problems of the human condition. Into the typical discourse of such texts, future-oriented and postulatory in nature, a new anthropological project was being inscribed – a project of an active citizen of the art world. It addressed both the artist and the spectator, as in avant-garde art both parties enjoyed a new-found equality. They were connected primarily by their shared experience of connection to the present moment, the time of technical revolutions and rushing civilization. The new man, like Athena sprung from the head of Zeus, emerged from the “wonderfulness of contemporary life”.

The modern world of constructors and catastrophists, naive optimists and melancholic pessimists was founded upon the experience of change, breakthrough and disconnection. The spirit of the age spoke in many tongues, but there was a common impression of the moment’s grandeur and a conviction of being witness to the birth of a new man.

Both the Dionysian divisions of European modernism (futurism, Dadaism, cubism) and the Apollonian<sup>32</sup> fractions have placed freedom on their banners. Giovanni Papini declared in his artistic credo: “I am a futurist, because futurism equals absolute freedom”<sup>33</sup>. The liberation of art meant both liberation from the past, tradition, convention, cultural institutions, the demands of the public, as well as liberation towards a certain concept of the Artist – a new synthesis of the All-too-human and the inhuman. Especially the exploration of the “inhuman” will be a calling for all exceptional individuals, as expressed in Guillaume Apollinaire’s words: “Above all, artists are men who wish to become inhuman”<sup>34</sup>. This thought returns in numerous avant-garde manifestos, and its importance and inherent ambiguity require deeper reflection.

32 These terms are employed for the purpose of describing the dichotomy of European Modernism by, i. a.: Edward Możejko, “Modernizm literacki: niejasności terminu i dyktomia kierunku” *Teksty Drugie* 29/30 (1994): 26-45.

33 Gian Battista Nazzaro, *Introduzione al futurismo* (Napoli: Guida, 1973), 69.

34 Guillaume Apollinaire, *The Cubist Painters*, trans. Peter Read (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) 9.

### 1. Futurism or Abandoning the Center

"Our renewed consciousness does not permit us to look upon man as the center of universal life" – the Italian futurists tried to convince us in their 1910 *Manifesto*<sup>35</sup>. Here the idea of modern anti-humanism equals the deposition of man, he is finally relieved from the central position that he occupied in the world from, at least, the beginning of the modern era. The creations of the human mind, the technical achievements, machines as the heroes of civilization's technological advancement will shape the ideal according to which the part that man is supposed to play in the world is determined. One of the artist's tasks is to praise the might and glory of these creations:

The artist must praise the machine, which is a synthesis of every great intellectual striving of modern civilization; this new, almost human living body, which constitutes an ingenious multiplication of the human body; the machine, which being a product and consequence of human effort, itself produces an infinite number of consequences and modifications to our accompanying sensations and daily life<sup>36</sup>.

The artist is thus a creator of dithyrambs in praise of the progress civilization, of a new co-existence between the steam-engine and the grease-smeared mechanic, he is the herald of the modern Icarus, who flies on the wings of airplanes, of the joyful arsonists and the roaring engines. The artist must possess a sensibility to the dynamic beauty of modernity and an enthusiasm for all of its manifestations. The machine is not merely an emblem of the futurist aesthetic and an object of art, it is also a model, a standard and measure for the actions of the new man. The traits Marinetti endowed him with: glorification of life, dynamism, power; equate the futurist conception of man with the Nietzschean *Übermensch*. The intensification of life transpires through permanent ecstasy, brought on by movement, noise, lightness and velocity. The machine initiates the founding myth of futurism, the myth of a mechanical centaur, the multiplied man. In the article *The aesthetics of the machine* Marinetti claims that today the machine commences and contains within itself the true drama of humanity<sup>37</sup>.

35 Umberto Boccioni et al., "Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto (11 April 1910)" in *Futurism: An Anthology* ed. Lawrence Rainey et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 65.

36 Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "Estetyka maszyny" in Tomasz Kiereńczuk *Od sztuki w działaniu do działania w sztuce. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti i teatr włoskich futurystów* (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2008), 251.

37 Ibid., 252.

The negative hero is not only the passéist culture, but also human nature that imposes its rules upon art: the principle of imitation and the contemplative manner. The contemporary man's rhythm of life, the order of perception and activity all acquire from the machine such traits as energy, power, discipline, precision, which allow him to discover new modes of existence. Mario Morasso, the author of *La nuova arma – La macchina* (1905), that precedes Marinetti's own treatise, prophesies the coming of an era of a new artist:

With pictures that we cannot even imagine, he will be able to show beauty yet unknown to us and reflect the character of new heroes – the mechanical colossi in permanent rivalry. The poet will reach ecstasy, describing metallic utensils that he does not recognize and will shiver at the sight of heroism of man administering this mechanical world<sup>38</sup>.

Marinetti created the idea of a multiplied man, who will become a citizen in the Kingdom of the Machine. This new kind of human being is a specific modification of its predecessor, that will come to life inspired by the process of mechanization and enhancements in the field of medicine. Lamarck's theory revealing the underlying rules of emergence and inheritance of new body parts in response to repetitive and motivated stimuli became one of the fundamental ideas feeding futuristic phantasms. Umberto Boccioni and Aldo Palazzeschi dedicated enthusiastic texts to a French doctor Alexis Carrel, who performed groundbreaking organ transplants in animal subjects<sup>39</sup>. The creative phantom-man was supposed to come to being as a final result of efforts leading to multiplication of energy, will, intelligence and instinct.

The futurist aesthetics in the course of realizing the project of dehumanization created new sets of rules for art at multiple levels of sophistication. One of the most interesting areas of artistic inventiveness of the Italian futurists was the theater, where a revolution, in the traditional theatrical relation between the actor and the spectator, took place. The intellectual energy of the creator is transposed into a kind of a recurring ritual (gymnastic exercises) that induces in the spectator a specific state of hypnosis. This is achieved by means of "dehumanizing the voice", "dehumanizing the face", geometric gestulation, numerous nonverbal means of communication (sounds of objects), dynamic and synoptic declamation.

38 Mario Morasso, *La nuova arma – La macchina* (Torino: Bocca, 1905) in Tomasz Kiereńczuk *Od sztuki w działaniu do działania w sztuce. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti i teatr włoskich futurystów* (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2008), 238–239.

39 Christa Baumgarth, *Futuryzm* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1978), 238–239.

In the new Futurist lyricism, an expression of geometrical splendor, our literary I or ego consumes and obliterates itself in the grand cosmic vibration, so that the declaimer himself must also somehow disappear in the dynamic and synoptic manifestation of words-in-freedom<sup>40</sup>.

Rebellion against the sentimental aspect of passéist art leads to the castration of human feelings, passions, affects and envies (they reduced eroticism, filled with characteristic misogyny, to a series of brief, mechanical acts). In turn brutality becomes appraised: "art, in fact, can be nothing if not violence, cruelty, and injustice".<sup>41</sup> This means that the artist abandons those fertile areas that until now provided traditional and satiating nourishment for art. The artistic identity looks for aesthetic stimulation on the antipodes of anthropocentrism.

## 2. Artists Against Art. Dada – the Radical Rebellion

The first decades of the twentieth century saw a radical stance of contestation take hold within the avant-garde. Its subject, scope and methods became the defining trait of particular movements; but its most severe form is to be found in the Dadaist movement. An anti-aesthetic stance taken by the artists constituting this group was directed against bourgeois culture, which – according to them – made art in its own measure and consumed it strictly for its own pleasure. Dada – in the words of the *Dada Manifesto* – meant most of all a "state of mind" undergoing constant rebellion<sup>42</sup>. This was a firm rebuttal of the traditional understanding of a work of art as an autonomous aesthetic object that is based on predefined canons of beauty and perfection, and the vision of an artist as an individuality distanced from the mundane concerns of ordinary life and the common public, by means of his socially sanctioned talent. "[...] Life that strives upward by negation. Affirmation-negation: the gigantic hocus-pocus of existence fires the nerves of the true Dadaist"<sup>43</sup>. The rule of contradiction became the sole principle that appeared on the horizon

40 Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "Dynamic and Synoptic Declamation (11 March 1916)" in *Futurism*, 220.

41 Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism (20 February 1909)" in *Futurism*, 53.

42 Richard Huelsenbeck, "Collective Dada Manifesto (1920)" in *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*, ed. Robert Motherwell (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989), 246

43 Huelsenbeck, "Dada", 246.

of life perceived as chaos, "a simultaneous muddle of noises, colors and spiritual rhythms". Such a view of the world and art as devoid of any limitations was at the source of a realization that anything can become a work of art, and anybody can become an artist. An arbitrary object, either found or manufactured, under certain conditions acquires the status of an aesthetic object (*objet trouvé*, ready-mades, collages, photo-montages). And the identity of the artist is not that of a man marked with a stigma of genius. One is not an artist – one only happens to be an artist, it is a part that one plays incidentally and for a brief time, although intensely – in aura of provocation, ridicule, and scandal.

The nascence of this idea caused a fundamental reevaluation of two basic categories: of the artist and the work of art, and was a sign of a crisis within the old and a beginning of a new aesthetic awareness. Nevertheless, its meaning is obscure even in the declarations of artists themselves. Specified and developed in numerous programs of countless creators and artistic groups, it projects a multitude of possible meanings.

The utopian dream of a radical break with the old and the beginning of new art was shared by all avant-garde artists. Nevertheless, even the greatest rebels often merely repeated the gestures of their predecessors. The Dadaists played their parts by masterfully performing gestures already honed to perfection by their nineteenth-century antecedents. The whole affair of absconding in the middle of war, battles, and bloody massacres of the year 1916, and creating in neutral Switzerland a "Cabaret Voltaire", was a truly extravagant maneuver in the best spirit of decadent escapism. Both in the case of the decadent and avant-garde artist the voluntary isolation, that fueled the intense creative practices, was meant to be a sign of disagreement with the process of technical modernization and a critique of nature's influence on the formation of aesthetic rules. The basic difference between these two generations is exhibited by the early twentieth-century artists' compulsive need for collective actions, the obligatory participation of spectators and in the madness proportional to the insanity of the world engulfed by war – inventiveness liberated from all rules. The meeting of Romanians (Tristan Tzara, Marcel Iancu), an Alsatian (Jean Arp), Germans (Hugo Ball, Richard Huelsenbeck), a Frenchman (Robert Delaunay) and the "Parisian" Spaniard (Pablo Picasso) in the earth-bound, bourgeois Zurich was the beginning of the "anti-artistic" anarchism.

The Dadaist proclamation of freedom culminated in an almost self-destructive ecstasy: "To be against this manifesto is to be a Dadaist"<sup>44</sup>. The image of a Dada inventor constructing a machine that as its purpose has the destruction of the creator himself, resurfaces in artistic comments of those

---

44 Huelsenbeck, "Dada", 246.

times. Art becomes the artist's enemy (Arp: "the Dadaists despised what is commonly regarded as art, but put the whole universe on the lofty throne of art"<sup>45</sup>), the Dadaist shies from becoming an artist, he champions life, action. This presupposition often resulted in artistic futility. Jacques Vaché's – the Paris avant-garde's dandy – "good fortune is never to have produced anything. He always kicked aside works of art, the ball and chain that retains the soul after death"<sup>46</sup>. Duchamp in hindsight judged the Dadaists' actions in the following way: "the Dadas were truly committed to action. They were not just writing books, like Rabelais or Jarry, they were fighting the public. And when you're fighting you rarely manage to laugh at the same time"<sup>47</sup>.

This is the version of Dadaism, where the race towards some infinite freedom culminates either in self-destructive nihilism or in the abyss of catastrophism (some futurists also shared this fate). The idea of an avant-garde artist at the same instance encompassed everything and nothing.

This sort of negation of art, in the subsequent stages of the avant-garde movement, led artists to commit "suicidal" gestures. The conviction that art died in the face of the frenetic explosion of technical civilization and mass culture, led to a drastic restriction of artistic communication, to the point of different kinds of "withdrawal".

### 3. Contradicted Identity: Now Everyone is an Artist

The avant-garde anti-art implied an image of the artist whose actions are guided either by the intellect or by instinct. Whatever the case may be, creativity is not an entelechial process, with some distant goal of producing a work of art, but depends on the intention and will to act. The transition from the aesthetics of the work of art to aesthetics of action became one of the crucial indicators of the shift within the aesthetic paradigm.

This archetype of the artist was closely connected to specific concepts of the 'self', which were coming to prominence in the first decades of the twentieth century. The abandonment of the essentialist paradigm of identity that changes in a linear fashion, in favor of a subject undergoing fragmentation, disintegration, that adheres to the rule of contingency and inner tearing, influenced the change in the image of a creative individual. Often perceived as an anonymous "man of the crowd", who performs random actions, with

45 Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: A Biography* (New York: Henry Holt, 1996), 191.

46 Andre Breton, *The Lost Steps*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 52-53.

47 Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 192.

their presumed aesthetic aspect of a non-intentional and immediate nature. Huelsenbeck wrote in his manifesto:

Dada is a state of mind that can be revealed in any conversation whatever [...]. Under certain circumstances to be a Dadaist may mean to be more a businessman, more a political partisan than an artist – to be an artist only by accident – to be a Dadaist means to let oneself be thrown by things, to oppose all sedimentation<sup>48</sup>.

The claim that creative action is merely one in a multitude of human activities revealed not only a break with the traditional status of that individual previously referred to as the artist. It also implied the presupposition that any human being can become a subject performing creative action.

This idea was developed exceptionally rapidly in the context of opinions that emphasized the democratization of art and the universal character of human nature.

The rejection of the autonomy of art called for by many avant-garde artists resulted primarily in the interweaving of artistic practices into the fabric of social life. This corresponded with the leftist convictions expressed by numerous artists. Introducing art to the general public was supposed to be a way of erasing boundaries between spheres of artistry, utilitarianism and entertainment. The public arena became a fertile ground for executing artistic actions that were tailored according to her special needs, and the style of this activity explicitly refers to the rules of mass entertainment.

Polish artists, following in the footsteps of their West European colleagues, will proclaim that: "Art must only and mostly be human, that is for people, for the masses, it is to be democratic and common", so "Artists to the streets!"<sup>49</sup>. At the same time, in a paradoxical twist, the democratization of art results not only in broadening and equalizing the base of its recipients, but also of its creators, everyone claims the right to be considered an equal creative subject ("Anybody can be an artist"<sup>50</sup>). The notion of an artist becomes an element of a mythical reality in a revolution made according to the principles of world

48 Huelsenbeck, "Dada", 246.

49 Bruno Jasieński, "Do narodu polskiego: Manifest w sprawie natychmiastowej futurystycznej zmiany życia" in Stanisław Jaworski, *Awangarda* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1992), 187.

50 Jasieński, "Manifest", 188. This idea will return in the manifestos of the neo-avant-garde, most visibly in the well-known Joseph Beuys interview from the year 1972, who declared that everyone is an artist, because "every capacity comes from the artistic capacity of man, which means, to be active, creatively".



"à rebours" (Peiper: "The greatest poet of the revolution is a baker"<sup>51</sup>). The enthusiasm for the frenzy of civilization that overwhelmed everybody at the time is clearly audible in these futuristic exclamations.

### An Artist Without a Biography

"What has been done in the name of self-improvement is completely irrelevant" – states George Grosz at the end of his essay *In place of biography* (1925). The avant-garde artist's renouncement of his own biography was just another gesture of contestation. It was directed against two movements within the traditional nineteenth-century concept of art; the first one was the institutionalized cult of the artist that has become a distinct cultural phenomenon. The artist's authority was constructed from a number of components: secretiveness, extravagance, occultism and wizardry, truth and wisdom, perfection of craftsmanship. The other target was biographism in its academic form, which explored either the expressive-emotional or cognitive-didactic aspect of a work of art. In the programs and manifestos of the first three decades of the twentieth century, that exhibit strong leftist tendencies, both these arguments will be used in the attack on bourgeois society. In extreme cases of truly radical artists, such as Grosz, for whom an ideal creator was a "sharp and healthy worker of the collective society", a biography consisting of "unimportant, accidental, external events"<sup>52</sup> was pointless.

In the proclamations of Italian and Polish futurists the matter of the artist's biography becomes even more complicated. Marinetti, criticizing the psychologism of passéist art, distinguishes its three forms:

1. Traditional scientific-documentary psychologism.
2. The Parisian sort of semi-Futurist, fragmentary, effeminate, and ambiguous psychologism (Proust).
3. Italian psychologism, which dresses up its enormous, pettifogging, ponderous, funeral, moralistic, academic, pedantic analyses as Futurism, with their associated decrepit Hamletisms: "To be or not to be; live, dream" and philosophical dialogues which have no tangible concern or dramatic pacing<sup>53</sup>.

51 Tadeusz Peiper, "Także inaczej" *Zwrotnica* 7 (1926): 198.

52 George Grosz, Wieland Herzfelde, *Die Kunst ist in Gefahr: Drei Aufsätze* (Berlin: Malik Verlag, 1925), 39-44.

53 Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "The Abstract Antipsychological Theater of Pure Elements and the Tactile Theater" in Filippo Tommaso Marinetti *Critical Writings*, ed. Gunter Berghaus, trans. Doug Thompson (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 390.

The psychologism of old art is to be replaced by “body-madness”, as he declares in a manifesto “*The Variety Theater*”, from the year 1913.

Bruno Jasieński, without the semantic inventiveness – but with sheer force, posits severing new art’s relationship with the soul, God and universals, replacing them instead with sport, sex and mathematics:

Our art is neither a resemblance, nor an anatomy of soul (psychology), it isn’t an expression of our longing for the kingdom of God (religion), it isn’t a discussion of eternal questions (philosophy). [...] The artists experience is his own. It is undoubtedly fascinating for his immediate family and admirers, but for nobody else. It is advisable that the artist channels and relieves his inner pressure in the proper manner, by taking up sports, through carnal love and a pursuit of formal science<sup>54</sup>.

The spirit of the time speaking through the voices of art historians (Wölfflin: history of art without names), literary theorists (Russian formalists) and artists, proclaimed a new image of the creator. German aesthetics and Russian literary theory have adopted the assumptions of anti-psychologism and anti-biographism as cornerstones of proposed methods of scientific inquiry focused on the formal dimension of the artifact. When artists decided to state their opinions on the subject, the discussion took an unexpected turn. The artist’s persona retained its former importance, but its public reception underwent a radical change. Similar to the case of the work of art, dynamic activity and creative invention also dominate here. The creative personality is inscribed into a complete aesthetic project and becomes subjected to the same principles that rule the art world. The notion of the artist encompasses the avant-garde triad of “life-art-vitality”. New art, being a “synthetic expression of cerebral energy”, “symphonizes the audience’s sensibility by exploring it, by reawakening its most somnolent layers with every possible means”<sup>55</sup>. The idea of an “artist without biography” *de facto* implies a farewell to the anachronistic understanding of identity: “Fate outlived itself and died. From now on anybody can become a creator of his own life and of life in general”<sup>56</sup>. The avant-garde vision of the artist brings into the limelight the persona of a self-creating creator.

54 Bruno Jasieński, “Jedniodniówka futurystów” in Jaworski *Awangarda*, 194–195.

55 Filippo Tommaso Marinetti et al., “The Futurist Synthetic Theater (11 January 1915)” in *Futurism*, 208.

56 Jasieński, “Manifest”, 190.

### Leonardo da Vinci – The Avant-Garde Genius

The avant-garde's disrespect for man's greatness, its praise of the masses, and the anonymity they offer, is one of its particularly distinctive features. The avant-garde artist's identity formed in accord with a declared feeling of community. Knocking works of art and geniuses off their pedestals became a gesture of self-definition. Exceptional individuals seemed to be an anachronistic phantasm of bourgeois society. In this context it is worth to refer to the paradox which was formulated by George Steiner in relation to the ancients: "It is just because the chaotic and the demonic were so vivid to ancient Greek sensibility that such energies were invested in order"<sup>57</sup>. Modernist philosophers stated that fascination with the phenomena of disintegration and coincidence is a consequence of an extraordinary sense of continuity and synthesis. The fantasy of producing a total work of art has been expressed in numerous visions of avant-garde artists, by among others: Kandinsky, Apollinaire, Schwitters. Both Picasso and Matisse "in their undisguised striving after futurity, after the consecration of the museum or the pantheon, these painters are disciples of Giotto"<sup>58</sup>. Several anthropological projects are logical outcomes of aesthetic ideals: Marinetti's multiplied-man, or Artud's total man. Frequently a specter of genius accompanies the avant-garde artists' journey through the valleys of a dehumanized world. Let us take a closer look at one aspect of the avant-garde mythology of genius, interpreted, as Steiner proposed, as the narrative of the modern artist's formal experience.

When he defined the area of anti-tradition Guillaume Apollinaire mentioned, in his well-known futurist manifesto, among others: Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Wagner, but omitted Leonardo da Vinci. Is it a coincidence? It most certainly is. Futurists seemed to strike at random. However, can we plausibly assume that he, whom European culture worshiped as its greatest genius for four hundred years, has been abandoned at the ash heap of history, together with the museums and the academia?

This just seems not to be the case, and having one particular event in mind, we can assume that Leonardo is a patron saint of the European avant-garde movement.

On 21 September, 1911 Vincenzo Peruggia steals the *par excellence* European (that is non-Italian) masterpiece of Leonardo da Vinci – *The Mona Lisa* – from the Paris Louvre. The particular effect this event has had was based on the force with which it unveiled the ferment that has for quite some time been steadily growing in the aesthetic tastes, norms and values, affecting not as

57 George Steiner, *Grammars of Creation: Originating in the Gifford Lectures for 1990* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), 42.

58 Ibid., 273.

much the area of academic aesthetics, as the sphere of cultural functioning of art. Some considered the wide interest the painting's disappearance has generated to be a proof of the visual arts' unwavering popularity, particularly of their sanctified masterpieces. Others saw in the empty space of the museum wall a prophetic mark left by the spirit of the time.

And the spirit of the time bellowed through the thoughts of Marinetti, Apollinaire and Artaud: "Away with masterpieces!" Curses muttered by the avant-garde artists from the beginning, have finally materialized: *Mona Lisa* disappeared. The day following the painting's theft Apollinaire, unsuspecting yet that he himself will soon become a suspect, wrote in an article:

"La Gioconda's beauty was so great that her perfection granted her an enduring place among masterpiece-trifles. And there aren't so many of those. Apollo Belvedere, Venus de Milo, Sistine Madonna, The Last Judgment, The Embarkation for Cythera, The Angelus, Isle of the Dead – this is almost everything that humanity has set aside from centuries of artistic effort"<sup>59</sup>.

No wonder that in the stretch of time between its theft in 1911 and its recovery in 1913, a heated debate elevated *The Mona Lisa* to the rank of an icon of high art. It became a synecdoche for great West European art. Leonardo's masterpiece was dematerialized in a twofold sense – the purely physical and the symbolic. The blankness of the Louvre wall terrified spectators with its remaining hooks, and the long lines forming before it were proof that the museum has become, as an institution, a kind of *perpetuum mobile*, capable of functioning without artifacts, replaced by the miasmal aura of an exhilarating aesthetic experience. The provocative questions of why has this "mere object of trade" (as the cynics commented) been given so much value, led to serious deliberations upon the mechanism of creating cultural value, and revealed a strong need for its demystification.

The painting's theft generated a whole series of cultural gestures made in jest: from satirical caricatures, parodies, press humor, cabaret songs, even short-films; to serious, desecrating comments. This is the period when, according to Donald Sassoon, the author of a monograph about *Mona Lisa*, a fashion for ridiculing high art in popular culture began<sup>60</sup>.

59 Mieczysław Porębski, *Granica współczesności 1909-1925* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1989), 35.

60 Donald Sassoon, *Mona Lisa: the History of the World's Most Famous Painting* (London: Harper-Collins Publishers, 2001).

The reflected light of *La Gioconda's* extraordinary fame also shone on the avant-garde artists. During the agitated discussion that ensued in the press, in one of the Louvre's director's caricatures there appeared, for the first time, a mustachioed *Mona Lisa*. Subsequent reproductions of Leonardo's painting enhanced with masculine facial hair, by such renowned artists as Picabia, Duchamp and Dali, have been considered to be among the most consequential provocations in the history of twentieth-century art. Have these gestures of degradation of a work of art come as a result of disenchantment with the era of geniuses? For Marcel Duchamp this puerile gesture will become a gateway to fame in Europe and the United States. The rebellious Dadaist will soon evolve into a rational manager, who with the aid of a New York notary will ensure for himself the copyright to the attached mustache, and beard. But the very act of toying with the masterpiece will absorb Duchamp so deeply that many years later he will attempt to emulate the original act. During the 1965 American retrospective of the artist, the invitation to the event was designed in the form of a playing card depicting *Mona Lisa*, sans mustache, with the inscription *LHOOQ rasée* (shaved). Thus Leonardo's painting became a caricature of Duchamp's work; Da Vinci was knighted as a permanent artistic interlocutor of the avant-garde genius.

Duchamp's interactions with the painting shared a common theme that directly referred to both of the artists. The added facial hair was a sign of the depicted person's sexual identity – hermaphroditism was supposed to be *Mona Lisa's* secret. Popular literary interpretations of the painting's mystery implicated Leonardo himself. The most popular of the Renaissance artist's biographies, Dmitry Merezhkovsky's<sup>61</sup> trilogy, suggested that the myth of androgyny is the key to Lisa Gherardini's portrait, which in fact is a portrait of Leonardo himself. It is a well-known fact that one of Duchamp's great fascinations, the sexual ambiguity of his own nature hermaphroditism and transvestism, became a creative impulse for many photographic self-portraits and numerous performances. Duchamp owes his discovery of the connection between the androgenic theme and Leonardo's person to the reading of Sigmund Freud's study from 1910 – *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood*.

Freud's text succumbed to the aura of avant-garde provocation, which while berating tradition simultaneously praised it. The creator of psychoanalysis was fully aware that entering the art world with his psychoanalytical apparatus spelled destruction to the sublime persona of the Renaissance genius. He appealed to the reader:

61 Dmitry Merezhkovsky, *The Romance of Leonardo da Vinci* (New York: Random House, 1931). The titles of subsequent parts are *The Death of the Gods*, *Julian the Apostate*; *Peter and Alexis*.

I hope the reader will restrain himself and not allow a surge of indignation to prevent his following psycho-analysis any further because it leads to an unpardonable aspersion on the memory of a great and pure man the very first time it is applied to his case<sup>62</sup>.

He assumed the hermeneutic value of the artist's "pathographical" portrait to be so high, that even if the amount of speculation and fantasy contained within it was so extensive to merit the accusation of being a mere "psycho-analytic novel", it was still worth the effort.

Freud achieved two goals: he took Leonardo's virtue from him, and gave him a body instead. The persona of the Renaissance artist that has become so idealized by the late nineteenth-century cult of sublime genius, revealed before the twentieth-century public its most intimate physicality. Freud's thesis that the creative process has a corporal aspect, led to the conclusion that an analysis of the artist's sexuality will bring a better understanding of the mechanisms influencing creative decisions. The ingenuity of the creator lost the dimension of a spiritual mystery, its secret revealed as mere coincidence that rules all nature. The discovery of rules governing the human psyche is accompanied by a descent into the abyss of contingent existence. Freud ends his study: "at the same time we are all too ready to forget that in fact everything to do with our life is chance, [...] We all still show too little respect for Nature which (in the obscure words of Leonardo which recall Hamlet's lines) is full of countless causes ["ragioni"] that never enter experience"<sup>63</sup>.

These three facts: the painting's theft, Duchamp's artistic games, and Freud's psychoanalytical study, make Leonardo a hero of three distinct types of narration: sensational, artistic and aesthetic. The public opinion in reaction to real and symbolic events, the artistic *praxis* and the scientific-philosophical reflection, produce a multidimensional cultural object, which Leonardo becomes as the avant-garde's genius.

From the vantage point of the artist's reflections upon artists, at that time, things look significantly different.

The image of Leonardo that emerged from numerous comments of avant-garde artists became a special kind of mirror, reflecting the presuppositions of contemporary creative individuals. The variety of avant-garde movements, of which many have designated Leonardo as their predecessor, is the reason his image resembles a cubist composition, only seemingly forming a singular object. Marinetti in his Sorbonne lecture (1924) named Leonardo the "first

62 Sigmund Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci: A Memory of His Childhood*, trans. Alan Dyson (London: Routledge, 2014), 35.

63 Ibid., 96-97.

great futurist"; Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger, in their 1912 book *Cubism*, designated Leonardo to the post of public defender of the new movement's program. The painter of the *Lady with the Ermine* can be found in fauvist manifestos (Henri Matisse) among accepted authorities on painting. Salvador Dalí's *Diary of a Genius* features, besides its main hero of course, another important supporting character – the Renaissance genius. At the same instance Leonardo is a futurist, a fauvist, a cubist and a surrealist, that is to say – a synthesis of the European avant-garde. Some of these occasional references are merely an exhibition of self-aggrandizing rhetoric, addressing the honorable precursor. The important aspect of the matter is that the Renaissance master's persona exists not only within the realm of historic reconstruction, but in the self-creating acts of contemporary geniuses.

The most compelling of all modernist portraits of Leonardo can be found in Paul Valéry's two essays, *Leonardo and the Philosophers* and the *Introduction to the Method of Leonardo da Vinci*. They are both examples of a thorough analysis of the ingenious artist's phenomenon, and at the same time a kind of aesthetic manifesto that will be developed and expanded by the author of *Eupalinos* in the following decades. The later of these texts, which was written in 1894 – shaped the perception of the Italian Renaissance artist in the eyes of the avant-garde's representatives, at the start of the twentieth century.

It is notable that the artistic matter, which constitutes the main object of analysis, is not some particular visual masterpiece of Leonardo's, but his judgments, the speculative aspect of his art. Thus, Leonardo the writer of *A Treatise on Painting* becomes a hero – this is a noticeable shift in the discourse of the transmission of cultural tradition. And the presence of a robust literary code of the visual arts' representation within European modernism cannot be ignored. The description of *The Mona Lisa* given by Walter Pater, as part of his essay on Leonardo from 1869, also included in his 1873 *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, has shaped the way of looking at images, and the narrative style used to describe them, for several decades. As far as in 1936 William Butler Yeats reprinted this fragment, in his introduction to the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse 1892-1935*, reshaping Pater's prose into free verse form. The poetic ekphrasis, that was a crucial narrative dominant used for describing art of past ages, lost its power with the passage of time.

Valéry follows a different path: he abandons the description of the works and tries to comprehend the very phenomenon of genius instead. He is not interested in the perfection of craft, but is fascinated by "passionate thinking" (Arendt's term), that unifies thinking and being. Leonard's famous phrase *l'arte è una cosa mentale* perfectly resonates with the conceptual denomination within the avant-garde movement. The debate, initiated by the Dadaists, on the role of artistic intent as a cornerstone constituting the work of art and all

other artistic practices, defined an entire period – from Duchamp's *Fountain* to conceptual art.

Valéry places self-awareness at the center of his model of an exceptional individual, and he attempts to discern the underlying “model of the continuity of the intellectual operations”<sup>64</sup>. He is fascinated by the “psychic experimentation” constantly occurring in the ingenious mind, that progresses from architecture to general physics and mechanics, from “forms, born of movement, there is a transition to the movements into which forms may be dissolved”<sup>65</sup>. There is a proposition in *Extraneous Remarks* that has its roots in the same problem that Freud grappled with: the peculiar entropy of the creative drive, that is the reason behind an inability to complete works of art and the compulsion to begin them anew:

To finish a masterpiece means to erase any trace that reveals or even suggest work. An artist should, according to this antiquated view, make himself manifest only by his style and should continue his labor until it has effaced all trace of labor. But considerations of the moment and of personality having slowly triumphed over those devoted to duration and the work itself, it has come to seem as if finish were not only useless and troublesome but even a hindrance to *truth, sensibility* and the revelation of *genius*<sup>66</sup>.

The conjoined opposites of continuation and experimentation, and also frailty, that contradict personal truth – those are components that make up the image of an artist, as an aporetic construct. *L'uomo universale* transcending the boundaries of art, technology and science through his inventiveness – that is a result of freedom – this is the modernist dream. It is noticeable in avant-garde anthropological concepts, and visions of a total artwork.

Valéry's essay is not just another aesthetic manifesto. The undertaken attempt of defining Leonardo's phenomenon is, as Kristeva would say, a phase of “narrated action”. The next stage would be the “acting narrative” – this is a key to reading Valéry's Mr. Teste stories.

Describing his own vision of the wanderings of a great mind, for whom feelings of freedom were a source and direction in leading a creative life, he

---

64 Paul Valéry, “Introduction to the Method of Leonardo da Vinci” in *Paul Valéry: An Anthology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 90.

65 Ibid., 86, 54.

66 Paul Valéry, *Degas. Manet. Morisot*, trans. David Paul (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 20–21.



reaches the conclusion that the logical consequence of experiencing such freedom must be the rational decision to limit it. From the vision of an ingenious, voracious mind, which in its insatiable drive toward understanding and creating, inspired by the daemon of analogy, consumes everything and everyone; to the ideal of freedom personified in Mr. Teste enclosed within the four walls of his “impersonal” room. The creation of Edmund Teste, the most mysterious of literary heroes that came from under Valéry’s pen, is a vision of a perfect mind that exists in extreme asceticism, removing subsequent fields of experience that life offers. Devoid of any ostentation or wonder, this genuinely is a new kind of genius. Lacking cheap exaltation, and free from the original sin of those seduced by self-love and fame, he embodies a straightforward, anonymous extraordinariness. A man that comprehended “human plasticity”, was a being “absorbed in his own variations, one who becomes his own system, who commits himself without reservation to the frightening discipline of the free mind”<sup>67</sup>. This genius, picked for his own use by the onlooker and narrator from an anonymous crowd, elicits enthusiasm and shock, he fascinates and terrifies, until he disappears completely in the compassion that the vision of Mr. Teste’s suffering induces in the spectator: the only mystery, he could not solve, was pain.

The All-too-human and the inhuman constitutes a modern aesthetic aporia, that Valéry tried to address using his own “sequence of intellectual operations”.

The process of creating a genius, in its subsequent phases: inspiration – “food for thought”, narrative of creative action, finally “acting out” the artistic myth, had in the case of Valéry, as well as other avant-garde artists, the character of experiencing identity. A particular poetics of self-creation is the foundation of the aesthetic notion of an artist. The relation between the modernist artist and other artists, taking shape in the aura of growing suspicion towards the anthropocentric ideal, often turned into a ritual repetition of the basic question of his own existence.

*Translation: Rafał Pawluk*

---

67 Paul Valéry, “The Evening with Monsieur Teste” in *Paul Valéry: An Anthology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 7.

---

Piotr Piotrowski

---

## From Global to Alter-Globalist Art History<sup>1</sup>

---

DOI: 10.18318/td.2015.en.1.8

### Does Global Art History Exist?

Kitty Zijlmans begins her short but condensed programmatic article with the following words: “Clearly, art history is not global”<sup>2</sup>. After making this categorical statement, the author presents over a dozen points of her art-historical research programme which could be the response to the processes taking place in the world, including the global dimension of art culture. I will not summarise it here but I would like to note that, partially, it has a “level-headed” character. Her primary postulate to make it an “intercultural” project is compatible with the mainstream literature which has been increasingly published in the recent years. Some of her more interesting

### Piotr Piotrowski

– professor in the Institute of History of Art at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. Director of IHS UAM (1999–2008) and the National Museum in Warsaw (2009–2010). Visiting professor in *inter alia* the Bard College, USA (2001), the Hebrew University in Jerusalem (2003) and the Humboldt University of Berlin (2011–2012). Author of a dozen or so books, including *Znaczenia modernizmu* and *Awangarda w cieniu Jolty* (2005; English ed. 2009, received the Jan Długosz Award and the Prime Minister’s Award). His most recent books include *Agorafilia* (2010; English ed. 2012) and *Muzeum krytyczne* (2011). Winner of the Igor Zabel Award for Culture and Theory (Barcelona, 2010).

- 
- 1 The present article is an extended version of the paper presented at the Methodological Seminar organised by the Art Historians Association in Nieborów on October 25–27, 2012. I would like to thank Prof. Maria Poprzęcka for the consent to this publication which precedes releasing the volume of materials from the Seminar. Also, I would like to thank participants of a seminar I conducted in the 2012/2013 winter semester entitled *Global Art History* at the Warsaw University within the “modern university” project, for stimulating discussions.
  - 2 Kitty Zijlmans, *An Intercultural Perspective in Art History: Beyond Othering and Appropriation in Is Art History Global*, ed. James Elkins (New York: Routledge, 2007), 289.

ideas are shared by many other authors, for example the concept that the global art history studies should reject the West-centred domination of the formal analysis and focus more on the “material” one. What is worth underlining, Zijlmans ends her concise text with a question whether this is going to work<sup>3</sup>, even though two years later, in the article included in the anthology co-edited by her, she seemed to have no doubts that this was going to work. She makes an assumption that art and art history/art criticism are a part of an “art system” which, being a “function” of a given social formation, is characterised by “self-observation” and “self-description”. Precisely in this matter, the discourse produced by art history plays the role of a regulator and creator of the above-mentioned system. The current trend to accept peripheral creation as a subject of art criticism and art history is a symptom of the art system’s globalisation. However, Zijlmans does not specify how (!) this is done but declares that this (!) is what happens, and she considers it a starting point for global art history<sup>4</sup>. The question asked earlier seems even more fundamental to the project which is called here “global art history”.

Undoubtedly, what we currently observe is not only globalisation in terms of the economy and politics, the Empire of some kind, but also something we could call global art – outstretched between the world market, the financial superpower of corporations and art collectors on the one hand, and creation working for the Counter-Empire<sup>5</sup> called the “Multitude” (with the unfortunate Polish translation as “rzesza”) by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. In the end, Jeff Koons’ global art is of a different nature than Artur Żmijewski’s artistic output. It is also natural that – as it often happened in history – it is contemporary art which provokes historical questions and thus shapes art history. Although there is a debate on the chronology<sup>6</sup> and condition of

3 Zijlmans, *An Intercultural Perspective*, 298.

4 Kitty Zijlmans, *The Discourse on Contemporary Art and the Globalization in World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches*, ed. Kitty Zijlmans, Wilfried van Damme (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2008), 135–150. Speaking of the artistic system, the author refers to the following publications: Niklas Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme: Grundriss einer allgemeinen Theorie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984); Niklas Luhmann, *Die Kunst der Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995).

5 Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001). On the translation of the word “Multitude” which is also the title of one part of Hardt and Negri’s trilogy (*Imperium, Multitude* [the book has not been published in Polish yet], *Rzecz-pospolita*), cf. *Praktyka Teoretyczna* [anonymous team], *Introduction* in Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri *Rzecz-pospolita*, trans. *Praktyka Teoretyczna* (Kraków: Ha!art, 2012), 48.

6 Generally speaking, some researchers signal earlier history of globalisation, at least going back to the capitalistic boom in the early modern period: Peter Sloterdijk, *In the World Interior of Capital: Towards a Philosophical Theory of Globalization*, trans. W. Hoban, (Cambridge: Polity Press 2013), Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Duke Univer-

globalisation, or even the global character of culture, and every year there are more publications discussing global art and its history as well as attempts to build global art history as a scientific discipline, I still have an impression that Kitty Zijlmans' question quoted at the beginning of this article remains valid. Even James Elkins, who is considered to be an expert in this field, does not give a satisfactory answer to the question about what global art history should look like. His argument is reduced to a postulate that we should neutralise Western instruments and refer to local texts which may provide both knowledge and tools of research<sup>7</sup>. Nonetheless, some scholars criticise him for applying them as stable matrices rather than treating them as real, often heterogeneous, historical sources, additionally enveloped with often equivocal interpretations<sup>8</sup>. If we wish to draw any specific conclusions, they will rather be negative – we know what global art history should not be.

Hans Belting gives a fairly convincing answer to this question, suggesting that global art history should not be associated with the World Art Studies which focus more on studying universally understood world artistic heritage rather than the historical and geographical meaning of artistic creation. It is also neither history of global art, being quite a new phenomenon, nor an "extension" of today's Western art history to areas which have been neglected and ignored so far, namely the so-called Global South (formerly referred to as the Third World), and being a part of contemporary, global art culture because this would mean the continuation of the hegemonic strategy of universalistic, modernistic, Western art history. Belting has no doubts that global art, different from modern and until, recently, contemporary, so-called postmodernist art in terms of quality, is a challenge to art history and, to a certain extent, confirms his earlier theses concerning the breach of a discipline paradigm

---

sity Press, 2005). In our field of research, they are joined by Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann who disputes with Fredric Jameson, *Art and Globalization*, ed. James Elkins et al. (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010): Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann's views on pages: 13, 37–39; Frederic Jameson's views on pages: 13–15. Cf. also Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *Toward a Geography of Art* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004).

- 7 James Elkins, *Writing about Modernist Painting Outside Western Europe and North America in Compression vs. Expression. Containing and Explaining the World's Art*, ed. John Onians (Williamstown MA, Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2006), 188–412; *Is Art History Global?*, ed. James Elkins (New York-London: Routledge, 2007); James Elkins, *Why Art History is Global in Globalization and Contemporary Art*, ed. Jonathan Harris (Chichester, Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 375–386.
- 8 Monica Juneja, *Global Art History and the "Burden of Representation" in Global Studies. Mapping Contemporary Art and Culture*, ed. Hans Belting et al. (Ostfildern: Hatje Canz Verlag, 2011), 279–280.

formulated aptly as “the end of art history”<sup>9</sup>. Obviously, he did not have in mind the end of reflection about art but transcending the frames of the paradigm – too narrow to embrace many traditional and contemporary art works. What is more, according to Belting, not only the academic discipline requires reconstruction but also the museum which, faced with global challenges (*nota bene* being realised mostly on the local level), cannot continuously follow previous models: neither MoMA, nor MoCA. The first one was entangled in the mythology of universalism<sup>10</sup>, the second – in the logic of late capitalism<sup>11</sup>. The new model should go against both the first and the second one as well as it should remove the disciplinary and institutional barriers separating e.g. an ethnographic museum from the one dedicated to art history, according to the movement springing in culture itself. Above all, it should provide a forum of public debate<sup>12</sup>.

### Global Art History and Post-Colonial Studies

Regardless of the lack of a conceptualised system of “how to deal with global art history?”, hence the lack of a cohesive theory, or even a proposition as such<sup>13</sup>, analytical practice reveals an enormous field of research and extensive literature on this subject<sup>14</sup>. Its source can be mainly found in the area of the

9 Hans Belting, *Das Ende der Kunstgeschichte. Eine Revision nach Jahren* (München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1994).

10 Cf., among others, Carol Duncan, *Civilising Rituals. Inside Public Art Museums* (London: Routledge, 1995), 102–132.

11 Rosalind Krauss, “The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum”, *October* 54 (Fall, 1990): 3–17.

12 These arguments appear in the published texts of the author and his collaborators in his project “GAM – Global Art Museum” in ZKM|Karlsruhe: *Contemporary Art and the Museum. A Global Perspective*, ed. Peter Weibel, Andrea Buddensieg (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2007), *The Global Art World. Audiences, Markets, and Museums*, ed. Hans Belting, Andrea Buddensieg (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2009), *Global Studies. Mapping Contemporary Art and Culture*, ed. Hans Belting et al. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2001).

13 For some time, David Summers’ monumental work was considered such a proposition – in his book, the author shifts the analysis from the visual to the spatial area which results in a polemic with fundamental Western categories of an analysis of a work of art. Cf. David Summers, *Real Spaces. World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism* (New York: Phaidon, 2003). Cf. also David Summers, *World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism, or Goodbye to the Visual Arts in Compression vs. Expression. Containing and Explaining the World’s Art*, 215–234.

14 Apart from the publications mentioned in the previous footnotes, I would pay attention to synthetic studies and anthologies of texts (excluding monographs of specific regions):

post-colonial studies which started to develop relatively late in our discipline, i.e. in the late 1980s. The year 1989, when three important exhibitions related with the subject simultaneously took place, seems particularly important and, for certain reasons, symptomatic as it coincided with the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe. In 1989 the following exhibitions were organised: *Magiciens de la Terre* in Centre Pompidou (curator: Jean Hubert-Martin), *The Other Stories. Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain* in Hayward Gallery in London (curator: Rasheed Araeen) and the most interesting of all editions, the third edition of the Havana Biennale (curator: Gerardo Mosquera).

The basic argument of the art-historical post-colonial studies is the multitude of modernities and modernisms, the variety of meanings and realisations as well as their transcultural, dynamic and participatory (but not disconnected from the centre) character. In fact, most scholars admit it – also these who do not identify themselves with the post-colonial perspective, such as one of the best researches of Asian art – John Clark<sup>15</sup>, or those who engage in the criticism of these studies somehow from the inside, such as an editor of the key magazine in the field – “Third Text” – Rasheed Araeen who accuse post-colonial theories (and even more the idea of multiculturalism) of masking the Western hegemony and preserving neo-colonial divisions<sup>16</sup>. However, I would like to mention here an article, written by a well-known expert in Indian art, Partha Mitter, published in the December 2008 issue of “The Art Bulletin”<sup>17</sup>. The author begins his text with a critical analysis of colonial art history, asserting one-way import of so-called primitive art from

---

*Globalization and Contemporary Art*, ed. Jonathan Harris (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), *Global Art*, ed. Silvia von Bunningsen et al. (Ostfildern: Hatje Canz Verlag, 2009), Charlotte Bydler, *The Global ArtWorld Inc. On the Globalization of Contemporary Art* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2004), Julian Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated. The Story of Contemporary Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), *Modern art in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. An Introduction to Global Modernisms*, ed. Elaine O'Brien et al. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

- 15 John Clark, *Modern Asian Art* (Honolulu: The University of Hawaii Press, 1998). Cf. also John Clark, *Modernities in Art: How are they 'Order'?* in *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches*, 401–418.
- 16 Rasheed Araeen, “Our Bauhaus Other’ Mudhouse”, *Third Text* 6 (Spring, 1988): 3–14. Rasheed Araeen, *A New Beginning. Beyond Post-colonial Cultural Theory and Identity Politics in The 'Third Text' Reader on Art, Culture and Theory*, ed. Rasheed Araeen et al. (London: Continuum, 2002), 333–345; Rasheed Araeen, *Art and Post-colonial Society in Globalization and Contemporary Art*, 365–374.
- 17 Partha Mitter, “Intervention. Decentering Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery”, *The Art Bulletin* 4 (vol. XC, 2008): 543–544. Cf. also Partha Mitter, *Reflections on Modern Art and National Identity in Colonial India: an Interview in Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, ed. Kobena Mercer (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2005), 24–49.

the colony to the metropolis and the movement which another scholar in another place calls mercantilism<sup>18</sup>. This import was of course related with the Western hegemony and with the conviction that modernism, despite being inspired by the East, may solely emerge in the West and from there it can be exported to the East as a Western product. The East – according to experts in colonialism – is not able to generate contemporary art by itself. Moreover, by importing modernism, an Eastern artist fell into a trap of being between exact and inept imitation. In the first case, he/she was accused by the coloniser of “aping”, in the second one – of the lack of progress in his scholarship. In other words, the colonial vision of contemporary art accepts only one modernism – the Western one – which of course conveys a universalistic, hierarchically implemented message. Mitter shows, however, that such a vision conceals an ideology rather than a true image of the relations between the metropolis and the colony. In essence, neither was “reception” of modernism passive in the colonies, nor was the movement unidirectional. In the first aspect, Mitter points to the example of the 19th-century India to show the spreading of academic painting as a synonym of Western colonisation. What is meaningful from the point of view of colonial politics, the academic art touched upon Oriental subjects known to Western art. This tendency was contradicted by nationalist concepts of returning to historical sources and exploitation of art based on traditional, Indian patterns. Nevertheless, the avant-garde movement of the early 1920s – above all cubism which was very popular in the region – overthrew this order. From that moment on, cubism-inspired Indian art began to function as a critique of colonial academism, but also nationalism expressed in art modelled on the Indian tradition. In the second aspect, as emphasised by the author, Western references to the so-called primitivism were not solely formalistic inspiration. In his opinion, by pointing to the “other” art, Western artists undermined this cultural hegemony; by rejecting classical and realistic foundations of Western art and by constructing rebellious poetics and messages, they challenged art tradition and imperial politics of the West as well as capitalist and bourgeois attitudes which were the foundation of Western societies including the colonial ones<sup>19</sup>. Mitter concludes that New Art History, based on post-colonial premises, may disclose a different side of modernism: pluralist, open and decentralised, and present a complex relation between locality and globalism, but also mutual

18 Ming Tiampo, *Cultural Mercantilism. Modernism's Means of Production: the Gutai Group as Case Study in Globalization and Contemporary Art*, 212–224.

19 Similar opinions were sometimes expressed by Western researchers not related with post-colonialism. Cf. Patricia Dee Leighton, *Re-Ordering the Universe: Picasso and Anarchism, 1897–1914* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).

inspirations between peripheries and centres in their dynamic shape. This obviously means – and is underlined by nearly all scholars in the field – that the post-colonial condition not only concerns former colonies but also, or actually most of all, (former?) metropoleis.

In this context, Partha Mitter introduces very interesting notions: “cosmopolitan primitivism” and “virtual cosmopolitanism” also called “imagined primitivism”, which is clearly a cunning reference to Benedict Anderson’s nationalist theory based on the notion of “imagined community”. These notions imply that referring to the so-called primitive was very common among modernist artists in the early 20th century and united them ideologically and artistically in their critical strategies towards aesthetic, capitalist and colonial politics of the West, regardless of the country and continent of their origin.<sup>20</sup> It is worth adding here that just as avant-garde artists in the West reached for “primitive” works from distant sources, Indian artists drew from their own sources – this situates these two artistic groups in two distinct positions and loosens the bonds within this international primitivist coalition. There is yet another discrepancy between them: Western artists focused on the critique of their “own” colonialism, at least of their own countries, whilst “other” artists, Indian artists in this case, fought with foreign colonialism. Nevertheless, taking up these issues surely made these “communities” be diversely located in the world map back then. It is, however, important to the author that it was the avant-garde, inspired by local folk (“primitive”) art, which made it possible for Indian artists to liberate from two traps of colonialism: Western imperial – and effectively Oriental – academism and nationalism manifested in Indian aristocratic traditional art (e.g. flat, decorative miniatures).

### Post-Colonial Studies and (Eastern) Europe

Post-colonial studies are one of the basic impulses to think about art globally. Should we develop this kind of reflection with regard to Eastern European art in this decentralised, pluralist perspective, we must definitely get through with the post-colonial studies.

We should notice, however, that various publications devoted to global art, and more precisely, to art history seen from the global perspective, *de facto* omit Eastern Europe. It is sometimes alluded to but in very general terms. Most materials are related with studies on Asian, African, Latin-American and Australian art culture, usually treated separately, somehow next to each

20 More extended argumentation of this kind is presented by the author in Partha Mitter, *The Triumph of Modernism. India’s Artists and the Avant-Garde, 1922-1947* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007).



other, instead of being evaluated in the context of their interactions. To such researchers, Eastern Europe is neither a problem for analysis nor interesting research material. The artistic reflection presented here is not to be found in their synthetic interpretations. Charlotte Bydler, trying to sketch a global panorama of the discipline cultivated outside the West, writes about art history in Africa, Turkey, Scandinavia, Korea, but she does not refer to Eastern Europe<sup>21</sup>. In a way, it is actually our fault. Despite several attempts to master art historiography of the region, predominantly made in Germany by Adam Labuda and his students<sup>22</sup>, a synthetic work about the development of art history in Eastern Europe, which would collect and compare experiences of theoreticians and researchers from different countries, has not been written yet. Certainly, it is not easy as these countries are quite numerous and their inhabitants speak and write using various, little-known languages. Nevertheless, such work must be performed by someone one day. On the other hand, as Jan Bakoš notices, global art history is to a small extent the subject of Eastern-European art historians' interest<sup>23</sup>, which is not entirely true but the fact is that there have been no serious studies in this field published in our part of Europe. As a result, we do not participate in this debate on the international level. In other disciplines such as literary studies or political and economic history, the situation is a bit different as proved by Jan Sowa's recent daring re-writing of the Polish history<sup>24</sup> and earlier, Ewa Thompson's studies on Russian literature – read from the colonial point of view<sup>25</sup>. However, this does not mean that such perspective is received uncritically in the field of research on history and literature<sup>26</sup>. Thus, drawing inspiration from the post-colonial studies in Eastern-European art history, being quite a different phenomenon from literature or history of politics and economy, is not that simple. In order to face this phenomenon at all, we must first rigorously scrutinise art-historical instruments of the post-colonial studies, if we want to go deeper instead

21 Charlotte Bydler, *The Global ArtWorld Inc.*, 159-179.

22 Cf. e.g. *Die Kunsthistoriographien in Ostmitteleuropa and der nationale Diskurs*, ed. Robert Born, Alena Janatková, Adam S. Labuda (Berlin: Gebrüder Man Verlag [Humboldt-Schriften zur Kunst- und Bildgeschichte], 2004).

23 Jan Bakoš, in *Art and Globalization*, 206.

24 Jan Sowa, *Fantomowe ciało króla* (Kraków: Universitas, 2011).

25 Ewa Thompson, *Trubadurzy Imperium. Literatura rosyjska i kolonializm* (Kraków: Universitas, 2000).

26 Cf. D. Skórczewski, „Wobec eurocentryzmu, dekolonizacji i postmodernizmu. O niektórych problemach teorii postkolonialnej i jej polskich perspektywach”, *Teksty Drugie* 1-2 (2008): 33-35.

of merely utilising slogans concerning multitude, decentralisation, critique of hegemony, hybridity of the subject, etc.

I believe that the key matter is criticism of Eurocentrism, intensively exploited by post-colonialists. It is one of our main problems as well. Without dissection of this notion, it is even hard to think about employing this perspective in research devoted to Eastern-European art. The path from this point to globalism, or global history of Eastern-European art, leads through Europe and not in opposition to it. Incidentally, not only European peripheries encounter this issue. Many researchers and observers of global culture agree that farther, intercontinental peripheries also need to take Europe into consideration rather than reject its presence. Because the alternative, as Gerardo Mosquera wrote, is not the “Marco Polo syndrome”, and not the return to cultural isolationism or pre-colonial “purity” but discovering the syncretism of modern and contemporary culture, the symbiosis of European and local influences<sup>27</sup>.

To post-colonial researchers, Europe is a negative figure largely homogenising the culture of the Old Continent. Frankly speaking, they can afford such simplification because, for their own purposes, debating over intra-European colonisation is meaningless. They associate Europe with historical experience of European colonialism represented by Great Britain, France, Belgium, Netherlands, Spain and Portugal. They are not concerned with such countries as Moldavia, Lithuania, Slovakia or Slovenia (often mistaken with each other), Poland – having its own episode of Eastern colonisation, Russia or even Germany, although it was in Berlin where Otto von Bismarck’s initiative resulted in organising a conference about the colonial division of the world in the years 1884–1885. Obviously, Germany had overseas colonial ambitions; it even had colonies. Eventually, similarly to Austria and Russia, it concentrated on conquering neighbouring territories rather than exploiting remote continents (earlier Poland acted similarly). Italy’s colonial adventure was slightly grotesque; Scandinavians, on the other hand, did not have such experiences at all, not mentioning the Irish – perhaps even more painfully affected by the British imperialism than Indians – who did not enjoy the status of the “pearl in the crown”. The completely inverted colonial scheme is manifested by Greece, the home of European civilisation colonised by the non-European superpower. Clearly, there is no one Europe: there is colonial and colonised Europe, imperial and invaded Europe, dominant and subordinated Europe. Comments regarding European pluralism and criticism of the continent’s homogenising vision are crucial to us because from our perspective, the notion

27 Gerardo Mosquera, *The Marco Polo Syndrome. Some Problems around Art and Eurocentrism* (1992) in *The Biennale Reader*, ed. E. Filipovic et al. (Ostfildern: Hatje Canz Verlag, 2010), 416–425.

of Eurocentrism is doubtful, while its post-colonial criticism definitely too simplified.

This has fairly serious consequences: an impossibility to maintain another key post-colonial notion, namely the notion of the “other”. To the British coloniser, the Indian is evidently the “other”, just like the Arab to the French or the American Indian to the Spanish. Czechs or Hungarians are not really the “other”; they are rather the “close other”, “not-quite-other”<sup>28</sup>, etc. This also works the other way around but not in the case of subjective colonial relations. Moreover, the Polish will also consider the Indian and the African as the “other”, especially in the context of culture. The “close other”, on the other hand, functions within the same *episteme*, in the same system of perceiving the world, in the area of the same cultural, traditional, religious models, etc. Consequently, the culture of the European coloniser or occupant is not totally strange, or at least it is not as strange as in transoceanic relations. This makes a fundamental discrepancy as it also defines artistic relations. To artists from Prague or Zagreb, Western-European art centres were not so much external as they were to e.g. Shanghai art circles, most modernist and lively ones in the Chinese culture of the 1930s. Hence, drawing from Parisian models (e.g. cubism) bore a different meaning in Lviv than in Calcutta. It also reached a different ground. Marginal European states, not only these on the East of the continent but also the Northern ones (an often forgotten fact), are not the countries where “art history has no history”, as Andrea Buddensieg wrote about Rasheed Araeen<sup>29</sup>. Therefore, the allegedly analogical and syncretic (as we have called it so far) reception of cubism in Cracow or Riga is not same thing as reception of cubism in Calcutta.

And finally the third question: who is the coloniser and who is colonised here? In attempt to respond to it, or in fact to expose difficulties in giving the response, I will only focus on the period after 1945. From that moment, Eastern Europe is – to a variable extent and with a different dynamic – occupied by the USSR. Cultural colonisation of Eastern-European countries expressed in socialist realism takes place in the late 1940s. By then, everything seems to be in the right place: there is the coloniser (USSR) and there are the colonised (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, etc.). In the mid 1950s the situation begins to be complicated. Generally speaking, the coloniser withdraws or is

28 In art-historical literature known to me, this notion is used by Bojana Pejić, *The Dialectics of Normality in After the Wall. Art and Culture in Post-Communist Europe*, ed. Bojana Pejić, David Elliott (Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 1999), 020. She also refers to Boris Groys’ notion of *fremde Nahe* but she does not provide the source.

29 Andrea Buddensieg, *Visibility in the Art World: the Voice of Rasheed Araeen in Contemporary Art and the Museum*, 52.

withdrawn from the cultural colonisation – again in various degrees and with different dynamics, depending on a country. At least this is what happens in Poland. What is, therefore, the decolonising strategy of Poland and other Eastern countries? It is patterned on Western states, mainly France, where – for many reasons – opportunities for emancipation can be found. For example, in French *informel* painting, at least as per conviction of local cultural leaders of the Khrushchev Thaw. Since it is not “indigenous” abstract art, the question arises whether this might be French cultural colonisation. If so, one wave of colonisation would be ousted by another, only that the second one was warmly welcomed by the colonised. To some extent, it would resemble the position of cubism in India, which, as already mentioned, forced out *par excellence* the art of the colonisers, i.e. academism. However, this is not a very close analogy because cubism, “imported” from Paris to Calcutta around 1922, not only had origins in the same geographical region as academism, but also, or most of all, was critical towards this region. Calcutta, therefore, was the destination of art which revolted against art associated with the colonisers, although it was coming from the very colonisers’ country. In the mid 1950s in Poland, the situation is slightly different. The geographical and, of course, political vector of colonisation changes its direction. What complicates it even more is that Paris and the afterwar French culture itself becomes a subject of American cultural colonisation, as discussed by Serge Guilbaut<sup>30</sup>. The Marshall Plan, therefore, made the French drive back. What came next was, for example, colonisation of French cinematography, at least until the emergence of the “new wave” which – what is worth remembering – was a reaction to Hollywood movies. Its political character was manifested not only in topics it touched upon but also in methods of shooting films – constituting the critique of commercial, that is American, cinematography.

However, if we ignored the specificity of Paris and looked at the situation of Eastern-European art culture of the cold war period in the categories of global cultural strategies employed by the antagonistic parties and their artistic manifestations, other complications come to light. Obviously, the cold war was global and its key protagonists, the USSR and the West (the US in fact), went into competition in terms of their cultural strategies on the territories of the Third World countries as they were called back then. In the artistic sense, it was the competition between two myths of universalism, or at least two stylistics with universal ambitions: modernism and socialist realism. The example of the Khrushchev Thaw shows that the question about the coloniser becomes more complex and that the cultural war between the

30 Serge Guilbaut, *Jak Nowy Jork ukradł idee sztuki nowoczesnej. Ekspresjonizm abstrakcyjny, wolność i zimna wojna*, trans. Ewa Mikina (Warszawa: Hotel Sztuki, 1992).

East and the West rages on not only in the Third World but also in the Second and even the First World which is an entirely separate issue. In other words, there might be two colonisers here – one is described as the oppressor, the other as the liberator.

The fourth matter is more of general nature. Post-colonial research is mainly developed in the field of literary studies or philosophy which in fact is also a type of literature. These two fields are the source of key notions and methods of analysis which not always commensurate with art-historical research. The polemic with this perspective was once presented by one of the most interesting researchers of visual culture in the context of the post-colonial condition – the post-colonial condition does not need to correspond with the post-colonial theory with which he *nota bene* argued – namely, Rasheed Araeen, chief editor of the major specialist periodical “Third Text”. In the conclusion of the extensive selection of texts published in this magazine, given a meaningful title *A New Beginning*, the author depicts main dilemmas concerning the system of notions and the ideology of the post-colonial studies; paradoxically, dilemmas generated within the perspective of the post-colonial condition which, in his opinion, characterise not only the former colonies’ territories but above all – the metropoleis<sup>31</sup>. It is worth noticing that the post-colonial theory should not be identified with the post-colonial condition. The latter is broader and can be the subject of research conducted from many different perspectives.

Let us start with the basic concern: literature uses the language which by nature, if one could say so, is national or ethnic which, essentially, is not the same thing. For obvious reasons, a writer in exile, using a foreign language to write, creates space between his own language and the acquired one, the one imposed by circumstances. The contemporaneity of literature is always mediated by the language – whether it is the language of the colonised (the local language) or the colonisers (the language of the diaspora). Participation in contemporary culture, thus, does not mean “direct” participation in the universal community of contemporary articulation of thoughts. Metaphors, notions, constructs, literary narratives, etc., are somehow translated to a specific language that already has its own “burden”. In visual arts, especially in the so-called high art, we have similar traditions which “burden” modernity or modernism (which is of course not the same thing) but participation in this art culture is linked with the myth of the “international style” – allegedly universal and read in a more direct way than nationally burdened literature. We have been convinced that people see more universally than they read.

31 Rasheed Araeen, *A New Beginning. Beyond Post-colonial Theory and Identity Politics in The 'Third Text' Reader*, 333–345.

These beliefs are confirmed, as it seems, by the most recent research on neuroarthistory currently developed by one of the most interesting promoters of the World Art Studies, John Onians<sup>32</sup>. But Araeen follows another trail. Being engaged in a polemic with Homi Bhabha (a literary studies theoretician) and his key notion of the “hybrid subject” and the “culture in-between”, and denouncing these notions for buffering tension between the colonised and the coloniser, he notices that artists in exile such as Brancusi (Romanian) or Picasso (Spanish) as well as many other less known figures coming from other continents neither perceived themselves as “expatriates” nor felt affiliation with the diaspora. On the contrary, they saw themselves as part of the same culture, part of modernity, no matter where they were coming from, they felt they created contemporary art, regardless of the country of their origin and their locality, although – let us add – art historians find such traces in their artistic output. They felt themselves a part of one culture, modern art. The author continues that their so-called exile was by no means imposed; it reflected their willingness to be in the centre (in Paris) and co-create contemporary art. Summarising this fragment of his argument, he ironically observes that the post-colonial theory cannot and does not want to understand it<sup>33</sup>.

To us, art historians, these comments are crucial. Independently of the radical approach presented by the editor of “Third Text”, they attract attention not only to distinctiveness of the artistic experience as compared with other creative experiences and development of a more suitable theory to describe it but they also – somehow incidentally, in the context of mentions concerning Brancusi and Picasso (and we could enlist here several leading contemporary artists living in Paris at that time) – acknowledge a certain European modernist community or a sense of community, regardless of the country of origin of a given artist. To researchers of Eastern-European art, thus, the presented critical reflection over the post-colonial theory could be of the utmost importance.

This long argument is not aimed at discouraging readers from the post-colonial studies and making them put them aside as useless in analysing the global dimension of Eastern-European art. It is quite the opposite in some sense: in my view, many words in the post-colonial glossary may turn out to be useful under the condition their criticism is taken into account. I would

32 John Onians, *A Brief Natural History of Art in Compression vs. Expression. Containing and Explaining the World's Art*, ed. John Onians (Williamstown MA: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2006), pp. 235-249; John Onians, *Neuroarthistory: Making More Sense of Art in World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches*, 265-286; John Onians, *Neuroarthistory. From Aristotle and Pliny to Baxandal and Zeki* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2008).

33 Rasheed Araeen, *A New Beginning*, 340.

say that we need European criticism of the post-colonial studies, somewhat in their own spirit, i.e. we need pluralism and decentralisation, rejection of hegemony and homogenisation; we need specific art-historical critical European studies not as an alternative to the post-colonial studies but as their filter. To put it concisely: the post-colonial studies are shaped against Europe – globalisation of Eastern-European art history has to happen through Europe.

### Global Comparative Studies

I wrote a programmatic article about horizontal art history once<sup>34</sup>. As it usually happens with programmes, this concept is also far from being perfect but – and that is not exceptional either – I am attached to it as its author. I would like to bring it in to the discussion about global art history. I will also add that it is founded on comparative art history as my assumption is that we get to know things by comparing them and I am not the only one to think that. However, the point is not about looking for mutual influences as this is the subject of a different reflection but about comparing seemingly remote areas of art culture in order to ferret out their diversity and eventually, exhibit global polyphony of art in – I shall repeat – the horizontal, parallel dimension instead of being focused concentrically around (Western) art centres. This method would involve two moves: firstly, horizontal historical cuts of the selected moments in global history and art history and, secondly, comparisons drawn in this perspective. It could be done in various areas – on the transnational, transregional and finally, global level.

I also spoke of three such historical cuts of the post-war culture when politics or history specifically intertwined with art.

First of all, I spoke of the end of the 1940s when the cold war intensifies and there is mobilisation on both sides of the barricade which significantly affects art in the global scale. This is when the global cultural cold war actually begins, followed by the elimination of (often illusory) remains of artistic freedom in Eastern-European countries; in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary – in all these countries communists gain total power in the years 1947–1948 which, in terms of art culture, leads to introducing socialist realism as an obligatory doctrine. On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, the strategy of globalising modernism is crystallised as an expression of the “American lifestyle”, often triggered by – which is a paradox only on the surface – conservatives or liberal conservatives some of whom hitherto declared to be strongly against modern art. The same art shifts from being radical to being liberal, which should be

34 Piotr Piotrowski, „O horyzontalnej historii sztuki”, *Artium Quaestiones XX* (2009), 59–73. Earlier in English: “On the Spatial Turn, Or Horizontal Art History”, *Umeni/Art 5* (2008): 378–383.

interpreted in the following way: it moves from leftist engagement, strong in the previous decade, to political non-involvement which of course makes it easier to use such art in the global cultural war by the US administration. This is the beginning of “stealing” Parisian contemporary art by New York<sup>35</sup>, the beginning of competition and at the same time the political globalisation of two myths of the universal culture: modernism and socialist realism, hence liberalism and socialism. What should be underlined, both Eastern and Western part of Europe becomes the arena of this conflict, but also the so-called Third World is subject to attempts of neo-colonisation by both the USSR and the USA. We should also remember that in 1949 China joins to communist world, while socialist realism becomes there the only acceptable, official artistic doctrine. So we have the same visual schemes as in Romania, Lithuania or Poland, only the eyes of characters on these images are more slanting. The late 1940s also give start to liberation movements in these colonies. The symbolic act of regaining independence of India in 1947 (and its division into two countries) also significantly affects the shape of the country's cultural policy but also the movements of the so-called non-involved states, in Europe represented by Yugoslavia. It would shortly reject the doctrine of realistic socialist art, replacing it with “socialist modernism”; the first sign of such a shift would be formation of the Croatian EXAT 51 group.

Secondly, the period before and after 1968 is yet another turning point on the map of global culture. The political and artistic arena undergoes fundamental revaluation; the wars in the Near East and in Vietnam are a new symptom of the cold war; intensification of the Southern American regimes exerts much influence on the local art culture; intellectual, cultural (also artistic) and moral revolution in the West as well as the Prague Spring in the East has major consequences visible in transformations of the art world. Finally, it is the time of the cultural revolution in China which has an immediate impact on Western-European culture. In that year, India hosted the first graphic arts biennial which – although it was not the first ever biennial outside the Western world (the very first one was organised in 1951 in São Paulo) – confirmed the fact that the so-called Third World countries, or “non-involved countries”, among which India played an important role, appeared on the global art scene. Entering the field of comparative studies on Eastern Europe and South America, *nota bene* developed by Klara Kemp-Welch from Great Britain and Cristina Freire from Brazil<sup>36</sup>, we should notice that, for instance, artists from Poland

35 Serge Guilbaut, *Jak Nowy Jork ukradł idee sztuki nowoczesnej*.

36 Klara Kemp-Welch, Cristina Freire, “Artists’ Networks in Latin America and eastern Europe (Special Section/Introduction)”, *Art Margins* 2-3 (Vol. 1, 2012): 3-13. Dr Klara Kemp-Welch is also an author of the MA Programme in the Courtauld Institute of Art in London: *Countercultures*:



and Argentina started their careers in the similar point of late modernism development, i.e. in the mid-1950s, which coincided with the liberalisation of artistic life in both countries – after banning Peronism in Argentina and Stalinist cultural policy in Poland (toutes proportions gardées). Both countries experienced the emergence of great energy, even euphoria over modernist art in both cases taking from French (not American) sources. In both countries, of course, the 1960s are the years of the neo-avant-garde, including conceptual art, but in Argentina it is the time of remarkable political radicalisation leading to identification of art with direct political action, while in Poland it served as an escape from politics. Thus, the year 1968, which in both countries is very meaningful, looks completely different than 1955<sup>37</sup>.

Thirdly, the horizontal “cut” around 1989: the collapse of a few regimes in the world (Eastern Europe, Latin America, South Africa) and at the same time the aggravation of the political course in China, the emergence of the global art market, great exhibitions and the new axis of the world organisation: North-South, alternative to the cold-war East-West division. The year 1989 also started a debate about the “former West”<sup>38</sup>, “provincialisation of Europe”<sup>39</sup> and movements of artistic and anthropological criteria of artistic analysis on the global scale; as claimed by Alexander Alberro, this is in fact a new era in the world art history<sup>40</sup>. The point is not only that everywhere in the world, including Eastern Europe, artists become interested in global issues (Artur Żmijewski in Poland, Póde Bal group in Czech Republic, Tamas Szentjób [St. Aub] in Hungary) but also that the end of the Cold War somehow provokes comparisons of art cultures originating from harsh regimes (like in

---

*Alternative Art in Eastern Europe and Latin America, 1953-1991*. Accessed on July 20, 2015, <http://www.courtauld.ac.uk/degreeprogrammes/postgraduate/ma/specialistareas/countercultures.shtml>.

37 I elaborated on this problem in a paper presented at the II International Congress of Polish History “Poland in Central Europe” in Cracow in October 2012 (section “Traces of the Avant-Garde – Art and Architecture in Central Europe after 1945” organised by Wojciech Bałus and Andrzej Szczerski): Piotr Piotrowski, *Globalising Central-East European Art* (typescript).

38 Cf. the project entitled *Former West: BAK – basis voor actuele kunst*, Utrecht <http://www.formerwest.org/>.

39 Behind this metaphor, taken of course from the title of a well-known book by Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Prowincjonalizacja Europy. Myśl postkolonialna i różnica historyczna*, trans. Dorota Kołodziejczyk, Tomasz Dobrogoszcz, Ewa Domańska (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2011), I understand such an outlook on the world art culture which will reduce comprehension of the West and the Western art to the position of one of many provinces.

40 Alexander Alberro, *Periodising Contemporary Art in Crossing Cultures. Conflict, Migration, and Convergence*, ed. Jaynie Anderson (Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press, 2009), 935-939.

Poland and South Africa). There is also the question of comparing changes which shaped contemporary art with the later world rebellion called the “Arab Spring” and art that defined it.

### Alter-Globalist Art History

And the final question is: what does this kind of scientific perspective have to do with economic, political, civilisational and cultural processes of globalisation? Assuming that globalisation is the Empire’s instrument<sup>41</sup>, let us ask how art history can be perceived in this context as a humanistic discipline? For this purpose, I would like to introduce yet another term: alter-globalism.

Again, to put it very briefly: alter-globalism is a movement of resistance to globalisation understood in the terms of economy and politics but also art and, more broadly speaking: culture. It originates from anti-globalism, i.e. the opposition to global exploitation of employees by big corporations. Anti-globalist activists soon realised, however, that should the critique and resistance to globalisation be effective, the opposition movement must have a global character as well. Otherwise, it will be easily pacified. As a consequence, the 2001 World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, approved the global resistance perspective. From that moment on, the movement started to spread rapidly all over the world – also in Eastern Europe<sup>42</sup>. In our part of the continent, this movement may be seen in the context of the so-called post-Communist condition which is not at all local but universal<sup>43</sup>. To a certain extent, it seems obvious, since the cold war and so the Communist condition were of a global character, the more the post-Communist condition should be global as well. In other words, we are faced with the question about the global nature of the post-Communist studies. Nonetheless, this is a separate issue which requires individual elaboration which – until now – in art history has not been yet systematically undertaken.

41 As indicated above, I use this notion in the understanding of Hardt and Negri. The authors also introduce the term: anti-empire as an opposition to the globalisation processes: Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*.

42 Grzegorz Piotrowski, *Alterglobalism in Postsocialism. A Study of Central and Eastern European Activists* (Florence: European University Institute, Department of Political and Social Sciences, 2011), doctoral thesis.

43 Susan Buck-Morss, *The Post-Soviet Condition in East Art Map. Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe*, ed. IRWIN (London: Afterall Book, 2006), 494-499. Boris Groys, *Art Power* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2008), esp. chapters: “Beyond Diversity: Cultural Studies and Its Post-Communist Other”, 149-163, “Privatization, or Artificial Paradises of Post-Communism”, pp. 165-172. Boris Groys, *Back from the Future in 2000+ Art East Collection. The Art of Eastern Europe*, ed. Zdenka Badovinac, Peter Weibel (Wien-Bozen: Folio Verlag, 2001), 9-14.

Art history is part of the humanities – the latter having of course many faces. Many of us interpret this discipline's functions our own way; understanding it has also changed over time. The definition of the humanities close to my outlook is that it is a part of the public debate, or more, it is an element of the strategy of resistance to the authorities and oppression, at the same time being on the side of emancipation and liberation. Art history which would handle such undertaking in the horizontal and comparative perspective (as discussed earlier in this article) – the global undertaking which would involve exposing repressive practices directed towards margins, peripheries both geographically and topographically (i.e. within certain localities) – I would call alter-globalist art history. It could concern both the past and the present, both curatorial and publishing practices, policies of both universities and museums, etc. Its key feature should be criticism and resistance to centralistic and exclusive art-historical activities and ability to reveal mechanisms of building hierarchy and hegemony as well as repression and denial in the global scale.

Research on conceptual art could be illustrative to this type of thinking. In my opinion, the milestone in the global development of such research in the alter-globalist version was the 1999 exhibition *Global Conceptualism: Point of Origins* organised in the Queens Museum of Art<sup>44</sup>. It is not the right place to discuss it in detail but we ought to notice that it was quite a natural reaction to another exhibition of conceptual art of an overtly hegemonic and Western-centric character, namely the one entitled *L'art conceptuel. Une perspective*<sup>45</sup> organised in the Parisian Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris ten years earlier. At the New York exhibition and in the research developing under its influence, Western conceptual art (mainly Anglo-American) was – let us say – “provincialised”, which means that it was exhibited as one of many or among many (South-American, Asian, Russian, Eastern-European, etc.) instead of being considered normative or paradigmatic. The West (England and the US) were reduced to one of the geo-historical territories where conceptualism was developing but it was deprived of the exemplary function. Whereas the remaining regions were presented against different traditions, with their own artistic dynamics and chronology. Therefore, if in (Western) modern art history textbooks conceptualism is analysed in the stream of art of Western provenance developing in the world, let us say: in the category

44 *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950-1980s*, ed. Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver, Rachel Weiss (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999).

45 *L'art conceptuel. Une perspective*, ed. Claude Gintz (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1989). Cf. also the paradigmatic text from this catalogue reprinted in the influential quarterly *October*: Benjamin Heinz-Dieter Buchloh, “Conceptual Art, 1962-1969: From the Aesthetics of Administration to the Critique of Institutions”, *October* 55 (Winter, 1990): 105-143.

of global domination of the Anglo-American analytical art, here we had an image of the horizontal diachrony of various and equally important art-historical perspectives. It seems that the shift of the scientific paradigm towards alter-globalism was most beneficial to studies on Latin-American art, always developed with the conviction of this continent's separateness and independence of the West<sup>46</sup>. The development of studies on Eastern-European conceptual art should also be observed in this context as they show considerable independence and individuality of its progress comparing to Western models, at the same time noticing its political meaning understood as resistance to the Communist system<sup>47</sup>.

Alter-globalist art history, therefore, is not a utopian programme; on the contrary, I would say, and the evidence is provided by the above-mentioned example of conceptual art studies. Perhaps its academic beginnings are not impressive, since this way of thinking is more visible in the work of curators who quite rapidly – considerably faster than academic institutions – took up the challenge of globalisation. Again, it is confirmed by the above example of

46 Cf. among others: Mari Carmen Ramírez, *Tactics for Thriving on Adversity: Conceptualism in Latin America, 1960–1980* in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origins, 1950–1980*, 53–71; Mari Carmen Ramírez, *Blue Print Circuits: Conceptual Art and Politics in Latin America* in *Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century*, ed. A. Rasmussen (New York: MoMA, 1993); Cristina Freire, *Arte Conceitual* (Sao Paulo: Jorge Zahar, 2006); Luis Camnitzer, *Conceptualism in Latin America: Dialectics of Liberation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007); Andrea Giunta, *Avant-Garde, Internationalism, and Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). A significant anthology of the Southern-American art criticism, entering into a polemic with the Western view of the art on the continent is *Beyond the Fantastic. Contemporary Art Criticism from Latin America*, ed. Gerardo Mosquera (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1996). The title of the volume was drawn from the typical, Oriental exhibition of the art of the continent: *Art of the Fantastic. Latin America, 1920–1987* (Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1987). Cf. also Mari Carmen Ramírez, *Brokering Identities: Art Curators and the Politics of Cultural Representation in Thinking about Exhibitions*, ed. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, Sandy Nairine (London: Routledge, 1996), 21–38.

47 Cf. among others: Laszlo Beke, *Conceptual Tendencies in Eastern European Art* in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origins, 1950–1980s*, pp. 42–51; Piotr Piotrowski, *Awangarda w cieniu Jolty. Sztuka w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej w latach 1945–1989* (Poznań: Rebis, 2005), pp. 341–367; *Die Totale Aufklärung. Moskauer Konzeptkunst, 1960–1990/ Total Enlightenment. Conceptual Art in Moscow, 1960–1990*, ed. Boris Groys et. al. (Frankfurt-Ostfeldern: Kunsthalle/Hatje Canz Verlag, 2008); Victor Tupitsyn, *The Museological Unconscious* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2009), pp. 101–121. Boris Groys, *History Becomes Form. Moscow Conceptualism* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2010). Cf. also the most recent debate on the subject: *Conceptual Art and Central Europe* (Zdenka Badovinac, Eda Čufer, Cristina Freire, Boris Groys, Charles Harrison, Vít Havránek, Piotr Piotrowski, Branka Stipančić), Part I and Part II “e-flux”, *Journal* 40 (12/ 2012) and *Journal* 41, (1/2012):

<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/conceptual-art-and-eastern-europe-part-i/>

<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/conceptual-art-and-eastern-europe-part-ii/>

studies devoted to conceptual art. Some exhibitions and curatorial projects of course complied with globalisation, others chose a critical approach, for instance some of the (increasing in numbers) biennials – and selected global exhibitions. There are art critics who even expect these events to provide space for shaping a global *politeia*, i.e. creating the world constitution which could protect the world from being exploited by the Empire. Boris Groys writes about this issue in reference to the Istanbul Biennial<sup>48</sup> and Charles Esche elaborates on it in the context of the Havana Biennial – its third edition, to be precise (unfortunately, the subsequent ones have not satisfied these hopes)<sup>49</sup>. It is also analysed by Okwui Enwezor, the artistic director of one of the most interesting editions of the Documenta exhibition: Documenta 11, proving that great world exhibitions may (but of course do not have to) be counter-hegemonic or counter-normative to the Western system<sup>50</sup>. While Ranjit Hoskote, pointing to the example of the seventh Gwangju Biennial in Korea, uses the term “biennial of resistance” to define low-budget events of a distinctly rebellious character<sup>51</sup>. Also Thomas Fillitz notices the possibility of building “zones of contact” between different cultures (the very expression comes from the title of the 2006 Biennial in Sydney entitled *Zones of Contact*) on the basis of the Dakar Biennale (Dak’Art). In his view, biennials can generate some kind of parallelism of perceiving different cultures and create an alternative to museums which are still – despite slogans they promote – subject to the domination of the Western paradigm of understanding art<sup>52</sup>.

The necessity of building the world *politeia* stems from the conviction that the lack of control over the global capital will cause the democracy crisis. So far, the democratic system has functioned within the national state within which, until recently, the economy has functioned as well – at least key economic decisions were taken in this area, subsequently negotiated with other national states. However, the economy escaped the control democratically

48 Boris Groys, “From Medium to Message. The Art Exhibition as Model of a New World Order”, *Open. Cahier on Art and the Public Domain (The Art Biennial as a Global Phenomenon)* 16 (2009), 56–65.

49 Charles Esche, *Making Art Global: A Good Place or a No Place?* in *Making Art Global (Part 1). The Third Havana Biennial, 1989*, ed. Rachel Weiss (London: Afterall, 2011), 8–13.

50 Okwui Enwezor, *Mega-Exhibitions and the Antinomies of a Transnational Global Form in The Biennale Reader*, ed. E. Filipovic et al. (Ostfildern: Hatje Canz Verlag, 2010), 426–445.

51 Ranjit Hoskote, *Biennials of Resistance: Reflections on the Seventh Gwangju Biennial in The Biennale Reader*, 306–321.

52 Thomas Fillitz, *Contemporary Art of Africa. Coevalness in the Global World in The Global Art World*, 116–134.

– precisely within the state of elective institutions. It is the markets, not people, that shape it and the markets seem not to be under any control, certainly not the democratic one. In short, citizens lost control over the economy. The path the nationalists dreamed of, which implies turning one's back to globalisation, is unfeasible. We need something that was called here *politeia*. But to make such a constitution effective in guaranteeing control to citizens, it has to be global. The above-mentioned authors believe that art has enormous power to build global culture and shape attitudes of global democracy; art which addresses political issues and which is characterised by global agoraphilia, willingness to be engaged globally, art which appears at the above enlisted exhibitions and biennials may be the avant-garde of such social and political changes. Obviously, excessive expectations for the causative function of art may be almost naive. Rasheed Araeen warns us against such illusions but he still maintains that criticism should be accompanied by the positive vision of the future, the vision of liberation<sup>53</sup>. Whereas Krzysztof Wodiczko adds: "After post-structuralism the time has come for self-reconstruction – the road to new visions and political, social and cultural constructs. Contriving and designing new, activating, open and agonistic projects [...] must become a part of this emancipatory programme"<sup>54</sup>.

The most recent example of such a tendency may be the seventh edition of the Berlin Biennial curated by one of the most world famous artists of global agoraphilia, Artur Żmijewski, under the meaningful title *Forget Fear*<sup>55</sup>. In a very interesting manner, Żmijewski shifted emphasis from the artwork to the art institution, turning the hierarchy established by artists in the late 1960s upside down. They revolted against the dominant role of galleries and museums, protecting the work of art and its artistic nature from the manipulatory – as they declared – practices of these institutions. Żmijewski no longer perceives the work of art as a priority; politics – important to artists around 1968 as well – does not need mediation of art – it may be exposed in direct actions. Hence, art ceases to be of the fundamental importance and gives way to the directly formulated political action. There were several examples as such at the above-mentioned biennial, starting with the basement – *nomen omen* – occupied by representatives of the "occupy" movement, through Marina

53 Rasheed Araeen, *A New Beginning. Beyond Post-colonial Cultural Theory and Identity Politics in The 'Third Text' Reader*, 345.

54 Krzysztof Wodiczko, „Miejsce Pamięci Ofiar 11 Września (Propozycja przekształcenia Nowego Jorku w „miejsce ucieczki”)”, *Artium Quaestiones* XIX (2008), 280.

55 Artur Żmijewski, *Forget Fear*, ed. Artur Żmijewski, Joanna Warsza (Berlin: 7th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, 2012). Some texts are available in Polish in "Nie lękajcie się", *Krytyka Polityczna* 30 (2012).

Naprushkina's *Focus Belarus*, or *Breaking News* – rooms where films presenting various political actions were shown, to the so-called congress of terrorists (*New World Summit*) with participation of representatives (usually lawyers) of diverse organisations considered by the EU and the US as terrorist – the latter presenting during sessions schematic thinking typical of Euro-American services and politicians who lump together all actions (including charity) organised by people accused of collaboration with terrorists (for instance, organising hospitals in the Gaza Strip). Hence, the art institution (Biennale) was politically instrumentalised and deprived of its autonomy; its prestige and symbolic capital was used to publicise political problems of the alter-globalist character. In reality, Żmijewski understood that the mentioned “congress of terrorists” could not have happened in “normal” conditions – a Dutch artist Jonas Staal who organised it, applied a specific license attributed to artistic institutions which “are allowed to do more”; on the occasion of the biennial, he could give topics touched upon at the event more publicity than it would have been done by commentaries published in the mass media.

## Conclusion

I have no doubts that post-communist agoraphilia – an attitude represented by critical artists both in Poland and in other countries of the former Eastern Bloc – was very successful in this matter<sup>56</sup>. Conflicts related with the body, religious iconography, nationalisms, etc., being the effect of rightwing circles' sharp reaction to critical art, showed how much power an artist may have in the struggle with a politician. The same strategy would be possible outside the borders of the national state, or even outside the area of a given region, hence in the global scale. The reflection upon art, presenting the profile of global agoraphilia, in consequence: art history interested in perceiving the artistic output of the past, may play a significant role in this field.

I do not claim that such beliefs will not face criticism<sup>57</sup>. What is more, in the same events which the above-mentioned authors perceive as a rebellion

56 Piotr Piotrowski, *Agorafilia. Sztuka i demokracja w postkomunistycznej Europie* (Poznań: Rebis, 2010), English edition: *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe* (London: Reaktion, 2012).

57 In this context, there is a very interesting polemic of George Beker with the earlier mentioned article by Okwui Enwezor. Beker accuses the Documenta 11's author of diminishing the tension between the “public sphere” and “spectacle”, failing to see the possibility to establish a strategy which would embrace both these spheres. First of all, however, Beker has doubts about the public. He claims that “great exhibitions” are “for nobody”; they are directed to the art world (so to themselves) rather than to the public who are supposed to take up their “counter-hegemonic” message: George Beker, *The Globalization of the False: A Response to Okwui Enwezor in The Biennale Reader*, 446–453.

against the Western hegemony in the art world, others – like Joaquín Barriandos – observe the processes of re-westernisation of the world art culture. What the author sees in so-called geo-aesthetics, i.e. the interest of Western institutions in creative output from other regions of the world (he points to Latin America), is first of all the strategy of labelling the “other” in order to maintain the dominant role of the Western canon of artistic values. The author claims that the question which should be posed here in order to disclose the truth about the relations between “us” and “others” is the question about who and where decides about the attribution of the status of periphery. According to him – mainly Western institutions such as museums, above all. He notices the possibility to rebuild this relation but this would require a different museum policy of purchases, the willingness of museums to open their “imagination” to real problems of another culture. Most importantly, however, it would require something he calls the “inter-epistemological dialogue”<sup>58</sup> which, I believe, may be the task not necessarily of art itself but art history. Assuming that the two are linked with each other systemically<sup>59</sup>, i.e. they are parts of the alter-globalist system, I can only summarise it by paraphrasing Kitty Zijlmans, quoted at the beginning of this text, that there is not (yet) alter-globalist art history. This does not mean, however, that it will not occur in the future...

*Translation: Marta Skotnicka*

---

58 Joaquín Barriandos, *Geopolitics of Global Art: The Reinvitation of Latin America as a Geoaesthetic Region in The Global Art World*, 98–114.

59 Kitty Zijlmans, *The Discourse on Contemporary Art and the Globalization of the Art System in World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches*, 135–150.



Arkadiusz Żychliński

## The Narrative Instinct. The Anthropological Difference in the Philological Framework

DOI: 10.18318/td.2015.en.1.9

De te fabula narratur.  
Horace

Underscoring the uniqueness of humans is all too easy.  
The challenge is to explain it in a naturalistic perspective.  
Dan Sperber<sup>1</sup>

I  
Marc Bekoff is one of the world's leading ethologists, an acclaimed specialist in the field of animal emotions, and Professor Emeritus of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Colorado, Boulder. He is the author of several books, including the 2007 title *The Emotional Lives of Animals*<sup>2</sup>. Among the varied and often thought-provoking examples and anecdotes provided by the author (in keeping with the book's overarching theme: "Listen to this story and see what you think") is the following story:

**Arkadiusz Żychliński**  
– PhD, Associate Professor at the Institute of German Philology, and member of the Pracownia Pytań Granicznych at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. Author of a monograph devoted to Heidegger's writings *Unterwegs zu einem Denker* (2006), a collection of essays *Wielkie nadzieje i dalsze rozważania* (2013), and a study on the theory of fiction *Laboratorium antropofikcji* (2014); co-editor of the following books: *W sprawie Agambena* (2010), *Nienasycenie. Filozofowie o Kafce* (2011), *Powinowactwa Pessoa* (2013) and *Katedra Bolaño* (2015). Contact: zychlin@amu.edu.pl

- 1 Michael Tomasello, *Origins of Human Communication* (Cambridge, London: The MIT Press, 2008), cover page.
- 2 Marc Bekoff, *The Emotional Lives of Animals. A Leading Scientist Explores Animal Joy, Sorrow, and Empathy – and Why They Matter* (Novato, California: New World Library, 2007).

A few years ago my friend Rod and I were riding our bicycles around Boulder, Colorado, when we witnessed a very interesting encounter among five magpies. Magpies are corvids, a very intelligent family of birds. One magpie had obviously been hit by a car and was lying dead on the side of the road. The four other magpies were standing around him. One approached the corpse, gently pecked at it – just as an elephant noses the carcass of another elephant – and stepped back. Another magpie did the same thing. Next, one of the magpies flew off, brought back some grass, and laid it by the corpse. Another magpie did the same. Then, all four magpies stood vigil for a few seconds and one by one flew off. Were these birds thinking about what they were doing? Were they showing magpie respect for their friend? Or were they merely acting as if they cared? Were they just animal automatons? I feel comfortable answering these questions, in order: yes, yes, no, no<sup>3</sup>.

Bekoff thus poses the following question: “Were these birds thinking about what they were doing?”, to which he replies in the affirmative: yes, they were. “Were they showing the magpie respect for their friend?” Again, yes, they were showing respect for their dead friend. “Were they merely acting as if they cared?” No, in Bekoff’s view, they were not merely acting as if they cared, and thus they were not acting as if they were doing what he thinks they did; they were actually doing it. “Were they just animal automatons?” he finally asks, and once again responds to this skeptical suspicion in the negative; no, they were something more than just animal automatons. In conclusion, notice that what Bekoff ascribes to the magpies is no more and no less than participation in a conscious funeral ritual. What more, he goes as far as to state that anyone who still harbors any doubts about the matter is an anachronistic skeptic:

In fact, the paradigm is shifting to such an extent that the burden of proof now falls more often to those who still argue that animals do not experience emotions. My colleagues and I no longer have to put tentative quotes around such words as happy or sad when we write about an animal’s inner life. If our dog, Fido, is observed to be angry or frightened, we can say so with the same certainty with which we discuss human emotions<sup>4</sup>.

Note a crucial flaw in the argument being discussed: the author makes an unjustified leap from the question of whether an animal is capable of

---

3 Bekoff, *The Emotional Lives of Animals*, 1.

4 Ibid., xviii.

experiencing emotion to the question of whether it is possible for an animal to participate in a conscious funeral ritual, an event that unambiguously implies a deeper cultural capacity. "Scientific journals and the popular press", Bekoff contentedly states, "regularly publish stories and reports on joy in rats and grief in elephants, and no one blinks"<sup>5</sup>. Nevertheless, some people are still surprised to read about magpie funeral ceremonies, dogs that have fallen in love, and jealous elephants. The goal of this article is to relate a few aspects of my own surprise and to attempt to list and explain the reasons for this surprise: to sketch, broadly speaking, the trajectory of my disagreement.

## II

In the 1981 essay *Brains in a Vat*, Hilary Putnam writes:

An ant is crawling on a patch of sand. As it crawls, it traces a line in the sand. By pure chance the line that it traces curves and recrosses itself in such a way that it ends up looking like a recognizable caricature of Winston Churchill. Has the ant traced a picture of Winston Churchill, a picture that depicts Churchill? Most people would say, on a little reflection, that it has not. The ant, after all, has never seen Churchill, or even a picture of Churchill, and it had no intention of depicting Churchill. It simply traced a line (and even that was unintentional), a line that we can 'see as' a picture of Churchill<sup>6</sup>.

Putnam therefore asks what, if not similarity, is necessary for one thing to represent another. He answers this question thus: "So it may seem that what is necessary for representation, or what is mainly necessary for representation, is *i n t e n t i o n*"<sup>7</sup>. Intentionality appears to be the key. Do magpies intentionally behave in a way that strikes outside observers as resembling a funeral ritual of sorts, one curiously similar to those performed by humans?

Intentionality is a complex phenomenon that can be described as occurring in varying degrees. According to Daniel Dennet, the hierarchy consists of intentional systems of the first, second, third and higher orders:

5 Ibid., xviii.

6 Hilary Putnam, "Brains in a Vat", in *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1.

7 Ibid., 2.

A first-order intentional system has beliefs and desires about many things, but not about beliefs and desires. A second-order intentional system has beliefs and desires about beliefs and desires, its own or those of others. A third-order intentional system would be capable of such feats as wanting you to believe that it wanted something, while a fourth-order intentional system might believe you wanted it to believe that you believed something, and so forth<sup>8</sup>.

The main shift occurs between first-order intentional systems, which have beliefs and desires without being aware of them, and the higher-order intentional systems, which are capable of a certain speculative detachment from their own beliefs and desires and those of others (it is the difference between “I know what I know” and “I know what he knows”; most animals, like children up to the age of three or four, are incapable of seeing a situation from any perspective but their own). Intentional systems of the second order and higher have what is known as the theory of mind, meaning they can not only think about their own thoughts (first-order intentional systems do not think about their own thoughts, they simply have them), but can also interpret the thoughts of others (which means that, at a basic level, they can answer the question of what another person sees at the moment). We know that some animals are second-order intentional systems, and that humans are intentional systems of the second and higher orders. However, it remains controversial whether there exist animals who behave in a manner that would require us to classify them as third-order intentional systems. Currently one of the most debated issues in animal philosophy pertains to the question of whether animals have a theory of mind and, if so, how developed it is<sup>9</sup>. As Stephen Budioansky observes:

Many animals observe and act upon other animals’ behavior, and likewise act in ways themselves that seek to influence others’ behavior. But evidence that animals seek to penetrate the thoughts and beliefs of other animals, and to seek to influence those thoughts and beliefs, are harder to come by<sup>10</sup>.

---

8 Daniel C. Dennett, *Kinds of Minds. Towards an Understanding of Consciousness* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 121.

9 For a convenient review of all of the major positions on this topic, see: *The Philosophy of Animal Minds*, ed. R.W. Lurz (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

10 Stephen Budioansky, *If a Lion Could Talk. Animal Intelligence and the Evolution of Consciousness* (New York: The Free Press, 1998), 164.

Among the members of all the orders in the animal kingdom, the ones considered most likely to have a theory of mind are of course primates, particularly apes. The evidence amassed so far appears controversial and ambiguous. One of the most respected researchers currently attempting to tackle this issue is Michael Tomasello, director of the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig. The main purpose of his recently published book *Origins of Human Communication* (for which he received the prestigious Hegel Prize, among other awards) is to demonstrate and prove that human communication arose from pointing and the use of natural gestures. Tomasello writes:

My central claim in these lectures is that to understand how humans communicate with one another using a language and how this competence might have arisen in evolution, we must first understand how humans communicate with one another using natural gestures. Indeed, my evolutionary hypothesis will be that the first uniquely human forms of communication were pointing and pantomiming. The social-cognitive and social-motivational infrastructure that enabled these new forms of communication then acted as a kind of psychological platform on which the various systems of conventional linguistic communication (all 6,000 of them) could be built. Pointing and pantomiming were thus the critical transition points in the evolution of human communication, already embodying most of the uniquely human forms of social cognition and motivation required for the later creation of conventional languages<sup>11</sup>.

According to Tomasello, there is a pro-social motivation behind the human gesture of pointing. We point something out to others on the assumption that it is something they would like to know, that it might turn out to be helpful to them, that by doing so we become helpful to others, or that it will allow us to breach a certain topic, etc:

Communicating information helpfully in this way is extremely rare in the animal kingdom, even in our closest primate relatives [...]. Thus, when a whimpering chimpanzee child is searching for her mother, it is almost certain that all of the other chimpanzees in the immediate area know this. But if some nearby female knows where the mother is, she will not tell the searching child, even though she is perfectly capable of extending her arm in a kind of pointing gesture. She will not tell the child because her communicative motives simply do not include informing others of things

---

<sup>11</sup> Tomasello, *Origins of Human Communication*, 2.

helpfully. In contrast, human communicative motives are so fundamentally cooperative that not only do we inform others of things helpfully, but one of the major ways we request things from others is simply to make our desire known in the expectation that they will volunteer help<sup>12</sup>.

One informative experiment was designed as follows<sup>13</sup>: a person places food in visible but unexpected place and points at it for the ape. The ape's gaze follows the pointing and once it has made eye contact with the food, it goes to fetch it. This could prove that the ape understood a simple message: I know that you want to tell me where the food is, and I am going to follow your hint. But when the initial conditions are slightly changed, this assumption may prove unjustifiable. In another attempt, one person hides food in one of three containers while another peeks. The apes see the person who is peeking, but not the one hiding the food. Previous experiments have taught the apes that there is food in only one of the containers and that they are only given one try at choosing the correct container. In the next step, the person who had been peeking now serves as a helper and points at one of the containers. How do the apes react? Their eyes look to where the person is pointing, but they select a container at random. They notice the pointing gesture, but they seem unable to decipher its meaning – a meaning that is clear as day to humans over the age of approximately months: I want to tell you that there is food hidden in this specific container. Apes, on the other hand, appear to interpret the gesture of pointing as simply indicating a container, without making the connection between the indication and the food. Interestingly, the results of the experiment are different when the conditions are once again changed in a seemingly insignificant way. When the helper becomes a competitor that desires the food just as much as the ape does, but cannot get it for some reason (for example, because she is not able to reach it with her hand), the ape immediately figures out where to look for the food: it is precisely the container the competitor is pointing at. The behavior is very similar in both cases: someone reaches out to point at the correct container, but the apes understand the gesture in only one specific case. As Tomasello observes:

One reasonable hypothesis, then, is that apes simply do not understand that the human is communicating altruistically in order to help them toward their goals. That is, they themselves communicate intentionally only to request things imperatively, and so they only understand others'

12 Tomasello, *Origins of Human Communication*, 5.

13 Jean Aitchison, *The Seeds of Speech. Language Origin and Evolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 57.

gestures when they are imperative requests as well – otherwise they are simply mystified as to what the gesticulating is all about<sup>14</sup>.

In another experiment, two chimpanzees cooperate in operating a specially designed device that dispenses food, but when it comes time to share the food, the faster subject cheats his partner. Having been cheated twice, the slower animal ceases to cooperate. In a similar experiment conducted with two-year-old children, the faster child helps the slower one so that in the end, both receive their rewards. Tomasello believes that the two models of behavior are separated by around two million (or at least several hundred thousand) years of development<sup>15</sup>. This leads him to the conclusion that “human communication is thus a fundamentally cooperative enterprise, operating most naturally and smoothly within the context of (1) mutually assumed common conceptual ground, and (2) mutually assumed cooperative communicative motives”. Tomasello goes on to demonstrate that human communication is unique in two ways:

Specifically, human cooperation is structured by what some modern philosophers of action call shared intentionality or ‘we’ intentionality [...]. In general, shared intentionality is what is necessary for engaging in uniquely human forms of collaborative activity in which a plural subject ‘we’ is involved: joint goals, joint intentions, mutual knowledge, shared beliefs – all in the context of various cooperative motives.

The idea is thus that:

human cooperative communication – whether using ‘natural’ gestures or ‘arbitrary’ conventions – is one instance, albeit a special instance, of uniquely human cooperative activity relying on shared intentionality [...]. The skills and motivations of shared intentionality thus constitute what we may call the cooperative infrastructure of human communication<sup>16</sup>.

To sum up, Tomasello’s theses are as follows:

In the beginning, there was the group intentionality of cooperative action, a behavior shared by children at play and the first humans. Sometime

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>15</sup> See Mathias Greffrath, “Das Tier, das ‘Wir’ sagt”, *Die Zeit*, no. 16 (2009).

<sup>16</sup> Tomasello, *Origins of Human Communication*, 7.

between two million and 250,000 years ago, certain groups of hominids must have gained an advantage over others through new collaborative ways of hunting and gathering. Group selection stabilized this “cultural revolution”: groups that cooperated were more effective and created a cultural niche that gave rise to new tools and inventions, which in turn were conducive to the development of the bodies and brains of the humans who were able to use them. Language, which had initially been a phenomenon that accompanied the cultural revolution, subsequently became the catalyst for increasingly complex collective practices<sup>17</sup>.

How does the above claim relate to our question about the theory of mind? If Tomasello is correct, it was the cooperative infrastructure of human communication (which requires shared intentionality) that allowed us to read the thoughts of others; individual intentionality, meanwhile, can only lead to the projection of one’s own thoughts onto others (it is the difference between the statements: “He knows what I know” and “I know what he knows”). Even the most intelligent apes are unable to surpass the level that children around the age of four attain effortlessly (barring specific disabilities or disorders such as autism, which is characterized by a fundamental inability to attribute mental states to others or to imagine the image we create in the eyes of others). Michael Tomasello thus presents a highly promising candidate for the anthropological difference, or the “mostly hidden, highly complex, species-unique, psychological infrastructure of shared intentionality”<sup>18</sup>.

Shared intentionality, which arose from gestural protocommunication in the process of evolutionary development, makes cooperation more effective and gives humans the surprising ability to perceive themselves and the world not just from one specific perspective, but also from the point of view of others. It gives them the ability to empathize with others, and, in turn, to think from their point of view. As a result of this ability, at some stage in their development humans acquired the capacity to think through the minds of others – a capacity that soon became a source of pleasure. At one end of this spectrum lie ordinary, everyday conversations<sup>19</sup>, while at the other there is literature and art<sup>20</sup>. Note that it is only when we are able to perceive ourselves

17 Greffrath, “Das Tier, das ‘Wir’ sagt”.

18 Tomasello, *Origins of Human Communication*, 59.

19 Cf. Robin Dunbar, *Grooming, Gossip and the Evolution of Language* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996).

20 Cf. Denis Dutton, *The Art Instinct. Beauty, Pleasure, and Human Evolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).



through the eyes of another person that we can pose the question about our own identity. It is easy to recognize that this superficially small ontogenetic step for a child (empathizing with another person) was a giant phylogenetic leap for mankind.

Let us now return to Bekoff's magpies and attempt to examine the event observed by the author in the light of the above considerations. Are magpies intentional systems? Of course: it is beyond any doubt that they have beliefs and desires that drive their behavior (what is controversial is how these beliefs and desires are represented in their minds). But for them to be able to take part in a funeral ritual that would be anything more than mindless (though, in its own way, highly intelligent) mimicry of behavior observed elsewhere, they would have to be intentional systems of at least the third order ("I know that my deceased companion could want me to express my attachment to him in this way [by laying a bunch of grass by his corpse]"). Tomasello's experiments show that in order for an intentional system to be a higher-order system, it requires the skill of shared intentionality (consider also the fact that, according to Bekoff, the four magpies take part in the "funeral ceremony" together: how could they coordinate their grief without shared intentionality? Of course, we often observe cooperation in the wild, but most, if not all, of these cases involve a system of biological determinants combined with the effect of the animal learning from its own mistakes). Shared intentionality would require a communication system that transcends the biological program: nothing of the sort is observed in magpies, and thus we may assume, with probability bordering on certainty, that their curious behavior has nothing to do with the funeral rituals that take place in the world of humans.

As a matter of fact, as one-time witnesses of the behavior described by Bekoff, there is nothing or almost nothing we can say about it, and it must be astonishing that, for some reason, the author seems not to want to recognize this fact. Bekoff makes no mention of whether other magpies in the vicinity displayed similar behavior. Have any other corvids (a family that includes ravens, rooks, jackdaws, crows and jays), or birds of any other family, for that matter, ever been observed to behave in a manner that in any way resembles the description above? Having seen magpies that appeared to be holding a "funeral" for their deceased "friend", Bekoff concludes that that is what actually happened. Myrmecologists once observed a certain astonishing phenomenon: dead ants are carried outside the area of the nest. This transportation of the body might strike the outside observer as resembling a funeral procession, with the deceased comrade being carried on a bier. Should we therefore conclude that ants also have something resembling a concept or sense of death and that they care for their dead companions? Such an assumption would

be fundamentally flawed: the behavior of ants is merely a biologically programmed reaction to a specific type of acid that forms in the bodies of dead ants and can lead to the spread of deadly diseases. When treated with that same acid, living ants are also removed from the nest<sup>21</sup>.

Another example: take the cuckoo chick, which, upon hatching, pushes other eggs out of the nest, evicting the actual offspring of its host parents. When observing this astonishing behavior, we are greatly tempted to see the chick as an evil and cunning cuckoo counterpart to Richard III, yet all cuckoo chicks behave in the same way, and while they do have reasons for doing what they do (in the process of evolution, the cuckoo genome developed a mechanism that drives the chicks to evict potential competitors from the nest, thus maximizing their own chances of survival), they remain absolutely unaware of what they are actually doing. Both cuckoos and Bekoff's magpies undoubtedly have reasons for doing what they do (the first case is clear, the second case is unclear) – behavior that, to us, resembles a planned mass execution or a funeral of sorts – but if they do not comprehend these reasons, then it would be a mistake to recognize them as higher-order intentional systems. There is much evidence to suggest that we are the only beings on earth capable of being aware of the reasons behind their actions.

### III

Until counterarguments convince me that I am wrong, I will assume that there is no place for mourning the dead in the life form of magpies (though we should not deny the possibility that they experience some vague form of sadness, one comparable to the sadness that sometimes overcomes us without any specific reason). Why is there no place for mourning the dead in the life form of magpies? Because there is little magpies could do with the concept of "dead", or, for that matter, "companion" or "mourning". The point is not that the dead magpie has no representation in the mind of the non-linguistic magpie – it probably has some form of extralinguistic representation – but rather that this representation is of a completely different nature than ours, which is mediated by language. The magpie may have a sense of impending death (something like a built-in biological mechanism that sends out a deactivating "final countdown" warning shortly before it is destroyed), and it may also experience a vague fear of death in stressful situations, but it cannot fear dying, nor can it specify its fears, as it lacks any concept of that state, just as a two or even three-year-old child simply does not have the tool required to do so.

21 Cf. D. Perler, M. Wild, "Der Geist der Tiere – eine Einführung", in *Der Geist der Tiere. Philosophische Texte zu einer aktuellen Diskussion*, ed. D. Perler, M. Wild (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2005), 16.

What tool is this? Some believe that language itself is the additional element or tool (or perhaps organ) that is the decisive factor. At first glance, this seems to be the case, however I would now argue that while language is a decisive factor, the matter is ultimately determined by our evolutionarily developed narrative instinct – or, to use a name that is perhaps more fitting, our fabulative instinct. In order to better understand what I mean, we must step back and attempt to gain a broader perspective.

Let us think about our nearest relative, the chimpanzee, with which we share 99.5% of our genes (compared to a “mere” 99% in the case of the gorilla). Why is it that we are so different despite such minor genetic differences? Our genetic similarity becomes more apparent when we realize that we shared a common ancestor up to about 5–7 million years ago, and thus the 0.5% difference is the result of the evolutionary changes that have occurred in the past several million years. We can imagine these genetic differences as differences in our cerebral hardware; as it turns out, they are actually very minor. But by examining only the brain (and the argument for the abolishment of differences between the species relies on the results of brain testing), we lose sight of a more important factor. Marc Bekoff appears to share the strong faith of those who believe that if they see similarities in the brain, then such similarities must also exist in the mind. At one point, for example, he wonders, “can a monkey blush”<sup>22</sup>, meaning can animals experience shame and embarrassment, and argues that:

comparative research in neurobiology, endocrinology, and ethology is needed to learn more about the subjective nature of embarrassment. If we study the neural and hormonal correlates of embarrassment in humans and we see similar patterns in animals [...], then we’re on safe ground claiming that animals are capable of experiencing embarrassment<sup>23</sup>.

In fact, we already know the answer: “These anecdotes do raise the possibility, and there’s no good reason to think animals can’t”<sup>24</sup>. Actually, there is a good reason. While we should not deny the possibility that a monkey is capable of experiencing embarrassment, we should also not jump to the conclusion that it is capable of experiencing such complex human emotions as love and awe. It seems (let’s risk this comparison, though technological metaphors should not be used lightly) that over the course of several million years of

<sup>22</sup> Bekoff, *The Emotional Lives of Animals*, 77.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

evolution, two completely different sets of mental software have been installed on our similar cerebral hardware. One is capable of running simple applications that process sensational interactions with the world, while the other is, from today's perspective, an advanced programming environment that comes pre-installed with a dozen programs that optimize world-access. We could thus imagine language as something along the lines of an operating system, or the basic software that manages how the rest of the device operates. This operating system creates our mind. While we have genetically similar brains, what makes us different from other animals is precisely our minds, in other words, how we began to use our brains as a result of the process of evolution. But the language that comes pre-installed on our cerebral hardware is not everything: it is merely an indispensable condition for running another extraordinary application, that of fabulation. I will use the term fabulation to mean the generation of stories and narratives, and the main thesis of my article is that it is precisely fabulation (and not merely naming) that is our natural method of interacting with the world (and thus with ourselves and others).

Therefore, in order to better understand our own minds, we should pay heed not just to the neurologists who peer into the structures of our brain, but also to those who know less about the brain but more about stories: specifically fabulators (professional story writers such as authors, screenwriters, directors, etc.) and philologists (professional story readers). Let us begin with Mario Vargas Llosa, who, in his book on the work of Juan Carlos Onetti titled *El viaje a la ficción* (*A Flight into Fiction*), takes us back to a time when "man (el hombre) is no longer an animal, but it would be an exaggeration to call him human"<sup>25</sup>. It is a time before the consciousness of time, a time when the present is itself overwhelming, a time that has yet to discover the past and the future. Our ancestor has recently become bipedal, acquiring the ability to walk on two legs, which has left him free to use his upper limbs, which, as he will soon notice, can be used to perform gestures and fashion tools (while affording females closer contact with their offspring). Hominids band together in groups, thanks to which they stand a chance of surviving in their hostile environment. The first groups resemble swarms rather than the germs of a society.

To coexist (*coexistir*) does not yet mean to live together (*convivir*). The latter requires a perfected system of communication, a shared, collective fate founded on such common denominators as language, faith, rituals, ornaments of the body and customs. None of these things exist yet: all that we

---

25 Mario Vargas Llosa, *El viaje a la ficción. El mundo de Juan Carlos Onetti* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 2008), 11.

have is bare survival, impulses and affects that precede logic and which led these semi-animals (*semianimales*), unequipped with the claws, fangs, horns and venom glands available to other living beings, to pick up sticks and stones, to hunt, sleep and move their groups from place to place, thus protecting each other and overcoming fear together<sup>26</sup>.

Fear is a basic emotion (like contentment, pain and anger) that is also experienced by some animals, but along with the gradual increase in a being's awareness of discovering the world comes a growing fear – even terror – and with it the necessity to develop more refined ways of coping with that fear.

The world is full of surprises, and for the primitive human, almost all surprises are deadly: the bite of a rattlesnake that slithers up to his feet through the grass, the lightning bolt that illuminates the storm and sets fire to the trees, or the sudden trembling of the earth, which cracks apart with a bang and forms fissures that can swallow him up<sup>27</sup>.

The more I see (and language also allows us to see, as Donald Davidson reminds us), the less I understand, and the less I understand, the more I am afraid. Instincts – sleep, eating, sexual intercourse – can help to some degree, but there comes a time when merely satisfying these instincts is no longer enough. Just as, in ontogenetic terms, up to a certain age, it is enough for us to feel the presence of our parents, grandparents and other loved ones, while after that age we also begin to seek consolation in other places in moments of hardship (usually by turning to various forms of religion), similarly, in phylogenetic terms, an early way of coping with fear-induced stress was simply to experience the closeness offered by others in our group; there came a point, however, when this was no longer enough.

Sometime in the past 200,000 years or so, there occurred a historic moment in which humans developed a symbolic system of communicating with others, with themselves, and with the world. This system was language, the novelty of which lay primarily in its universal nature: handy and functional like a Swiss army knife, it could be used to coordinate existing forms of cooperation (such as hunting and gathering) while also providing us a completely new form of world-access. It was as if we suddenly acquired an actual sixth sense, in addition to touch, hearing, taste, smell and sight, one that not only combines and perfects the first five (not only can I see, I now know what it is

---

26 Ibid., 12.

27 Ibid., 13.

that I see; not only can I see and hear, I can now feel and express my emotions, etc.), but also constitutes a whole new quality.

If we agree with Michael Tomasello's claim that in the beginning there was not the word, but the gesture – and most currently available primate experiment results suggest that this is likely the case – then the gesture must have at some point been replaced by the sound. Instead of attempting to inform others about a nearby grazing mammoth with his hands, some hominid must have emitted a sound, and it is quite possible that it was an onomatopoeic sound that evoked the image of a mammoth in the mind of another member of his group<sup>28</sup>. This must have been one of the sparks that lit the fire – a fire that burned for hundreds of thousands of years until the creation of language as we know it. We do not know how much time elapsed before it occurred to a hominid that by telling others about a nearby mammoth – it is quite probably that this happened by accident – when in fact there was no sign of mammoths in the area, he would have free rein to look around the camp. Thus the lie was born, and was eventually expanded into the art of systematic deception. It likely took tens of thousands of years – as the period between the assumed birth of a proto-language (around 300,000–250,000 years ago) and the discovery of the earliest cultural artifacts (around 100,000 years ago) suggests – for one of the more clever hominids to use the word for mammoth not to communicate the actual presence of a mammoth or to mislead others, but to evoke the image of a mammoth and to embed it in a broader context, one associated, for example, with a glorious or tragic encounter. That same word used in a new and unknown functional application gave rise to the first protofiction. In most groups there was likely a member who found it easier and more pleasurable than others to tell fictional stories; the majority, we may assume, were eager to listen to him. With time, these early storytellers eventually became professional raconteurs<sup>29</sup> as well as shamans, witch doctors and priests.

Roland Barthes astutely observes that narrative is “international, transhistorical, transcultural”; it is “like life itself”<sup>30</sup>. Narrative – not just philosophy,

28 See speculations by a linguist and researcher of language evolution: Derek Bickerton, *Adam's Tongue. How Humans Made Language, How Language Made Humans* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2009), 218. See also W. Tecumseh Fitch, *The Evolution of Language* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

29 Vargas Llosa refers to them elsewhere as *los habladores* and devotes a separate book to the topic. See Mario Vargas Llosa, *The Storyteller*, trans. Helen Lane (London: Faber and Faber, 1990).

30 Roland Barthes, “An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative”, trans. Lionel Duisit, *New Literary History*, Vol. 6, No. 2, “On Narrative and Narratives” (Winter, 1975): 237.

as Gombrowicz asserted – even in its shortest form – has “the supreme value of organizing the world in a vision”<sup>31</sup>. Not the *whole* world, of course: the ambition that drove Hegel to write *The Phenomenology of Spirit* is not the same as that of a child telling its parents about the rabbit it made out of construction paper. Yet the intention is the same: to give order to that which we call life and, in turn, the world, as our lives are inextricably linked to the world. We give this order to a piece of the world, our tiny world. We attempt to do this at various levels: telling the time (“7:10 pm”) is one way of organizing the world; my article is another. They are different types of fabulations that organize the world at a fiction level of zero (as a side note, recall that the difference between fictional and nonfictional fabulation is just a difference of degrees: every non-fictional statement can become fictional merely by changing its context: if I were to publish the sentence “it’s 7:10 pm” on a single page with plenty of white space in a poetry anthology, it would take the form of a poem (whether or not such a poem would be worthy of attention is another matter entirely), and if I were to have a character in a novel utter the sentence, it would take the form of prose fiction).

Once they had learned to give form to pieces of rock, working and shaping them, early humans must have begun to behave similarly with regard to life: by living, we give some form to the stream of life, working and shaping its raw material. We do this by fabulizing our lives, meaning we run our experiences through the narrative filter of stories. Stories do not necessarily have to mean *War and Peace* or *The Man Without Qualities*; the word “story” can also bring to mind much shorter sequences. The shortest work in the history of world literature is the one sentence story *The Dinosaur* penned by the Guatemalan writer Augusto Monterroso: “Cuando despertó, el dinosaurio todavía estaba allí” (“When he awoke, the dinosaur was still there”).

From the anthropophilological point of view (let us use this term to describe the branch of philology that explores the anthropological difference), fabulation can be regarded as the smallest unit of utterance: fabulation, rather than narrative, because from the point of view of conventional literature studies, narrative is “a monological statement presenting a sequence of events arranged in some temporal order, associated with the characters participating in them and with the environment in which they take place”<sup>32</sup>. Narratives take the form of stories or descriptions, “depending on whether the phenomena in the foreground [...] are dynamic and develop in time, or static and arranged

31 Witold Gombrowicz, *A Guide to Philosophy in Six Hours and Fifteen Minutes*, trans. Benjamin Ivry, (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2004), 26.

32 Michał Głowiński et al., *Słownik terminów literackich* (Warsaw: Ossolineum, 2000), 331.

in space”<sup>33</sup>. The basic difference between fabulation and narrative is that while the narrative is regarded as a certain derivative form of the statement, fabulation can be seen as its initial form. In other words, it is traditionally posited that narrative is an arranged, extended sequence of mutually connected events. I, on the other hand, posit that fabulation means every uttered sequence: everything else is left to the recipient. As we know (think back to the microstory about the dinosaur mentioned above, for example), stories are formed as much by the intention of the sender as they are by the imagination of the receiver. Stories are derived from interpretation, and interpretation is our natural way of being in the world. Thus a mere word or two is enough to create a story, as long as we know what to do with it. (Just as some linguists consider the sentence to be the smallest complete unit of communication and are inclined to interpret the individual word as an elliptical form of a sentence, so the story, at a different level, can be considered the smallest complete unit of interacting with the world, and the individual word can be interpreted as its elliptical form. The thing about ellipses, as we know, is that they leave more to the imagination.)

Our being-in-the-world thus turns out to be our being-in-stories. This idea was first articulated in philosophy by a somewhat forgotten student of Edmund Husserl, Wilhelm Schapp, who wrote: “We, people, are constantly entangled in stories” (which is also the title of his book *In Geschichten verstrickt*). “We go to sleep with stories that occupy our minds, they accompany us and pursue us into our dreams, and stand beside us when we wake up”<sup>34</sup>. “The only access we have to ourselves”, explains Schapp, “is through the stories in which we are entangled. We access others through the stories in which they are entangled, and we access animals through their stories”<sup>35</sup>.

This interpretation, if we accept it, offers us a convincing explanation of such incontrovertible facts as the one that we, as people, are quite eager to engage with stories, spending entire hours in front of the television or movie screen, curled up with a book, or simply sharing the latest gossip. We can explain this behavior from an evolutionary perspective, as Brian Boyd, professor of English Literature at the University of Auckland, attempts in his book *On the Origin of Stories. Evolution, Cognition, and Fiction*. Boyd writes: “That is what I want to explain in evolutionary terms: our impulse to appeal to our own minds and reach out to others for the sheer pleasure of sensing what we

33 Głowiński et al., *Słownik terminów literackich*, 331.

34 Wilhelm Schapp, *In Geschichten verstrickt. Zum Sein von Mensch und Ding* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2004), 1.

35 Ibid., 136.



can share even in an unprecedented new move”.<sup>36</sup> This marriage of philology and the natural sciences relies, of course, on the mere creative application of the knowledge of others. At one point in the book *Humans and Other Animals*, the professor of the philosophy of biology John Dupré writes quite seriously that “perhaps we might have more idea of the linguistic capacity of apes if the research had been carried out by literary critics”<sup>37</sup>.

Having developed the language organ, humans gradually learned to make the most efficient use of it, eventually transforming their ability to perceive the world through language into the ability to perceive it through the stories they wove around it and with which they weave themselves into it. Although apes can be taught the rudiments of human language, they completely lack the inclination to confabulate, because even with a vocabulary of several dozen concepts, they have never figured out what language actually does: it is a means of weaving ourselves into the world. And yet when I walk past the half-open door of the room of my three-and-a-half-year-old daughter, I can often hear her naturally and almost unconsciously making up stories. She usually assembles them out of bits and pieces of the cartoons she has recently watched, the books we have read to her, and various things she has seen and heard. While the resulting stories are long yet relatively straightforward, they foreshadow much more complex stories to come in the future. Is this not instinctive behavior? Storytelling must have provided some evolutionary advantage – most likely by enabling humans to test reality and make mistakes in their minds, where it is only our mental avatars, and not us, that risk death – and we can tentatively assume that those modules responsible for creating stories in human minds were thus enhanced.

#### IV

My final step will be to perform a more thorough examination of this evolutionary advantage. Language, a “product of a certain aridity”<sup>38</sup>, enabled humans to take over the world within a certain world picture i.e. a specific vision of the world. Let us however examine the side-effects of our linguistic and fabulatory cognitive software. Let us look, for example, at the pain that is a constant presence in our lives: on the one hand, pain is a sensory

36 Brian Boyd, *On the Origins of Stories. Evolution, Cognition, and Fiction*, (Cambridge (Mass.), London (England): The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 10.

37 John Dupré, “Conversations with Apes: Reflections on the Scientific Study of Language”, in *Humans and Other Animals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 243.

38 Jean Aitchison, *The Seeds of Speech. Language Origin and Evolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 57.

impression, a physiological phenomenon, and every animal equipped with a highly-developed nervous system can sense pain of similar intensity. On the other hand, language-based consciousness can transform even brief pain into long-term suffering, which only can only be experienced by the symbolic animal *homo sapiens*. Suffering is neither an impression nor a phenomenon: suffering is, from the formal point of view, a narrative structure (I will tentatively define suffering as interpreted pain). When a loved one dies, we not only experience the pain caused by our loss, but also suffering associated with the whole web of stories in which our lives were intertwined, stories of the past as well as the future. Suffering forces us to remodel our guiding self-narrative and often to re-embed ourselves in the world. In order to cope with these challenges, it becomes necessary to develop immunizing techniques and strategies.

Peter Sloterdijk puts it thus: "After centuries of experiments with new forms of life, the realization has dawned that humans, whatever ethnic, economic and political situation might govern their lives, exist not only in 'material conditions,' but also in symbolic immune systems and ritual shells"<sup>39</sup>. People are beings equipped not only with a biological immune system, but also a social immune system (comprising legislation, solidarity agreements, etc.) and a metaphysical or symbolic immune system that helps them bear the uncomfortable condition of unavoidable contingency. "Unlike animals, we have concerns that compel us to reach out into the future and, as mortals, 'look ahead' toward our own deaths, and thus we must build symbolic immune systems"<sup>40</sup>. Systems of this type – the strongest of which thus far in the history of humanity have been religion (including mythology, etc.), philosophy (and all sorts of [quasi]scientific discourses) and literature (as well as film, theater, etc.) – can be described in the anthropological-evolutionary perspective as a compensating mechanism that allows humans to put down roots in the uncomfortable circumstances of constant exposure to the winds of fate. Immune systems, Sloterdijk says, are "embodied expectations of injury and the corresponding programmes of protection and repair"<sup>41</sup>. These programs can be described collectively as anthropotechnics, or "the methods of mental and physical practising by which humans from the most diverse cultures have attempted to optimize their cosmic and immunological status in the

39 Peter Sloterdijk, *You Must Change Your Life. On Anthropotechnics*, trans. Wieland Hoban (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 3.

40 Peter Sloterdijk, "Die glauben, demnächst können sie fliegen", interview in *Literaturen*, no. 5 (2009): 52.

41 Sloterdijk, *You Must Change Your Life*, 20.

face of vague risks of living and acute certainties of death"<sup>42</sup>. From the evolutionary point of view, fiction is the best known immunizing agent, a technique that increases our resistance to life in actual reality. "Art altogether", writes Thomas Bernhard in the novel *Old Masters*, "is nothing but a survival skill (*Überlebenskunst*), [...] it is, time and again, just an attempt – an attempt that seems touching even to our intellect – to cope with this world and its revolting aspects"<sup>43</sup>. Art as the art of survival; I would prefer instead to talk about fiction as an immunizing strategy. But it could not exist without our natural disposition for fabulation: while language, through stories, enabled us to see, describe and order the world, to settle and colonize it, it is a special kind of story (namely, fiction) that enables us to also transcend it when it becomes unbearable; thus fiction, like an enormous spacecraft, enables us to leave the world if necessary.

## V

We began with magpies and their ostensible funeral ritual, in the description of which Bekoff unwittingly engaged with and paraphrased the immortal question posed by William Blake: "How do you know but ev'ry Bird that cuts the airy way, Is an immense world of delight, clos'd by your senses five?"<sup>44</sup>. How? Firstly, because I, like Dennett, believe that "the kind of mind you get when you add language to it is so different from the kind of mind you can have without language"<sup>45</sup> that even if it is not a mistake to label both as minds, one must still remember this difference. And second, because the fabulation program, when added to language, means that "our sense that there are riches in the minds of other creatures – riches inaccessible to us but not, of course, to them – is [most presumably – AŻ] an illusion"<sup>46</sup>.

"We need a narrative like we need space-time; it's a built-in thing", says David Foster Wallace, one of America's most original contemporary authors<sup>47</sup>.

42 Sloterdijk, *You Must Change Your Life*, 10. I expand on this topic in my article "Making it explicit. Petera Sloterdijka anatomia antropotechnik", *Kronos* no. 3 (2009): 264-278.

43 Thomas Bernhard, *Old Masters. A Comedy*, trans. Ewald Osers (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 151.

44 William Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell", in *The Poems*, ed. W.H. Stevenson (London: Longman, 1971), 108.

45 Daniel C. Dennett, *Kinds of Minds. Towards an Understanding of Consciousness*, 17.

46 Dennett, *Kinds of Minds. Towards an Understanding of Consciousness*, 17.

47 David Foster Wallace, "Fictional Futures and the Conspicuously Young", in *Both Flesh and Not. Essays* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2012), 52.

*Vivir para contarla* ("Living to Tell the Tale") is the title of the 2002 autobiography by Gabriel Garcia Marquez; let us modify it to better suit our needs: *Contar para vivir*, telling the tale to live. Because, as the book's Polish translators (Joanna Karasek and Agnieszka Rurarz) tell us, "life is a tale". We know no other life; this is the briefest summary of the discussion above. We may conclude from this that humans are not as unique as they are because they have language, but because by having language, they are equipped with a tool that enables them to tell stories about what it means to be human (being human is as much a state of mind as it is a biological condition). We learn how to be people through fiction. "Fiction", David Foster Wallace tells us, "is about what it is to be a fucking *human being*"<sup>48</sup>. This in turn means that questions about humanity can just as readily be posed from the philological standpoint. Who is man in the philological framework? He is an animal that lives in stories. This fact does not make us better or more intelligent than other animals, as these are relative qualifiers, but simply different from them – so different, in fact, that though our brains share a continuity, our minds, and thus our perception of the world, are divided by an unbridgeable chasm.

*Translation: Arthur Barys*

---

<sup>48</sup> Larry McCaffery, "An Expanded Interview with David Foster Wallace", in *Conversations with David Foster Wallace*, ed. Stephan J. Burn (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 26.

Bogusława Bodzioch-Bryła

## Towards the Post-Human Body. On New Poetry and New Reality

DOI: 10.18318/td.2015.en.1.10

To be so close with the machine  
as to spend your entire life inside it  
F. Zawada, *Cywilizacja donos pierwszy*

In his deliberations on the world of electronic media, Wolfgang Welsch contrasted them with the human body understood as a peculiar, inviolable sphere, existing in this particular respect as a sort of taboo.

The body is a conservative element, and it remains a condition for our every operation. From the philosophical side, the significance of corporality as a counter-balance to the electronic tendencies of immaterialization has been expounded repeatedly in the last few years. [...] But there is also a media intangibility, a sovereignty and obstinacy of bodies. These we are rediscovering today in a counter-move to the mediatization of the world. Think, say, of Nadolny's «discovery of slowness» or of Handke's praise of weariness. Amidst the turbulences of a world increasing its electronic potency the uniqueness of an unrepeatable hour of encounter is becoming important to us anew—or the inertia and the joy of a touching hand or a pair of eyes<sup>1</sup>.

### Bogusława

### Bodzioch-Bryła –

university lecturer at the Institute of Cultural Studies of the Academia Ignatianum in Kraków. Author of the following books: *Ku ciału post-ludzkiemu. Poezja polska po 1989 roku wobec nowych mediów i nowej rzeczywistości*; *Kapłan Biblioteki. O poetyckiej i eseistycznej twórczości Adama Zagajewskiego*; *Z nowymi mediami „w kulturze” i „o kulturze”*. *Scenariusze zajęć edukacji medialnej dla nauczycieli*; co-author of *Przepływy, protezy, przedłużenia. Przemiany kultury polskiej pod wpływem nowych mediów po 1989 roku*; *Literatura i nowe media. Homo irretitus w kulturze literackiej XX/XXI wieku*. Contact: boguslawa.bodzioch-bryla@ignatianum.edu.pl

<sup>1</sup> Wolfgang Welsch, "Artificial Paradises? Considering the World of Electronic Media—and Other Worlds", in *Undoing Aesthetics*, (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 183–184.

Interactions with modern science and culture not only seem to disprove the thesis, they seem to render it invalid. The cultural change taking place in both philosophy and art, a process initiated years ago by the collapse of the idea of modernity, introduced the term *posthuman* into the general discourse, and thus touched upon the very essence of humanity and heralded transcendence beyond the accepted limits of its understanding. In performances aspiring to the rank of works of art, the human body undergoes a range of extreme treatments, including disassembly, hypodermic penetration, fragmentation, technologization, introduction into symbiotic bonds with artificial technologies, and thus ceases to be an untouchable organic whole and loses its prior inviolability. "New technologies extend and augment the human body and as such influence the shape of identity"<sup>2</sup>.

The real turning point transpired [...] with the advent of the electronic era and its crowning achievement: the computer. Using that particular invention, man decided to create, perhaps the ultimate, perfect machines in his own image, not physical ones as much as intellectual. Work on artificial intelligence enthralled both scientists and consumers of mass culture already densely populated with robots, androids, gynoids, and cyborgs. The latter bear the greatest resemblance to true human form due to their hybrid nature: they are an amalgamation of human and machine<sup>3</sup>.

As we stop to ponder the question of the artistic application of possibilities offered to us by technology, including photography or computers, we do not have to look any further than the work of Robert Mapplethorpe, Laurie Simmons (quasi-human figures immersed in water), Susan Wides (groups of wax figures in simulated relations), the "sculptured" self-portraits of Charles Ray (portrait-like reconstructions of the artist's head affixed to the body of a mannequin)<sup>4</sup>, or the performances of Stelarc, based on the exploration of the symbiosis between the flesh and the computer. The latter, an Australian artist, in his quest to make the body more compatible and to extend its sensory and reactive capabilities, seems

2 Ryszard W. Kluszczyński, "Ontologiczne transgresje: sztuka pomiędzy rzeczywistością realną a wirtualną", *Kultura Współczesna* 1-2 (2000): 194.

3 Monika Bakke, *Ciało otwarte. Filozoficzne reinterpretacje kulturowych wizji cielesności*, (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Instytutu Filozofii UAM, 2000), 162-163.

4 Alicja Kępińska, "Ciało post-ludzkie", *Kultura współczesna* 1-2 (2000): 144-152.

to have taken his art to the extreme and subjected his own body to external manipulation<sup>5</sup>.

During the performance, his consciousness controls only half of his body, the other half is moved from without. [...] the artist's physicality is cleaved in half: the head and the right part of his body reacts to signals flowing from his "internal consciousness", that is his brain, whereas the left is subordinate to external signals flowing from electrodes attached to the skin. An external consciousness controls the latter. The audience, using specially programmed computers and muscle stimulation devices, can program the motor input sequence to be performed by left side of the artist's body. Therefore, in his performances, Stelarc combines reactions to stimuli flowing from two sources in a single body. The audience controlling him can be either near the artist and program the choreographic directly by approaching the terminal [...] or can do so remotely, via computer networks<sup>6</sup>.

The works of Konrad Kuzyszyn are another peculiar instance of the relevance of the topic of cultural experiences (manipulations) performed on the human body. In the "Condition" series, he created compositions that Monika Bakke labeled a sort of surreal anatomy or a bestiary.

5 For Stelarc, "what matters is a sort of global consciousness related to the capability to function remotely, the capability to connect (via the Internet) and interact in a multitude of ways, both with other people as well as remotely controlled robots and software. From this new perspective, the body becomes different from the idea of an organism defined along traditional lines. Stelarc believes, quite controversially, that a person's individuality is no longer paramount. The ability to communicate takes center stage, because only in communication with other bodies does the body acquire new power in this virtual structure. By inquiring whether it is important to stick by one's imperfect, deficient body, the artist explains that maybe the meaning of being human lies in refusing to remain just that. Thus, the artist joins others in asking: has man already become an anachronism, a vestige of bygone eras?

For Stelarc, the Internet is something more than just a means of storing and transmitting information. The artist believes that we may be developing strategies that establish the Internet as a sort of external nervous system, linking bodies serving as network nodes. [...] The Internet becomes this intelligent switching and linking system. This idea was implemented in one of Stelarc's performances, entitled «Ping Body». During the performance, hosted in Luxembourg, the artist subjected his body to electric stimulation flowing from three distinct sources: the Georges Pompidou Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, the Media Lab in Helsinki, and the «doors of Perception» symposium that was taking place in Amsterdam at the time. The reactions of Stelarc's body were involuntary, controlled remotely by other people over great distances". Bakke, *Ciało otwarte*, 154

6 Piotr Krajewski, "Od reprodukcji mechanicznej do genetycznej", in *Piękno w sieci. Estetyka a nowe media*, ed. Krystyna Wilkoszewska, (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 1999), 242.

The “Condition” cycle comprises small objects that one can fit in the palm of one’s hand, usually made out of two Plexiglas plates holding between them a single photographic film frame that features the likeness of a human, or we should say, the likeness of something humanlike. Sometimes it is the human body multiplied, other times it is a body posed to resemble a human embryo, and still other times, only a fragment of the body is multiplied. This creates the impression of dealing with monstrously disfigured flesh, bodies that Nature has not separated properly, or with victims of some cruel genetic experiments. [...] Kuzyszyn created something akin to surreal anatomies or even a bestiary, as it is anomalies that blur the clearly delineated border between the human and the animal, and simultaneously reinforce other polarities: between the normal and the abnormal, the natural and unnatural, the good and the evil<sup>7</sup>.

All of these examples further confirm the notion of man expanding his area of interest; after exploring nearly every sphere receptive to his experience, he is now willing to expand it further by examining his own body and organism.

According to Jaron Lanier, one of the main creators and theorists of virtual reality, one of the most striking characteristics of the virtual world, a world defined by flexibility and the ability to shape it at will, is the fact that the border between the human body—the body of the user—and the rest of the world is fluid. In essence, from the perspective of virtual reality, the body can be defined as that portion of the reality that does not move with the speed of thought. In these circumstances, a precisely definition the boundaries of the body may turn out to be very difficult<sup>8</sup>.

When the partition between the human and the artificial finally collapses, all other dualisms will follow, polarities will become indistinguishable from one another, and man will be knocked down from the unique and privileged position that was bestowed upon him by Enlightenment philosophers. In point of fact, the transgression of boundaries is an essential feature of postmodernism, whereas the cyborg represents the ultimate transcendence of a specific boundary<sup>9</sup>.

---

7 Bakke, *Ciało otwarte*, 44.

8 As quoted in Derrick de Kerckhove, *The Skin of Culture: Investigating the New Electronic Reality*, (Toronto: Somerville House, 1995).

9 As quoted in Bakke, *Ciało otwarte*, 155.



These changes are obviously affecting the younger generation of poets. Some of their works definitely transcend Welsch's concepts we discussed earlier and seem to go hand in hand with the musings of contemporary aestheticians and cultural anthropologists, as they touch upon subjects that were not that long ago considered taboo, including the depersonification of human beings. Naturally, we will not use this space to investigate the effects of the more extreme treatments performed on the literary figure of the human body. I personally presume that what we are dealing with here is a sort of a prelude, a preface to the real and total unveiling of the body of the future—the cyborg.

Breaching the boundaries of the body with the intention of disrupting its integrity is one of the symptoms of the breaking of the taboo. Peeking inside the body as if we would into the depths of a complicated mechanism, or observing it with an eye “equipped” with quasi-IT knowledge and terminology, seems to be a potential remedy for its numerous ailments. In the era of the biotechnology syndrome, the body in the traditional sense becomes something of a vestige, its meager durability and poor resistance to external factors gradually invalidating its *raison d'être*.

That particular way of thinking about one's flesh is fairly evident in one of Marcin Baran's poems:

The cough raises my blood pressure, clamps  
my brain. My heart cracked, the skin  
on my head taut [...]  
My hands swell in my sleep.  
[...]  
Face bloated  
in the morning, the skin between my skull  
and my scalp is burning. As long as the organs work, the exterior  
can be whatever it wants—in anticipation  
of terrible pain

[Marcin Baran, *Ciało*]

as it is in Majzel's work:

this morning I found blood seeping out.  
[...] a hematoma is blooming inside, the little growth.  
the feral, migratory creature.  
let's call it a hematoma, 'cause the doctor's comforting.  
[...]  
maybe it's not a tumor but a garden,  
silence slowly shrouding it?

[...]  
 and life? it'll show up.  
 somewhere north of the navel.  
 wild orchards will overgrow us.  
 a sensitive yet colorless fur.

[Bartłomiej Majzel, *krwiał BZ*]

The perception of bodies and corporeality as irremovable obstacles that simultaneously are inherent attributes of humanity also shines through in the work of Biedrzycki:

this frost grinds my teeth and grates my enamel  
 my desiccated eyeballs knocking around the too big  
 sockets. Wherever I go, I carry with me on a glass neck  
 a skull filled with metal bees  
 [...]  
 March has come and pierced me with its eyes  
 bright with fever

[Miłosz L. Biedrzycki, *oczy błyszczące*]

"Only how long / can this electoral machine of the body / will keep stuffing bloody votes into the urn of my heart?", asks Marcin Baran, prefacing the question with a poetically ascetic account of the clash between his lyrical self and his, shall we say, machinery, a description of the limitations of the human mind rooted in corporeality. The rhetorical question requires no answer but a negative reply seems obtrusively self-apparent.

Poets of the younger generation try to tackle the matter of flesh as a source of ceaseless trouble and worry. The environment which man inhabits—the surrounding reality described in postindustrial categories—tries to suggest to him a possible remedy to spiritual and bodily ailments that trouble him. This reality was the origin of the image depicting man as an amalgamation of elements hailing from different sources that was eventually transplanted onto poetic ground.

Man as automaton, a mechanism resembling multitudes of technological creations filling our civilizational space in both form and function—a picture like that is far from rare, especially in fragments that describe the confrontation between the lyrical self and one's own consciousness, the latter entangled in relationships within its immediate proximity:

I walk from room to room. The shadow follows me,  
 uncertain. I water the flowers, sweep the dust, drink, swallow.

The Earth turns, its gears sluggish,  
drifting to the port of the calendar page,  
the day already pulling the handbrake in the parking lot of the night.  
Sentences tumble out lopsidedly,  
as if from a jammed hurdy-gurdy. I'm still feigning  
words, actions, gestures.

The typewriter binds them together.

[Grzegorz Olszański, *Z życiowych problemów  
nieżyciowych facetów. Część pierwsza, nieostatnia*]

The automation of the human body and its reflexes is accompanied here by a peculiar feeling of amalgamation with the typewriter, a technological creation of man, which leads, in turn, to inauthentic behavior; lest we forget, "feigning" implies dissemblance, simulation and deception.

This specific character also leaves its mark on spaces more distant than one's own room, spaces which entangle the lyrical protagonist within a web of situations and dependencies related to institutions or governments:

The clerk receives and disburses  
funds, raises and lowers  
her head.

[...]

The cashier's fingers are faster than numbers.

[Grzegorz Olszański, *Z życiowych problemów  
nieżyciowych facetów. Część druga, bez pokrycia*]

Poetry of the new generation often employs the notion of man constructed in the image of a multiple choice machine:

What we did, we could have done differently

[Grzegorz Olszański, *Wyjście z okręgu*]

or man as automaton wholly devoid of any human characteristics, working with computerlike precision and rhythmicalness:

Memory catalogs holding the exact  
amount of dust and number of stains, the place learned by rote.  
Simple sentences. Complex problems. [...] The cadaver awaits.  
Renews, repeats.

[Grzegorz Olszański, *Przejęzyczenie*]

The human automaton usually possesses a mind structured like a computer's central processing unit.

...interactive memories

launched by pointing the memory cursor towards the appropriate word or gesture.

[Grzegorz Olszański, *Narodziny tragedii*, *Sztuka mięsa*]

The virtualization process, however, touches more than just the body. Even more prevalent is the issue that we might classify as the interrogation of identity, and of the subject "becoming dispersed, decentralized, inconsistent, we might even say consumed by the interface"<sup>10</sup>.

As the image of the integral organism is gradually "replaced with the notion of an incoherent body, constantly enhanced and reconditioned—constantly on the lookout for new identities, permanently dissatisfied with itself"<sup>11</sup>, we can surmise that the mental disposition of the lyrical "self" finds itself in a similar situation, and it is in this light that we see the subjects of these poems.

The disintegration of the bodily image [...] puts the subject in danger of returning to realms not yet under the influence of the conceptual order, that is returning to an archaic, disassembled, uncoordinated body, a body dissimilar from itself. The return to the realm of the real order may elicit psychotic fantasies revolving around disintegration and surrendering oneself to the authority of the external world—the objective world.

In the widespread fascination with the images of the human body, Lacan sees the expression of a desire for a strong and stable identity. The image that the subject wants to associate with reinforces its position in the imaginary and symbolic sphere against the dangers lurking within itself. The subject permanently retains what we may label the sediment of prior corporeal experience in fragments that appear in dreams about the disintegration of one's body and, in extreme cases, in psychotic depersonalizations<sup>12</sup>.

10 Agnieszka Cwikiel, "Metafora cyborga—ciało przyszłości", *Kultura współczesna* 1-2 (2000): 161.

11 Adam Paluch, "Wizerunek nasz, czyli ciało na scenie ponowoczesności", in *Transformacja, ponowoczesność wokół nas i w nas*, ed. Adam Paluch (Wrocław: Katedra Etnologii Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1999), 129.

12 Bakke, *Ciało otwarte*, 23-24.

It also turns out that it is possible to look from another perspective at the role of media integrated with the human body and their influence on the structure of the human organism, which, as a result, no longer seems to be a fully autonomous entity. The notion of media functioning as a sort of “prostheses” that extend and augment the body of the modern human being is espoused by numerous scholars, including Lyotard, Virilio, and Welsch<sup>13</sup>.

The electronic media insert us into a world moving at the speed of light, a speed that our senses are simply not designed to handle. Therefore, media art should take on the task of adapting humanity to function at these breakneck speeds. That is the direction Lyotard took with his 1985 exhibition, as did Virilio and Welsch—by depicting changes taking place in the sphere of human perception (the vanishing constitutes part of the phenomenon, the anaesthetic determines the aesthetic). In this option, the media are considered an extension of the body, an augmentation of the body’s sensory capabilities, an enhancement of the human *aisthesis*. The media become prostheses that allow us remote vision and hearing. [...] Even McLuhan himself has described the media as man’s sensory prostheses. They introduce both quantitative and qualitative changes into prior frameworks of human perception. Thanks to the media, we perceive more and we perceive differently<sup>14</sup>.

As noted by Monika Bakke,

we ceaselessly enhance our capabilities, we boost and sharpen our memory, our vision, hearing, olfaction. Newer and newer technologies revamp our bodies increasing our dependence on them [...] We are already used to the idea of miniature electronic devices buried deep inside our body, facilitating its survival. They are invisible to the naked eye, hidden, and they blend in perfectly with their organic surroundings. The scope of this expansion is impossible to ignore, we are already past a very significant boundary—until very recently, technology was still external, still part of the landscape, the environment, and not the body<sup>15</sup>.

13 Krystyna Wilkoszewska, “Estetyki nowych mediów”, in *Piękno w sieci. Estetyka a nowe media*, ed. Krystyna Wilkoszewska, (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 1999), 22.

14 Wilkoszewska, “Estetyki”, 22.

15 Bakke, *Ciało otwarte*, 152.

These notions have also led to the rise of new fields of study, including neuroaesthetics, a discipline based on the idea of a cybernetic network comprising both human organs and microprocessors.<sup>16</sup> Virilio perversely considers the disabled person overcoming their limitations with the help of technology to be the ideal of a healthy human. The difference lies in the fact that paraphernalia once considered external prostheses (glasses, crutches) or even animal organs transplanted into humans are now supplanted by miniature hardware—gear that Virilio calls (electro)technical prostheses<sup>17</sup>.

We should take a step back here and ponder the matter of the scenery that accompanies the average user of the modern world in the exact moment that we might consider the definitive “here and now”. Here is one example of reality constructed by Lekszycki:

I wake up in a cold room, my anxiety  
recognizes me in the mirror. to start the day well,  
I remind myself of the end—the scene with the woman  
giving me the cold shoulder.  
a low scoring average won't give me a career in Zepter Idea Śląsk  
Wrocław, not even my  
high school basketball team.  
no, it doesn't hurt me at all.  
I still have my Technics stereo,  
a six-head Thomson VCR,  
and I still can add some memory  
to my PC, swap out the CPU,  
Grundig allows me to watch the coverage  
of the Four Hills Tournament and be moved  
when adam małysz  
leaves behind his rivals, gliding to 133 m. after achieving  
92.5kph on the threshold, and so I can fly  
from my apartment doors into the murky void  
outside—and glide 200 meters to the kiosk.  
to buy cigarettes and a puzzle set with naked ladies

[Paweł Lekszycki, *ekliwiy wiersz o samotności i pustce, której nie wypełni drogi sprzęt audio-video ani nawet miłość narodu polskiego do adama małysza*]

<sup>16</sup> Wilkoszewska, “Estetyki”, 23.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 23.

The reality put together by Lekszycki often turns out to be completely artificial, a conglomerate of conduits that may have mediated contact with the real, external world, were such a world to exist. However, the virtual conglomerate (the audio-video composite) seems to be the only definitely true element, while Lekszycki himself is surrounded by nothingness, nonexistence, this “murky void”. The genuine original of the world does not exist, only its fragments do, copied and conserved in the bowels of complex mediation machines. It is no wonder then that man himself is also practically a nonentity; in its place there is only a creature whose body was enhanced by flawless prostheses. If we are to listen to music, we should only do so using a Technics stereo, view the world only through a TV screen, store memories only in the memory of a computer. A “Technics stereo”, a “Thomson VCR”, a “PC central processing unit”, a TV set—all of them prostheses of modernity—these are the only things that truly exist. Every attempt to go “beyond” means entering an uncertain area that touches directly upon personal reflection and experience which, in turn, puts one at risk of falling into the “murky void” of unknown extraction.

Dwelling in the virtual expanses of the Internet is extremely tempting, especially given the unlimited possibilities in terms of generating new realities. In a demiurgic gesture of creation, Lekszycki designs a world that is the total opposite of the realities of spaces we label with the prefix “cyber-”:

sun filtering through the blinds. the ceiling  
is my sky, when building walls  
I discover the power to  
spread fire and quake the earth.  
tornadoes obey me.  
the rivers as well.  
as does the bourgeois mob.  
my whispers ignite  
the first flashes of disquiet and rebellion.  
my words quell all insurrection.  
also in my hands: improving education  
or fostering crime. years of plenty, years of famine.  
it's my privilege to raise taxes.  
I unleash monsters upon cities and then kill them dead.  
I'm the wellspring of entertainment and labor. a patron of the arts.  
it's my world, so don't mess with my head.  
don't talk to me about the examination of the divine  
in modern poetry. never try to scare me

with death. I know all the god mode cheat codes.  
enter.

[Paweł Lekszycki, *sim city*]

We are dealing here with a situation where, probably under the influence of a computer game, the consciousness of the lyrical protagonist impersonates a godlike creator entity that dreams up realities at will, with the verbal equivalent of the act of creation—the Biblical “let there be light”—replaced by Lekszycki with the far more computerlike “enter”. We should take notice of the extensive usage of the personal and possessive pronouns – “I” appears over thirteen times. The poem becomes something of a manifesto of the modern man, someone claiming to be subject to no limitations, but the manifesto is a dangerous one—it ends with an ambiguous and ominous “enter”, a gesture one might mistake for an extermination order.

The magical “enter” reveals [...] to the stranger new avenues in a potentially interminable journey, new possibilities that emerge in the drift through messages and cultures, and countless interactions with thousands of Internet users. There are no dead-ends in cyberspace, each click of the mouse is but a prelude to the next one. Simultaneously, categories like linearity or consequentiality lose their meaning in its depths: B does not necessarily have to come after A, and C after B. You can “click” forwards, backwards, up, down, sideways; G, S, even (-6) or (\*\*\*) can come after A. You can swap out and combine logics and conventions. There are no limits or demarcations, everything here can lead to everything else and intermingle with everything else. Here, intertextuality becomes hard fact<sup>18</sup>.

We should ponder the change in the meaning of the term, which seems to acquire new, additional significance in the context of the aforementioned Lekszycki poem: the word “enter” is now more than a simple computer command, it is a godlike gesture used to demonstrate one’s own power.

“I hear a command flowing from the holy screen”, writes Tadeusz Pióro in his poem *Na jawie*. Also in this case, the lyrical “self” seems to exist in a reality that we may as well affix with the prefix “cyber”. This nearly surreal world is a conglomerate of artificiality:

18 Agnieszka Gromkowska, “Tożsamość w cyber-przestrzeni—(re)konstrukcje i (re)prezentacje”, *Kultura Współczesna* 3 (1999): 37.



We sat in a forest with a basket full of sandwiches,  
 a thermos with spiked tea, [...]  
 One day, however, all the leaves  
 were knocked down by a violent wind:  
 apples of Eden here and there on the branches:  
 we found ourselves in a symbolic impasse.  
 Only recourse was to go on a shopping spree  
 credit card holograms  
 glimmered like ornaments on a Christmas tree  
 [...]  
 the polygraph refused to cooperate  
 and we failed the memory test.

[Tadeusz Pióro, *Daj mi tam gdzie nie myślę, Wola i ochota*]

An innocent stroll through the forest suddenly transitions into a walk through the woods of fiction, while the script for this particular metamorphosis only partially resembles an apocalyptic scenario. The realm of nature is promptly replaced by a space resembling the crowded corridors of huge malls experienced during outings dominated by “shopping sprees”, the “glimmer of credit card holograms”. Because the “polygraph refused to cooperate”, and the “memory test” ended with failure, there is no way for us to invoke and refer to notions like the “Beginning” or “Truth”. Therefore, Pióro deceives us when he writes:

there is a way out from under this pile of prostheses  
 [...] the procedure is simple  
 record your voice after the signal.  
 Call you back as soon as I get back from the void

[Tadeusz Pióro, *Daj mi tam gdzie nie myślę*]

The signal, as it turns out, does not come from the beyond at all, as the only signal is the beep of the answering machine—a very special form of falsity: a voice separated from its owner, a word separated from the person uttering it (akin to *Logos* without God?). It is a shift in both time and space. It seems that the void of the information channel is our way out from under the “pile of prostheses”, a situation wherein the Sender and the Recipient are not bound in the act of communication, and immediacy will not act between one and the other. This, in turn, violates the traditional structure of the act of communication, as it eliminates the one seemingly essential element of the process, that is contact.

Dread is pervasive in virtualized reality. The comfort of Internet immediacy has a way of promptly turning into a source of discomfort.

Given the Internet's public and ubiquitous character, protecting one's privacy is becoming increasingly harder. It turns out that even one's most intimate experiences can become the subject of public discourse. There is no private space-time, neither is there a wholly private domicile. There is, however, the screen and the web: a computer in front of which thousands of people sit simultaneously, all of them invisible but ready to observe<sup>19</sup>.

George Kateb turns our attention to the modern tendency of exposing oneself to public view, the desire to be observed. Four factors can be deemed responsible for this state of affairs, these being: the social nature of man, sociability specific to democracies, democratic exhibitionism (its symptoms include the incredible popularity of talk shows), and democratic theatricality<sup>20</sup>.

Not every individual will experience the carefreeness of satisfying "the craving of the eyes". Under these exhibitionist conditions, amidst thousands of webcams, many of them often installed in private apartments, it is fairly easy to feel kept under surveillance. These feelings also accompany the lyrical protagonist in the works of new generation poets, they are rooted in the protagonist's mind and in time grow to be an indispensable constituent of his disposition. In poetry, they sometimes take the shape of a sneaking suspicion, one reeking vaguely of conspiracy theories, that one is being watched, spied upon, even followed or imitated:

...I sit here  
and watch: the laundry I hung earlier imitates  
towels from commercials and starts to strip  
sensually shedding clothespins, people at the store  
imitate the protagonists of modern poetry,  
the neighbor imitates Kim Basinger  
in the scene with Cocker playing in the background.  
Then she leans out the window  
and does the same thing I do.

[Grzegorz Olszański, *Śmy, Słowa. Pojedyncze zdania, złożone problemy*]

In Grzegorz Olszański's work, this specific discomfort takes the shape of an overwhelming feeling of inertia, a dangerous thickening of air that inspires a fishlike gasping for air:

19 Anna Błaszczuk, "Przestrzeń w wymiarze wirtualnym", in: *Przestrzenie, miejsca, wędrówki: przestrzenie w badaniach kulturowych i literackich*, ed. Piotr Kowalski (Opole: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, 2001), 73-74.

20 George Kateb, "Poznawani i obserwowani", *Res Publica Nowa* 2 (2000): 35-49.

The snow melted long ago. Now it's the asphalt,  
 melding with the wheels of truck [...]  
 The stocks of air have skyrocketed at the  
 meteorological stock market, some of them  
 vanished, others shredded by blades  
 Of ventilators [...]  
 The radio, the TV, the press  
 will surely make a big deal out of it.  
 Already the air is thick in my throat,  
 [...]  
 At night, the writing on the wall will come alive  
 with fresh paint [...]  
 "Give me some air"—a scream erupts,  
 radio waves billowing and drifting away with it  
 into the ether. [...]  
 The screaming will stop.  
 The day will overexpose the  
 curtains. Lungs will slowly turn to gills.

[Grzegorz Olszański, *Wakacje w mieście. Walka o oddech*]

In Olszański's poem, the air is thick not with heat but with excess ("blades of ventilators", "the radio, the TV, and the press", fresh paint of the "writing on the wall", "radio waves", the "ether"), making it useless, making it impossible to breathe, closing the larynx. The presence of the protagonist can be felt only between the lines. No entity deriving from outside the space-time dominated by elements of the *techné* realm can exist within it. That is the reason for the impersonal character of oblique verses that seems to suffuse the entire poem. In her ruminations on the subject of crowds and urban density, Jolanta Brach-Czaina acknowledges the experience of density to be an essential element of our world, and she includes both population density—with street traffic and mobs swarming in buses and subway cars—and the accumulation of a large number of individual objects in a small space in the term's semantic field. Density also encompasses the rush of information and symbols we associate with categories like commodity abundance, as well as the surge of activities, experiences, stimuli, and even sounds, in other words a multiplication of sensations that is so cherished by modern societies<sup>21</sup>.

The results of this swarming include the perception of reality as a conglomeration of secret arrangements, secret objectives, and secret undertakings, all

21 Jolanta Brach-Czaina, "Gęstość, tłok, miasto", *Res Publica Nowa* 2 (2002): 54–58.

of them part of a giant conspiracy spun by the (post)modern world aimed against every individual being:

suddenly I thought  
about all these  
facilities  
ready to turn you into a corpse  
  
and open all night long

[Grzegorz Olszański, *Hades zaprasza*]

Filip Zawada reaches the pinnacle of suspicion in his poem *Plakat*:

It was already dark when I saw the poster  
calmly fluorescent  
CAMPS FOR CHILDREN  
with German lessons

[Filip Zawada, *Plakat*]

The particular brevity of the poet makes the reader question whether only the poster is fluorescent in the scene. The unspoken contamination of phrasemes (a language immersion camp and a concentration camp) is provoked by an involuntary procession of associations: the term “fluorescent” may be included in the semantic field of the term “phosphorescent”, which in turn may invoke connotations of experiments on humans conducted in death camps.

The stifling atmosphere in the poems of Eugeniusz Tkacyszyn-Dycki resembles the insides of the schizophrenic personality of the modern man, a person who on one the hand recognizes the dangers of becoming too dependent on specialized surrogates of human beings—machines, while on the other hand is paralyzed by a fear of what seems to be unknown, alien and free of the processed cud of popular culture.

What will happen to us once we finally learn when  
they'll disconnect us from or reconnect us to the oft-faulty  
medical equipment in the regional hospital where  
everything seems broken except the nurses

[Eugeniusz Tkacyszyn-Dycki, *Na korytarzu szpitala wojewódzkiego*]

In *Virtual reality*, Miłosz Biedrzycki's important examination of the changes that our modern reality is undergoing, the author investigates the oft-discussed problem of authenticity and derivation, or more precisely—the limits

of simulation and whether their crossing makes it impossible to discern the real from the virtual. *Virtual reality* seems to directly correspond with Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality of the modern world, the world of simulation and simulacra, the world in which all referentiality has been abolished and reality exists only as an artifice recreated in signifying systems<sup>22</sup>.

I walk & admire the precision with which it was made  
 the pressure on my sole in the exact moment  
 when my foot touches the sidewalk  
 turn my head a bit and I look at  
 another piece of the image. [...]   
 the dust, the whirling—reconstructed  
 very realistically. [...]   
 the same hippies on drums I saw last spring  
 even the rhythm's the same. maybe blood—only  
 the servile processor suggests the images  
 at will: bongo drums, hair, summer  
 dresses of the girls—so the sensations stay  
 consistent. a stripling walks among the audience, drum turned  
 over, collecting change. I put two thousand in, he looks at me,  
 mumbles: fanks. fanks? what is this?  
 they could have dialogue in polish.  
 whatever—it's probably a pirated copy, anyway.

[Miłosz L. Biedrzycki, *Virtual reality*]

The image of the human body in this poem is focused particularly on its natural functions and activities, which in turns gives the impression that sensory perception is not something ascribed to the human body by physiology and

22 Baudrillard envisions modernity as reality that is reproducible, simulable, and hyperreal. It is, in Baudrillard's words, "produced from miniaturized cells, matrices, and memory banks, models of control—and it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times from these. It no longer needs to be rational, because it no longer measures itself against either an ideal or negative instance. It is no longer anything but operational. In fact, it is no longer really the real, because no imaginary envelops it anymore. It is a hyperreal, produced from a radiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere. [...] It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real, that is to say of an operation of deterring every real process via its operational double, a programmatic, metastable, perfectly descriptive machine that offers all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes. [...] A hyperreal henceforth sheltered from the imaginary, and from any distinction between the real and the imaginary, leaving room only for the orbital recurrence of models for the simulated generation of differences". Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 2-3.

thus its inherent element by natural law, but rather an artificially added function, installed like an external piece of software (“the pressure on my sole in the exact moment/when my foot touches the sidewalk/turn my head a bit and I look at/another piece of the image”). This, in turn, leads to the likening of the structure of the lyrical protagonist to that of a piece of hardware—a simulator of the human organism (unnaturally lagging movements, interactive vision function with limited capabilities allowing only partial perception of the visual input with the role of the eyeball assigned to a device similar to a microprocessor handling image projection).

We live in a world transformed and undergoing transformation, the boundary between the real world and the virtual reality of the media its most sensitive spot. The threshold, at the same time ubiquitous, spatial, temporal, as well as processual, unconstrained by neither space nor time, confines man’s existence to a peculiar set of interspaces and intertemporalities, to a hybrid world “in-between”—not only between civilizations and cultures, but primarily between reality and virtuality<sup>23</sup>. A quote from Umberto Eco seems to perfectly encapsulate the sentiment:

Once upon a time there were the mass media, and they were wicked, of course, and there was a guilty party. Then there were the virtuous voices that accused the criminals. And Art (ah, what luck!) offered alternatives, for those who were not prisoners of the mass media. Well, it’s all over. We have to start again from the beginning, asking one another what’s going on<sup>24</sup>.

*Translation: Jan Szelągiewicz*

---

23 Kluszczyński, “Transgresje”, 192–193.

24 Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1985), 150.

---

Aleksandra Ubertowska

---

## Nature at Its Limits (Ecocide). Subjectivity After the Catastrophe

---

DOI: 10.18318/td.2015.en.1.11

In the history of subjectivity, the current of non-anthropocentric humanities marks new and important caesuras which, it seems, once and for all dismantle late, modernist paradigms, essentialist fictions and demands based on foundations made up of “nature/culture”, “human/animal”, “internal/external”, and “somatic/spiritual” distinctions. In his actor-network theory (ANT), Bruno Latour states that subjectivity (and psychology) are a plasmatic elemental force, circulating between various beings which are excluded by old typologies and which acquire the status of actants – beings endowed with the power of self-agency<sup>1</sup>. It is that self-agency, defined as an ability to influence other elements of the network, which takes over functions of exclusive subjectivity – a fact, which has certain consequences both in the sphere of epistemology, as well as politics. The monumental institutionalism of old societies is replaced in Latour’s theory by softness of a cloth-net, always woven anew, in response to appeals of beings endangered by exclusion, ostracism and genocide.

An increasing number of interpretations, as Dominick LaCapra suggests, through observation of a fairytale-like

---

**Aleksandra Ubertowska** – expert in the study of literature, professor of Uniwersytet Gdański; her research interests include the literature of the Holocaust, gender studies, the problems associated with identity and ecocriticism. Her articles were published in “Teksty Drugie”, “Pamiętnik Literacki”, “Ruch Literacki”, as well as in joint volumes of Polish and non-Polish publications (*inter alia* Lexington Books, Peter Lang, Akademie Verlag).

---

1 Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social, An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 61–89, 201–220.

phantasm, and a performative gesture<sup>2</sup> or, as Giorgio Agamben suggests in his *The Open. Man and Animal*: the “movable boundary inside of a man”<sup>3</sup>, suggest the illusory character of ontological divisions such as “human/animal”, “humans/(evil, destructive, alien) nature”. According to Agamben, man is a product of the “anthropogenic machine”, which fabricates a “human” in the body of a two-legged animal through isolation, or amputation of “naked life”, an animalistic particle of being. *Zoe* becomes an object of marking, of enclosure in a concentration camp (a body of a muselmann), and simultaneously reminds us that “we are what we have lost”. That is where the concept of integrating the lost particle of subjectivity, developed in *The Open*, came from. For Agamben, the acceptance of one’s animal qualities has a salvation-like, utopian quality. In order to illustrate its essence, Agamben recalls the image and the aura of an apocalyptic feast on illustrations from the 13th-century Hebrew Bible found in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana collection. In the illustrations, figures of the righteous have been presented in human forms, but crowned with animal heads at the end of time and history.

In a comparable case, Jacques Derrida in his *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (*L’animal que donc je suis*, 2006<sup>4</sup>), a collection of seminar lectures, investigates questions of “new subjectivity”. The title contains a reference to the classical, Cartesian formula that embraces the essence of the human subject. Therefore, his correct sense would have been a little different, and far more iconoclastic (“I am an animal, therefore I am”). In his zoo-autobiography, Derrida – in contradistinction from many representatives of animal studies – does not remove the boundary between what is human and animal. On the contrary, he problematizes these two spheres profoundly, complicating their status (he calls his methodology “limitotrophy”<sup>5</sup>, or a method that feeds on the phenomenon of liminality like a parasite).

Therefore man and animal in Derrida’s dissertation are separated by boundaries: diverse, folded, constantly accreting and, at the same time, cavernous. In order to define the nature of an animal, Derrida created

2 Dominick LaCapra, *History and its Limits. Human, Animal, Violence*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2009), 151–154.

3 Giorgio Agamben, *The Open. Man and Animal*, trans. K. Attel, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 15.

4 Jacques Derrida, *L’animal que donc je suis*, (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2006). It is a posthumous collection of Derrida’s lectures. I used a German translation by M. Sedlaczek: Jacques Derrida, *Das Tier, das ich also bin*, (Vienna: Passagen Verlag, 2010).

5 Derrida, *L’animal que donc je suis*, 55.



a neologism: *animot*<sup>6</sup> – an “animal word”, assuming that an animal is merely (and as much as) a grapheme created by man, to whom God granted the right to name animals. The *animot*, within the Cartesian project, was supposed to reinforce the superior position of man in a world, cutting him off from the affective nature of an animal. In the end, it institutionalized boundaries and revealed their conventionality. The themes of limitotrophy and graphemes of Derrida’s concept coincide within that very motive. The *animot* delineates a network of boundaries and folds that differentiate the identity claims of man. That deconstructionist gesture (stemming from a polemic with Heidegger) shows that man, to the same extent as an “animal”, is “poor in the world” (*weltarm*), separated from language and truth about the essence of being. Man is also merely a place, where a subject can settle in; a subject that is far from any of its classical definitions. For purposes of his eco-critical lectures, Derrida constructed a new concept of subjectivity by writing that today the most important question seems to be about “a subject of compassion, co-feeling”<sup>7</sup>, about “I” immersed in, and not separated from, the environment.

Books and articles discussed here are linked by one particular theme, which locates eco-critical, philosophical reflections in a historical order, or more precisely – in a strictly defined context of “concentration camp universe”, as the most radical emanation of bio-power, genocide or – in an even broader context – post-catastrophic consciousness. Relationships between post-catastrophic thought and literature and eco-criticism are diverse, penetrating and supplementing each other at many levels. It should not be too much of a simplification, if one were to state that a transition from “Holocaust studies” to political and literary studies ecology is a natural step in an intellectual development conditioned by the internal logic of both disciplines. Dominick LaCapra, a theoretician of trauma, is also involved in animal studies by no mere accident, while Giorgio Agamben combines reflections on “concentration camp universe” and the condition of the *muselmann* with essays on bio-power, and the history of interchangeability of the *bios/zoe* categories. The interception of concepts from the sphere of eco-criticism takes place at the level of rhetoric, through the exploitation of its internal performative potential. That is why Claud Lanzmann, when he talks about the effects of the Holocaust, employs the image of “deforestation”<sup>8</sup> – climate changes resulting

6 Ibid., 65.

7 Ibid., 52.

8 Claude Lanzmann, “Der Ort und das Wort. Über ‘Shoah’”, in *Niemand zeugt für den Zeugen, Erinnerungskultur nach der Shoah*, ed. U. Baer, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2000), 110.

from the destruction of the Amazon rain forests – taken from contemporary ecology, while Jacques Derrida in his previously mentioned lectures, or Tadeusz Różewicz in his poems from the *Grey Zone* collection talk about the genocide of animals that undergo genetic experiments, or fall victim to industrial food processing practices.

The fact that environmentalism begins to broaden research horizons of the Holocaust studies is confirmed by Sybille Steinbacher's<sup>9</sup> essay, in which she showed to what great extent the environment around Auschwitz, rich in water and swamps, (which was favourable to the industrial plans of the IG Farben Company which located its factory in the nearby town of Monowitz – a theme known from the memoirs of Primo Levi) decided about the massive scale of the forced labor camp. One could say that in this particular case nature – a factor external to man – became a causative element of history, as understood by Richard Foltz<sup>10</sup>.

Terminological borrowings go in the reverse direction as well: eco-criticism or, more broadly, environmental history, apply terms and descriptive categories, which function within the Holocaust and genocide studies. The widely commented book by David Zierler, *The Invention of Ecocide: Agent Orange, Vietnam, and the Scientists Who Changed the Way We Think About the Environment*<sup>11</sup>, could serve as a good example. The concept of ecocide (by analogy to terms which function in the political sciences: genocide and ethnocide) was introduced by Arthur Galston, a bio-chemist, to describe the American military operation 'Ranch Hand', which consisted of spraying the South Vietnam territory with chemicals (herbicides). The operation led to the irreversible burning down of hectares of the jungle, which served as natural protection for Viet Cong soldiers.

Searching for affinities, which connect – at the level of lexis, methodology, or system of notions – the histories of extermination of entire groups of man, and devastation of nature is, it seems, motivated by a sensation that spheres, separated from each other, constitute an ecosystem that is impossible to grasp through description, which operates with anthropocentric research categories. Operation Ranch Hand transcended historical paradigms

9 Sybille Steinbacher, *The Relationship of the Auschwitz Camp to the Outside Environment, Economy, and Society*, in *Lessons and Legacies VI. New Currents in Holocaust Research*, ed. J. Diefendorf, (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2004).

10 Richard C. Foltz, "Does Nature Have Historical Agency? World History, Environmental History, and How Historians Can Help Save the Planet", *The History Teacher*, vol 37, no 1 (2003): 9–28.

11 David Zierler, *The Invention of Ecocide: Agent Orange, Vietnam, and the Scientists Who Changed the Way We Think About the Environment*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011). See a discussion at H-Net: <https://www.h-net.org/~environ/roundtables/env-roundtable-2-1.pdf>.

(for example, the “Cold War” scheme, a conflict of two military superpowers), because its results had a trans-national character, which impacted the entire biological universe. That is why, for such a long time, it was not included in historiographic studies.

### Non-Human Factors Against the Nazi Tekhné

In the light of the above observations, the need for reflection on the question of the extent to which Latour’s perspective of broadening the formula of subjectivity with ‘non-humans’ remodels the understanding of post-catastrophism in literature and art, as well as what new perspectives it introduces to the question of inexpressibility/unpresentability of a traumatic experience becomes understandable. In the present essay I will be interested in the forms of visual and literary representations, in which the intervention of non-human factors in the sphere of traumatic experience, and the world after a catastrophe, has been presented in a radical way, causing a need for reformulation of existing cognitive and poetological schemes.

A touching essay by David L. Clark<sup>12</sup> about Bobby – a dog that accompanied Emmanuel Levinas in a work camp for French-Jewish prisoners of war (that turned out to be a last one in the Nazi Germany to believe in Kantian ethics) – brings back to mind an incredible, although relatively forgotten, film etude by Janusz Morgenstern entitled *Ambulance* (1961, screenplay by Tadeusz Łomnicki, score by Krzysztof Komeda). In that nineteen minute long movie an animal appears as well – an SS-Mann’s guard dog (a “pedigree” German Shepherd, of course) that escorts a group of Jewish children to an ambulance, which performs the function of a gas chamber (it was an allusion to trucks used by Germans during the first stage of “Operation Reinhardt”). Scenes take place in a grim, ghastly space, in a petrifying emptiness of concrete slabs pressed against the backdrop of grey skies, which only strengthens the sensation of irreversibility of death. However, in a social “network” involved in that event, a “risky connection”<sup>13</sup>, so strongly highlighted by Latour, took place in the form of disturbance of the mass death algorithm. The dog shown in Morgenstern’s movie rebels against its assigned role – when unleashed, it does not attack its victims, and instead, with a joyful bark, joins a young boy playing with a paper

12 David L. Clark, “On Being ‘the Last Kantian in Nazi Germany’: Dwelling with Animals After Levinas”, in *Animal Acts: Configuring the Human in Western History*, eds. Jennifer Ham and Matthew Senior (New York: Routledge, 1997), 165–198.

13 Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*, trans. Catherine Porter (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2004), 32–35.

fan. The animal pays a high price for its spontaneous gesture – guards start to abuse and torment it. When the doors of the “ambulance” are shut, the last sounds the victims hear is an outcry of a beaten dog, and of birds singing in the distance.

The animal, by immersing itself in the joy of play, has dismantled the “operational script” of the crime and abandoned the role of being a tool of the Holocaust. Against the claims of Luc Ferry, who proves that an animal – contrary to a human being – cannot distance itself from a code in which it was anchored<sup>14</sup>, it is the dog of this anti-fairytale, which is assigned a privilege of not so much a moral judgment, but of transgression of conditionings that determine it.

Not only does the rustic element cancel the rigors of the Nazi “*tekhne*”, but it also introduces shifts in the epistemological framing, which explicates the mechanism of the Holocaust and the roles of its participants. It shows that Hilberg’s triangle (perpetrator – victim – bystander)<sup>15</sup>, which is fundamental for the historians of the Holocaust, is an imperfect construct, because in order to encompass all dimensions of an event such as the Holocaust, it should become a model – potentially – of more dimensions. It is the dog, with its spontaneous (moral? communal?) reflex, as an element from outside human world, that turns out to be a fourth element of Hilberg’s epistemic figure.

An animal (and the world of nature) reveal themselves in the context of liminal situations, and mark the focal points for cultural post-catastrophism, which results in presenting a “concentration camp universe” as an event verifying the understanding of history and historicity. It is not a coincidence that Benjamin’s Angel of History (inspired by Paul Klee’s painting) appears to be an ontological hybrid, almost an animal, which recognizes ruins of civilization through its motion directed backwards. An eco-critical philosopher would say that this civilization collapsed because it subordinated the development of its “carnophallogocentrism” idea (Derrida), which is displayed via the strive to possess and consume Others. Agamben<sup>16</sup>, when reinterpreting Kojève, stated that transgressing boundaries between humanity and animality would take place in the moment of the messianic fulfillment of history – the acceptance of an internal animal will become an act of liberation from the trap of dependency, and oppressive power of subject over object.

14 See review of Luc Ferry *The New Ecological Order* (Chicago: 1995) by C. Wolfe “Ecology, Animal Rights, and the Poverty of Humanism”, *Diacritics*, 30 (Summer 1998).

15 Raul Hilberg, *Sprawcy, ofiary, świadkowie: zagłada Żydów: 1939-1945*, (*The Destruction of European Jews*) (Warsaw: Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, 2007).

16 See Agamben, *The Open*.

Not many literary works thematize with equal radicalism that same conviction as *Goldi* does – an auto-biographical novel by Ewa Kuryluk. This confusing, from a research point of view, book tells a family history, which is saturated with distant echoes of historical events: the Second World War, the Holocaust, the Polish intelligentsia's involvement in communism, questions of anti-Semitism and the March 1968 events. However, these dramatic events which are deeply rooted in Polish historical awareness are barely recognizable in the text. One could say they exist as unclear marks, multiple reflections, or ricochets of presented processes, hidden and camouflaged in a meandering and static narration with an unclear system of references.

There is a temptation to refer back to Adrienne Rich, the recently deceased author of *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*<sup>17</sup>. Rich defines the difference between the patriarchal and pre-patriarchal social systems as an opposition between “power over others” and the (feminine) “power of transformation” immersed in the world of nature. Matriarchy operated without hierarchy and domination, and its reason for being was a transformation of its essence (bordering on magic) which follows the rhythms of nature (according to Rich, birth was marked as a transformational ritual in matriarchy).

Despite visible analogies between the revisionist potential of mythographic feminism and ecology, the revelations of Rich seem too anthropocentric from the perspective of eco-criticism. One could state that another stage of liberation from the yoke of “carnophallogocentric subjects” is established by Kuryluk’s “apotheosis of animality” with a visible, utopian vision of “pluriversum” – Latour’s society rejecting mechanisms of exclusion<sup>18</sup> – on the horizon of her book.

Animals in Kuryluk’s narration are in captivity, and forced into frameworks of the human world. Domestication, however, does not destroy their sovereignty and does not transform into a brutal domination. On the contrary, in Kuryluk’s family from the novel, a reverse process takes place – there is a gradual animalization of people. The process takes the form of nicknaming (“Paws” becomes father’s new name – his animal mark) and Peter’s madness is interpreted as an answer to “animal Auschwitz”, an unending captivity and massacre of non-human beings.

There was a long silence, broken by mom’s whisper: “After I came back from the clinic they didn’t play ‘signals’ any more. Next, Goldi passed

17 Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1995)

18 Latour, *Politics of Nature*, 53.

away, and Peter started collecting bugs. While in Tworki he could hear voices of animals inside of him, and kept murmuring: "Auschwitz, Dachau, punishment". He refused to eat meat. Mom stared at a bookshelf, where Goldi used to stand. Peter took a rubber piggy bank with a coin slot between its ears with him to Warsaw. "I'm hiding it here, you cry baby" he used to say to Zaza after your death, "so it won't get lost". Einstein Goldi always kept something in his bag for Paws. When he comes back we'll surprise him<sup>19</sup>.

Nature exists in *Goldi* outside of the discourse of power, and – which is its logical consequence – outside of the power of the discourse. That is why the fabric of this prose is porous, grainy, and the particular sequences and paragraphs appear incohesive. They tend to pile up and split in prismatic time, where the same event – the meeting between a father and a mother escaping the ghetto, the death of the father, the manifestation and the course of a brother's mental illness – is signaled and "tried" in various modalities of the text, as well as various time perspectives. The most painful episodes from mother's pre-war Jewish life that she is almost in denial about become "exiled" from the text in book's last parts through some kind of spasmodic reflex, which cannot be entirely explained by the term 'acting out' in reference to a trauma. It is truly inexpressible "vomit", a deeply abject gesture, hence one that removes ontological divides.

The text becomes an animal, it "animalizes" itself, which can be observed through its dispersed and unstable signification. The process of reading the book is step-like: knots, points, all of which tie together words disintegrating in dialogues, constitute scenes of play with animals, particularly with Goldi the hamster, and Zaza the dog. The scene of Peter's death, taking place next to a bear cage in a city zoo, is a culmination of these transformations. The scenes, seemingly accidental at the beginning, transform into a necessary element of construction of the novel during reading. It is the animals, or the dimension of ontological relations they embody, that counteract the disintegration of the world and text, create a "deep structure" of Kuryluk's acentric narration, constantly in danger of collapsing. When one considers their presence in a broader context, one could say they establish a new "ethical syntagm" which conditions the formulation of moral judgments after a catastrophe. Animals embody Agamben's lost dimension of humanity, and fill the gap in a single-sided technocratic construction of modern man.

19 Ewa Kuryluk, *Goldi. Apoteoza zwierzęczkowatości*, 2nd ed., (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2011), 140.

### Sebald, or Escape from Marking

Eco-criticism marks fields of undiscovered meanings of important texts and iconic messages. I think of this potential when I go back to photographs from a series entitled *Totenstill* by Dirk Reinartz from 1985, which depicted an old location of the Sobibór extermination camp<sup>20</sup>. In that terrifying place, where within couple of months over two hundred and fifty thousand people have been murdered, the only thing that remained after the dismantling of the camp machinery was a meadow slowly being reclaimed by the forest. Reinartz's photographs earned interesting interpretations, which may be read as an attempt at hermeneutical exegesis of those post-memorial images. In this context one should mention above all a well-known essay by Ulrich Baer<sup>21</sup>, which so powerfully describes the emptiness of the traumatic place which – according to the will of the author – is granted sense only by a man playing the role of an observer. However, this interpretation – which is obvious from the perspective of eco-criticism – has a categorical, “anthropomorphic” flaw embedded in it. After all, this place is not empty, there is nature, a forest, and uncannily lush vegetation, which establish biocentric inscriptions – voices added to a tragic history of post-concentration camp space. Although contemporary ecology heavily stresses the incomparability of “ethical scenarios” of different forms of being, in this particular case, one can establish – without falling victim to anthropomorphism on the level of description – that nature plays a role of an actant in an ethical space, generating an event in a sphere from which man has retreated. Certainly, a reflection surrounding pictures from Belżec should consider reevaluating Darwin's opposition between “organism (man) vs. environment” as its starting point, along with its inscribed antagonism as a rule of preserving balance in the world.

Novels and stories by W.G. Sebald repeatedly employ a motif of discrete presence of nature (or rather ungraspable from the perspective of anthropocentric codes), facing an empty space, which was left behind by the dead. It seems that his work appropriates contradicting interpretations of nature that mark the horizon of eco-criticism<sup>22</sup>: both autonomous, virgin-like nature unspoiled by man, but always “filtered” through a constructivist consciousness

20 Pictures show the area of a former concentration camp in 1970s and 1980s. In 1993, the Museum of the Former Death Camp in Sobibór has been established to mark the fiftieth anniversary of a prisoners' uprising.

21 Ulrich Baer, “Zum Zeugen werden. Landschaftstradition und Shoah oder Die Grenzen der Geschichtsschreibung im Bild”, in *Niemand zeugt für den Zeugen*, 219–235.

22 Justyna Tabaszewska, “Dangers or possibilities? Eco-criticism – reconnaissance” in “Danger or possibilities? Eco-criticism - reconnaissance”, *Teksty Drugie* 3 (2011): 206–207

(*Die Ringe des Saturn*, 1995, *Nach der Natur*, 1988), as well as the post-industrial, degenerated environment of man (*Schwindel. Gefühle*, 1990).

Already in the first story from *The Immigrants* (*Die Ausgewanderten*, 1992), entitled *Dr. Henry Selwyn*, the dominating role of nature is revealed. The protagonist and the narrator of the story lives in a garden, spends his time observing blades of grass, their shapes and the forms of life. This introduction could be interpreted both as a symbolic gesture of “stooping” to the level of the world of vegetation, as well as a meta-literary signal revealing the existence of hidden pre-narration, which is always siding with nature in Sebald’s prose: it constitutes a bio-, and not anthropogenesis.

Warily we walked round the house. On the north side, where the brick-work was green with damp and variegated ivy partly covered the walls, a mossy path led past the servants’ entrance, past a woodshed, on through deep shadows, to emerge, as if upon a stage, onto a terrace with a stone balustrade overlooking a broad, square lawn bordered by flower beds, shrubs and trees. Beyond the lawn, to the west, the grounds opened out into a park landscape studded with lone lime trees, elms and holm oaks, and beyond that lay the gentle undulations of arable land and the white mountains of cloud on the horizon. In silence we gazed at this view, which drew the eye into the distance as it fell and rose in stages, and we looked for a long time, supposing ourselves quite alone, till we noticed a motionless figure lying in the shade cast on the lawn by a lofty cedar in the southwest corner of the garden. It was an old man, his head propped on his arm, and he seemed altogether absorbed in contemplation of the patch of earth immediately before his eyes.<sup>23</sup>

The early volume of stories hints at a possible answer to the question about the reasons for the ungraspable character of nature in the face of the Holocaust. Nature in Sebald’s stories always precedes man. The glacier in the Alps, and the English garden from *Dr. Henry Selwyn*, Cappadocia from *Ambros Adelwarth*, or the moors of Norfolk from *Rings of Saturn* constitute an ontological foundation, an *arche* of man’s actions. The systems symbolically created by man are secondary toward nature, that is why it escapes marking, or situating within the system of meaning distinctions.

The hero of Sebald’s debut poem, *Nach der Natur* (1988), faces a similar paradox. Georg Wilhelm Steller went down in history as a deck doctor of an arctic expedition of Vistus Bering, also known as the “great northern

23 Winfried G. Sebald, “Dr Henry Selwyn” in *Immigrants*, trans. Michael Hulse, (London: Harvill Press, 1996), iBooks edition.



expedition". He became famous as a researcher of sub-polar fauna (he was the first to describe a sea cow, soon to be eradicated by fur traders), and a collector of scientific artifacts, who brought sixteen cases of valuable anatomical collections from Bering's expedition. Steller's experience becomes a repetition of the archetypical gesture of conquest of nature, and taming of biodiversity through scientific cognitive and classifying procedures in Sebald's interpretation.

Sebald's reading of Steller's biography becomes more understandable when we try to situate it in the context of Latour's account from an expedition to the Amazon – a photo-philosophical, scientific essay entitled *Circulating Reference*<sup>24</sup>. Bruno Latour analyzed the work of scientists researching, on the basis of soil samples, processes taking place between the savanna and the tropical forest of Boa Vista in Brazil. In that extremely important study, Latour describes a process of "transfer from soil to code" as a series of transformations grasping the essence of a tropical forest into geodesic nets, charts, and measurements of a tableau-comparator. The task, which Latour sets for himself is to formulate an answer to the question about what is the category of reference in a research process. In his final conclusion he states that the mythical "truth of the forest" is not a research conclusion, but what is left after the entire chain of cognitive transformations, sometimes complicated and abstract, and sometimes incredibly simple, like pointing to a boundary between a tropical forest and sandy savanna. Latour does not leave any doubts: the process of situating an object (a forest) in a discourse has an imperialistic dimension, since it marks passage from independence to world domination. Inescapably, it also has a reductionist effect. Latour states: "scientists dominate over the world only to such an extent, as to which the world decides to meet them halfway in the form of two dimensional inscriptions, prone to code combinations"<sup>25</sup>.

The presence of a gesture of desemantization of the scenery, which is fundamental for Sebald's writerly practice, becomes fully understandable in that context. Nature does not play any metaphorical functions, does not constitute semantics, or require from its protagonists hermeneutical activities, even though it exists in a relation to human history. This relationship with historicity should be described as a non-insistent *durée*, contrapuntal against the rapidly changing world of man. That is why the protagonists of Sebald, those who experienced historical traumas – exiles, children of Holocaust

24 Bruno Latour, "Zirkulierende Referenz. Bodenstichproben aus dem Urwald Amazonas" in *Die Hoffnung der Pandora. Untersuchungen zur Wirklichkeit der Wissenschaft*, trans. G. Rossler, (Frankfurt am Main Suhrkamp Verlag, 2000).

25 Latour, "Zirkulierende Referenz. Bodenstichproben aus dem Urwald Amazonas", 41.

victims, victims of political and racial oppression – search for nature as a framing of their post-traumatic neurosis. According to a paradox, they are often accompanied by images of nature in its sublime representations, so eagerly employed in totalitarian iconography: mountain peaks, a storm at sea, Alpine meadows, or – in absolute contradiction – a post-industrial wasteland.

Are Sebald's protagonists interested in removing cultural and historical mediations and, subsequently, arriving at "nature in itself", even if it were to be another intellectual construct? It seems to be a very unlikely interpretation, especially when we realize that one of most notorious practices of Sebald was to expose all naturalized mediations. Photographs, so characteristic for his prose, are used precisely with that purpose in mind. They are used in photo-textual narrations in a function of a double, which destroys faith in the existence of a source of representations, as well as debunks claims of realism to a mimetic rule over reality.

I do not believe that these men sit by the sea all day and all night so as not to miss the time when the whiting pass, the flounder rise or the cod come in to the shallower waters, as they claim. They just want to be in a place where they have the world behind them, and before them nothing but emptiness. The fact is that today it is almost impossible to catch anything by fishing at the beach. The boats in which the fishermen once put out from the shore have vanished, now that fishing no longer affords a living, and the fishermen themselves are dying out. No one is interested in their legacy. Here and there one comes across abandoned boats that are falling apart, and the cables with which they were once hauled ashore are rusting in the salt air. Out on the high seas the fishing continues, at least for the present, though even there the catches are growing smaller, quite apart from the fact that the fish that are landed are often useless for anything but fish-meal. Every year the rivers bear thousands of tons of mercury, cadmium and lead, and heaps of fertilizer and pesticides, out into the North Sea. A substantial proportion of the heavy metals and other toxic substances sink into the waters of the Dogger Bank, where a third of the fish are now born with strange deformities and excrescences. Time and again, off the coast, rafts of poisonous algae are sighted covering many square miles and reaching thirty feet into the deep, in which the creatures of the sea die in shoals<sup>26</sup>.

---

26 Winfried G. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, trans. Michael Hulse (London: Harvill Press, 1998), iBooks edition, 77-78.

What is symptomatic, however – despite the grand “praise of bio-diversity” – is that a careful reading of *The Rings of Saturn* suggests a conclusion, in which simultaneously passing landscapes of Suffolk dunes, or of Alpine meadows in Sebald’s prose are, in truth, modalities of one and the same landscape. It is a coherent landscape with thick, undifferentiated texture, as if it played a function of essence abstracted from that which is clear, phenomenal. Nature in Sebald’s prose is always in a state of maximum focus, and strongly saturated with materiality. At the same time, it is always identical with itself, does not undergo alienation, does not “unglue” from its ontological background and never gets lost in complex representations marked by contradictions. Only man breaks up continuity, and introduces dissonances with a stigma of conflict of fracture.

In general, Sebald, even though gently, refers to the tradition of the English pastoral novel – with its vision of antagonism-free relationships in the universe – and builds a dystopian vision of a “world after nature”, where a man is immersed in nihilism and cosmic loneliness. What is characteristic, nature in Sebald’s works, in a very gentle, subdued way, reveals its state of exhaustion, which indirectly corresponds with his literary topos – emptiness left after Jewish inhabitants in German and Czech towns. It is a nature reaching its limits, struck by the sheer scale of the crime, results of which have transgressed boundaries of man’s world.

*Translation: Jan Pytalski*

---

Ewa Domańska

---

## Ecological Humanities

---

DOI: 10.18318/td.2015.en.1.12

**T**his article strives to make a preliminary attempt at defining specific features of ecological humanities<sup>1</sup> as a symptom of the emergence of a new paradigm. I am particularly interested in the trend of ecological humanities which has been developing at an accelerated rate since the late nineties in the frame of posthumanist

**Ewa Domańska** is associate professor of theory and history of historiography in the Department of History, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland and since 2002 visiting associate professor at the Department of Anthropology, Stanford University. Her teaching and research interests include comparative theory of the humanities and social sciences, history and theory of historiography, posthumanities and ecological humanities. She is the author and editor of many books, recently: *Existential History* (in Polish, 2012); *History and the Contemporary Humanities* (in Ukrainian, 2012) and *History Today* (ed. with R. Stobiecki and T. Wiślicz, in Polish, 2014). Contact: ewa.domanska@amu.edu.pl

---

1 In the literature of the subject, ecological humanities is often also defined as environmental humanities or sustainable humanities understood as a domain that is actively involved in the sustainable development and future oriented conviviality (Stephanie LeMenager and Stephanie Foote, "The sustainable humanities", *PMLA*, vol. 127, no. 3 (May 2012): 572-578.). In this article I will be using the term ecological humanities (or ecoposthumanities), in order to distinguish it from both postmodernist movements of „deep ecology” (which I am referencing), and from „social ecology” tied to the left-wing movements and Marxism, and from technocratic understanding of environmental and sustainable research, which, according to the critics, are conserving a destructive development of the global capitalism. (See Valerie de Campos Mello, „Mainstreaming the Environment: Global Ecology, International Institutions and the Crisis of Environmental Governance”, *Human Ecology Review*, vol. 7, no 1 (2000): 31-43.) I propose not to use the term ecological humanities as synonymous with environmental humanities as the latter is tied predominantly to various movements of environmental protection, whereas ecologism is a much broader notion and encompasses not only a specific idea of knowledge/science, its practice and the ways of cognition, but also a change in consciousness.

criticism of anthropocentrism<sup>2</sup>, Eurocentrism (and “a predatory discourse of Western cognitive imperialism”<sup>3</sup>), while emphasizing the validity of creating a complementary and inclusive knowledge emerging from the integration of the humanities and social sciences with life sciences and with native knowledges (indigenous ways of knowing). In this sense and with the purpose of distinguishing it from the earlier approaches, this domain can be named as ecoposthumanities. Further in this article, I will present general characteristics of ecological humanities and offer a working definition of this domain. I will also outline its biohumanistic background and ties with indigenous knowledges. I will consider the hypotheses that ecological humanities co-create a future utopia, which unveils an eternal longing for belonging to community, however, in this case, not just a human community, but a multispecies metacommunity (also in the sense of fabricated species) considered in a planetary perspective of carbon based life on Earth. Using the latest discoveries of neuro- and cognitive sciences, it is also anticipating the future knowledge production in terms of extended mind and distributed cognition.

It has to be noted that the definition of mutual relations among domains/trends/approaches/paradigms, which are defined with the use of different terms as non-anthropocentric humanities, posthumanities, ecological humanities, biohumanities, is difficult because of the fact, that all of them, it seems to me, are the harbingers of the new paradigm, which is in the process of becoming. It is therefore defined through its characteristics: it is non- or anti-anthropocentric (hence the non-anthropocentric humanities); it builds a holistic vision of combined humanities and life sciences (biohumanities), to a large extent it references ecological thinking and values (ecological humanities) and it invokes a conglomerate of various, often mutually exclusive

2 Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Tamar Sharon, “A Cartography of the Posthuman, Humanist, Non-Humanist and Mediated Perspectives on Emerging Biotechnologies. *Krisis*, no. 2 (2012): 5-19; Stefan Herbrechter, *Posthumanism. A Critical Analysis* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013); Pramod Nayar, *Posthumanism* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2013).

3 The term “epistemicide” is often used to indicate predatory discourse of Western epistemology against indigenous knowledges. See: “Different Knowings and the Indigenous Humanities”, Daniel Coleman in Conversation with Marie Battiste, Sákéj Henderson, Isobel M. Findlay, and Len Findlay, *ECS: English Studies in Canada*, vol. 38, no. 1 (2012): 142. Cf. also: J. Taboho Lebakeng, M. Manthiba Phalane and Nase Dalindjebo, “Epistemicide, Institutional Cultures and the Imperative for the Africanisation of Universities in South Africa” *Alternation*, vol. 13, no. 1 (2006): 70-87; Karen Bennett, “Epistemicide! The Tale of a Predatory Discourse”, *Translator*, vol. 13, no. 2 (2007): 151-169, *Cognitive Justice in a Global World: Prudent Knowledges for a Decent Life*, ed. by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007).

tendencies defined as posthumanism (posthumanities). Moreover, it is often emphasized, that it is posteuropean (with implied criticism of the imperial West; Europe is no longer the center of knowledge production), post-human (the idea of human nature is criticized; human epistemic authority of knowledge building is questioned), post-gender (the departure from sexual identification and the ability to modify the human being so as to rid it of sexual characteristics); post-white (white race is no longer the dominant race)<sup>4</sup>.

In the case of ecological humanities (concerning also the non-anthropocentric humanities and posthumanities), the focus is not only and not as much on opting for a certain research program and an interest in the avant-garde trends, but also on promoting a different vision of the world. Mainly because it is based on relational thinking<sup>5</sup>, which stresses mutual ties, codependency, co-existence and joint life of nature-culture, human, non-human beings and the environment. In this option the objective is to change consciousness and also to achieve a social transformation and to build "inclusive democracy" or/and participatory ecological democracy<sup>6</sup>; the possibility of composing a "common world" comprised of humans and non-humans (Bruno Latour). In this vision the mutual world is understood not in the categories of globalization, but on one hand in a planetary and cosmic perspective, and in molecular perspective, on the other<sup>7</sup>.

Henryk Skolimowski, the founder of ecophilosophy, stated, as early as the 1970's, that physics, seen as the model of cognition, promotes the kind of

4 In this article I do not discuss the new media, virtuality and the digital technology tied to ecological humanities (e.g., the issue of artificial nature or "ecology without nature" - Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2009).

5 Obviously, relationism (privileging thinking in terms of relations) is nothing new, however during recent decades, affirming relational character of reality (visible for example in thing studies) and thinking in the terms of networks and entanglements, it gained a new meaning, different from its traditional epistemological notion. To make this distinction, some researchers use the term relationalism. See: Joseph Kaipayil, *Relationalism: A Theory of Being* (Bangalore: JIP Publications, 2009), 9. Charalambos Tsekeris, "Relationalism in Sociology: Theoretical and Methodological Elaborations", *Facta Universitatis, Series: Philosophy, Sociology, Psychology and History*, vol. 9, no. 1 (2010): 139-148.

6 Cf.: Roy Morrison, *Ecological Democracy* (Boston: South End Press, 1995), and also, Franz J. Broswimmer, *Ecocide. A Short History of the Mass Extinction of Species* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 97ff.

7 Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 254, 259, 262; Isabelle Stengers, *Cosmopolitics*, trans. by Robert Bononno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Alan Dove, "Microbiomatics: The Germ Theory of Everything", *Science*, vol. 340, no. 6133 (2013): 763-765.

understanding of rationality and objectivism which plays a role in derogating knowledge and is not conducive to the cognitive needs of humans. He also pointed out that the interests of survival of the human species dictate the need for a knowledge furthering the objective of keeping it alive. Biology, offering a different paradigm of cognition, can, in his opinion, contribute to building such knowledge<sup>8</sup>. Ecological humanities of today seems to be going in this direction and keeps returning to the evolutionary understanding of science from the perspective of adaptation to the changes occurring in the world on the one hand, and to discussion about whether science (humanities) has a survival value for the human species (and for life in general), on the other. This is one of the reasons why the paradigm shift observed in the last decade adopts different goals for the production of knowledge and different points of departure for it. Life itself (*or zoë*)<sup>9</sup>, in its postanthropocentric understanding (Rosi Braidotti), becomes such a point, also synthetic life and necrolife (dead matter as a habitat for living organisms) in its various forms and appearing on different levels (from life on the molecular level to macroorganisms and complex technologies), as well as researching relations, which support and enrich it. The idea of carbon based life becomes a base of co-substantive identification of earthly life forms.

Some researchers approach life affirmation critically. It has been stressed more often recently that humanists should include the law of entropy in their considerations as it contends that every insular system tends toward the state of equilibrium, but also that all systems have limited lifespans<sup>10</sup>. The extinction of the human species (just as much as of other species) is therefore a real possibility<sup>11</sup>. One of the main representatives of ecoposthumanities, Ursula K. Heise, noted, that the discourse of extinction of species is of an anthropogenic (caused by humans) nature. The story of the possibility of extinction of the human species has therefore an anthropocentric tilt<sup>12</sup>.

8 Henryk Skolimowski, "Problems of rationality in biology", in: *Studies in the Philosophy of Biology*, ed. by Francisco Jose Ayala and Theodosius Dobzhansky (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 224.

9 Rosi Braidotti, "Feminist Epistemology After Postmodernism: Critiquing Science, Technology and Globalisation". *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews*, vol. 32, no. 1 (2007): 71; *ibid*, "Locating Deleuze's Eco-Philosophy: Between Bio/Zoe Power and Necro-Politics", in: *Deleuze and Law Forensic Futures*, ed. by Rosi Braidotti, Claire Colebrook and Patrick Hanafin (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 96-116.

10 Cf.: popular science book by Jeremy Rifkin, *Entropy: A New World View* (New York: Viking Press, 1980).

11 Alan Weisman, *The World Without Us* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books; St. Martin Press, 2007).

12 Ursula K. Heise, "Lost Dogs, Last Birds, and Listed Species: Cultures of Extinction", *Configurations*, vol. 18 (2010): 49-72. Cf. also: Terry Glavin, *The Sixth Extinction. Journeys Among the Lost*

Within the growing interest in thinking in the categories of ecology and environmental protection in the humanities, new domains began to emerge as early as in the 1970's, such as ecological anthropology, as well as ecological history and philosophy, joined later by: ecoaesthetics<sup>13</sup>, ecomedia and ecocinema<sup>14</sup>, ecolinguistics<sup>15</sup>, ecopoetics<sup>16</sup>, ecocriticism<sup>17</sup>, ecosemiotics, political ecology, etc. Also, there has been talk about eco-domains as part of a so called green cultural studies. Some researchers regard cultural ecology<sup>18</sup> as a new transdisciplinary paradigm (also in literary studies). But only in the last few years, posthumanist inspirations have begun permeating these disciplines and revealing themselves through the use of such descriptions as post-human geography<sup>19</sup>.

### Ecological Humanities – A Preliminary Outline

Toward the end of the 1990's, Frithof Capra stated that we are witnessing a paradigmatic turn in the sciences, from physics to the life sciences,

---

and Left Behind (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2007); *The Anthropology of Extinction. Essays on Culture and Species Death*, ed. by Genese Marie Sodikoff (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012).

13 Arnold Berleant, *Aesthetics Beyond the Arts. New and Recent Essays* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012).

14 *Ecocinema Theory and Practice*, ed. by Stephen Rust, Salma Monani, and Sean Cubitt (Routledge, 2012); Sean Cubitt, *EcoMedia* (New York: Rodopi, 2005).

15 *The Ecolinguistics Reader: Language, Ecology and Environment*, ed. by Alwin Fill and Peter Müh-  
lhäusler (London and New York: Continuum, 2001).

16 Scott Knickerbocker, *Ecopoetics: The Language of Nature, the Nature of Language* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012).

17 Apart from classical texts by Lawrence Buell (including *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005); in the new literature, it's worth pointing to: Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2012), *Configurations: A Journal of Literature, Science and Technology*, vol. 18, no. 1-2 (2010) published the special issue „Ecocriticism and Biology“, combining the efforts of literature scholars and biologists in uniting the two cultures. The authors call for greater focus on life sciences, which can enrich ecocriticism as an interdisciplinary field researching connections between literature and human environment. A theme issue entitled „At the Intersections of Ecocriticism“, was also published by *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol. 19, no. 2 (2012).

18 Hubert Zapf (Hg.), *Kulturökologie und Literatur: Beiträge zu einem transdisziplinären Paradigma der Literaturwissenschaft* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2008).

19 Fiona Coyle, „Posthuman Geographies? Biotechnology, nature and the demise of the autonomous human subject“, *Social & Cultural Geography*, vol. 7, no. 4 (2006): 505-523 (theme issue: „Posthuman Geographies“).



accompanied by a change in the system of values as a departure point for researchers, that is, in a broader sense, ecological thinking<sup>20</sup>. The new paradigm, defined by Capra as a holistic or ecological paradigm, is characterized, in his approach, by a number of turns: from rationality to intuition, from self-confirmation to integration, from domination to partnership, from competition to co-operation, from the notion of structure and its parts to the notion of the whole and process. This paradigm rests on the theory of systems with particular interest in the issue of self-organization<sup>21</sup>, and it is tied in with the emergence of new forms of spirituality, supporting the perception of the world in the categories of “the fundamental interconnectedness and interdependence of all phenomena and of embeddedness in the cosmos”<sup>22</sup>. Even though the ideas of Capra, similarly to those of Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers, are frequently grouped with the so called intellectual New Age, and, as such, are viewed by many with skepticism, in reality, since 1996–98 we have been observing a shift from the constructivist and interpretive paradigm to the ecological paradigm<sup>23</sup>. However, I have to stress here that some researchers maintain, as does, for example, Richard McNeil Douglas, that environmentalism “in itself is not a new paradigm, but rather an antithesis [of the modern paradigm of progress – ED], which emerges from the

20 Fritjof Capra, *The Web of Life. A New Scientific Understanding of Living Systems* (New York: Anchor Books, 1996), 5–13. Cf. also: Thomas A. Arcury et al., „Ecological Worldview and Environmental Knowledge: The ‘New Environmental Paradigm’”, *Journal of Environmental Education*, vol. 17, no. 4 (1986): 35–40.

21 The theory of systems, focused on self-organization, autonomy, integration, and co-operation processes, is attracting a lot of interest. Among the representatives of the systems thinking are two Chilean researchers: Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, whose autopoiesis theory describing self-organization of molecular systems is enjoying an interdisciplinary success. It is used in social research by Niklas Luhmann, among others. See: Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living* (Reidl, London, 1980) and by same authors, *The Tree of Knowledge, The Biological Roots of Human Understanding* (Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, 1998). It's worth stressing that Varela, in his neurophenomenology project emphasizes the weight of the Asian traditions (e.g., Buddhism), which introduce themes unknown in the Western tradition into the discourse on experience.

22 Fritjof Capra, David Steindl-Rest, Thomas Matus, *Belonging to the Universe: Explorations on the Frontiers of Science and Spirituality* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991), 70 (part III “The Current Shift of Paradigms”).

23 Ewa Domanska, „Die paradigmatische Lücke (paradigmatic gap) in den heutigen Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften”, trans. by Michael G. Esc, *Historie. Jahrbuch des Zentrums für Historische Forschung Berlin der Polnischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, no. 4 (2010/2011): 34–54.

growing contradiction between progress and reality, and only then indicates (...) a need for a new paradigm"<sup>24</sup>.

It is assumed that the development of ecological humanities began in 1980 with the publication of the book *The Death of Nature. Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* by Carolyn Merchant. That book, according to Robyn Eckersley, introduced ecology to humanities by showing that the title's death of nature is linked to the departure from animistic and organicistic understanding of nature and the acceptance of the mechanistic idea which serves capitalism by regarding nature as something dead, brought in motion by external forces<sup>25</sup>. However, the real growth of ecological humanities started at the end of the 1990's, which coincided with the dying out of postmodernism as the critical tendencies stimulating the debates, and with the increase of interest in the trends functioning under the banner of various kinds of turns: posthumanist, relational, spatial, postsecular, the turn to materiality (and return to things), the agentive turn, the affective turn, the non-human turn, the species turn, etc. Most definitely the development of ecoposthumanities received a boost from postcolonial studies, the studies of animals and plants, an interest in research ethics, persistent for a considerable length of time, as well as the systems theory (Gregory Bateson, Humberto Maturana, and Francisco Varela) built upon biology and permeating humanities along with complexity theory and cognitive sciences.

In simplifying, we can distinguish the following features of ecological humanities, which in many points reveal the more general dominant trends in present day humanities and social sciences:

1. One of the important features is the merging of humanities and social sciences with life sciences (or, in general, with natural sciences). In this sense, many elements of ecological humanities are tied to the emerging biohumanities and to the integration of sciences, seen more often as the function of their mutually complementary nature rather than as a trans- or inter-disciplinary bond as represented by various "studies"<sup>26</sup>;
2. Ecological humanities have a critical attitude toward the traditional paradigm based on mechanistic science, on the one hand, and on the other, on patriarchal values (patriarchalism is understood here as

24 Richard McNeil Douglas, „The Ultimate Paradigm Shift. Environmentalism as Antithesis to the Modern Paradigm of Progress", in: *Future Ethics. Climate Change and Apocalyptic Imagination*, ed. by Stefan Skrimshire (New York-London: Continuum, 2010), 214.

25 Robyn Eckersley, „The Death of Nature and the Birth of Ecological Humanities", *Organization and the Environment*, vol. 11, no. 2 (1998), 183.

26 Cf.: "The Fate of the Disciplines", special issue of *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 35, no. 4 (2009).

masculinistdomination of Man over Nature). In this perspective the world is seen again in the categories of an organism; or, rather, an organic system<sup>27</sup>. This type of humanities is based on the structural metaphor of organicism<sup>28</sup>, which is tied to its characteristic preference for an ontology of connectivity, relational approaches and the so called “flat alternatives”, which consider things in their mutual connections and interdependence<sup>29</sup>. In the creation of knowledge within the framework of ecological humanities, we are dealing with the key notions characteristic of organicism, such as: integration, unity, holism, coherence, linkage and inclusion, unions and relations. The researchers, as we could say after Stephen C. Pepper, play the part of “channels of integration”<sup>30</sup>;

3. It is a remarkable phenomenon that within ecological humanities efforts are made to build a bridge linking Western and Eastern sciences and native knowledges (described further in this article);
4. Ecological humanities dignify the cognitive value of localities (organic attachment thereto) and impose a cross-species perspective. It is within this framework that a multispecies theory of the humanities and social sciences is being created on basis of a the non-anthropocentric approach, critical of the proposition of human exceptionality (the influences of critical post-humanity, but also the attempts of building a new humanity). On this plane there occurs a contact between ecological humanities and posthumanities;<sup>31</sup>

27 Here the issue becomes complicated, since biotechnological progress forces a redefinition of the category of organism. It is no longer understood in opposition to mechanism, as it was in the XVII and XVIII centuries. It is often said that organism is an organic machine (Varela). Charles T. Wolfe, “Do Organisms Have an Ontological Status?” *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences*, vol. 32, no. 2-3 (2010), 208.

28 Stephan C. Pepper, *World Hypotheses* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1942). Chapter XI: “Organicism”, 280ff.

29 Arturo Escobar indicates some characteristics of such approach: “flat versus hierarchical, horizontality versus verticality, self-organization versus structuration, emergence versus transcendence, attention to ontology as opposed to epistemology”. Arturo Escobar, “The ‘ontological turn’ in social theory: a commentary on ‘Human geography without scale’ by Sallie Marston, John Paul Jones II and Keith Woodward, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, vol. 32 (2007), 106. These approaches can be regarded as aspects of the before mentioned theory of complexity.

30 Pepper, *World Hypotheses*, 291.

31 Neil Badmington, “Cultural Studies and the Posthumanities”, in *New Cultural Studies. Adventures in Theory*, ed. G. Hall, C. Birchall (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

5. This branch of humanities is based on the model of social inclusiveness and often refers to an ethics of solidarity and respect for various forms of life, including those devoid of organic animation (e.g., things). The turn in the interest goes from the individual subject to community;
6. In ecological humanities, the lack or incompleteness of knowledge is considered – as noted by Debora Bird Rose and Libby Robin – not so much an obstacle, as rather the condition of participation in the live system of the planet and the factor of survival<sup>32</sup>.

In the last decade, the growth in popularity of ecological humanities was driven largely by the Australian periodical *Australian Humanities Review*<sup>33</sup>. Since 2004, Deborah Bird Rose, who has the title of Professor of Social Inclusion, has edited, along with Libby Robin, the Ecological Humanities section in the AHR. In 2006 they published the article “The Ecological Humanities: An Invitation”<sup>34</sup>, from which one can infer the definition of the version of ecological humanities promoted by the journal, which can be regarded as representative of the concept discussed in this article: ecological humanities constitutes a multidisciplinary domain of research aiming at integration and non-hierarchical treatment of the humanities and natural sciences, Western, Eastern, and native knowledges. Ecological humanities is based on the ontology of connections promoting both the human intercultural relations and interspecies connections. Ecological humanities voices the necessity of submitting to the laws of ecology<sup>35</sup> and regarding humanity as a part of a larger whole of a living system. It would promote an ethics of respect and interspecies solidarity, which is of considerable significance for the

32 Deborah Bird Rose and Libby Robin, “The Ecological Humanities in Action: An Invitation”. *Australian Humanities Review*, no. 31-32 (2004). <http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-April-2004/rose.html> [accessed - 1.06.2012]. Thus we return to the issue of suspending or deferring knowledge.

33 Theme issues of the journal that attracted wide interest, among them: “Gregory Bateson and Ecological Aesthetics” (vol. 35, 2005); “Ecopoetics and the Ecological Humanities in Australia” (vol. 39-40, 2006); “Writing in the Anthropocene” (vol. 47, 2009); “Unloved Others: Death of the Disregarded in the Time of Extinctions” (vol. 50, 2011).

34 Deborah Bird Rose, Libby Robin, “The Ecological Humanities in Action”.

35 Barry Commoner in the book *The Closing Circle: Nature, Man, and Technology* proposed an – as he called it – “informal set of ‘laws of ecology’” which are as follow: 1. everything is connected to everything else; 2. everything must go somewhere; 3. nature knows best; 4. there is no such thing as a free lunch (“every gain is won at some cost. In a way, this ecological law embodies the previous three laws. Because the global ecosystem is a connected whole, in which nothing can be gained or lost and which is not subject to over-all improvement, anything extracted from it by human effort must be replaced”). Barry Commoner, *The Closing Circle: Nature, Man, and Technology* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), 42.

consideration of the idea of social justice and opening it up to non-human beings.

In the volume 52 of the AHR magazine for 2012, Deborah Rose and Thom van Dooren published "The Farewell" to the section and announced the emergence from it of a new international interdisciplinary open access periodical called *Environmental Humanities*<sup>36</sup>. Its editorial board includes Dipesh Chakrabarty, Donna Haraway, Vandana Shiva, Anna Tsing, and Cary Wolfe. The first volume of the periodical was published in November of 2012. In the introductory, program article, we read, that the development of ecological humanities is the answer to the fast changes occurring presently in the environment and, against ecological and social challenges facing the world. The magazine, as the editors declare, is engaging in discussion of fundamental questions about the meaning, the value, the responsibility and the purpose of producing a humanistic knowledge in the context of these changes and challenges<sup>37</sup>.

The editors are pointing towards several characteristics distinguishing their approach from the traditional environmental research developing since the 1960's. And so, first, the discourse held within the framework of the latter has concentrated on the issues of man, the issues of policies and social justice, whereas the new magazine, and the contemporary approach of the ecological humanities, are largely focused on the non-human world and on a critical consideration of the issue of exclusivity of the human species. Secondly, the magazine is supporting the ambition of the environmental humanities of becoming a more scientific domain through a closer cooperation with such disciplines as behavioral economics and cognitive psychology. These fields of knowledge have a particular importance for the research of ecological humanities as the departure from a narrow understanding of causality limited to human (intentional causality), and also they conceptualize in an interesting way the relations between what is human and non-human. Thirdly, the cutting edge of criticism is directed against the mentality born in the womb of the Western-European culture, and, especially against the idea of a passive nature as a resource ready for human use. Fourthly, the journal, and ecological humanities, in general, tend toward building an integrative and complementary biohumanist knowledge combining the humanities and social sciences

---

36 Home page of „Environmental Humanities” <http://environmentalhumanities.org/> [accessed – 3.01.2013]. The editors often use environmental, ecological, sustainable humanities as synonyms.

37 Deborah Rose, Thom van Dooren, Matthew Chrulew, Stuart Cooke, Matthew Kearnes and Emily O’Gorman, "Thinking Through the Environment, Unsettling the Humanities", *Environmental Humanities*, vol. 1 (2012): 1–5.

with life sciences. An example of such a research domain is the emerging multispecies ethnography<sup>38</sup>.

The authors published in the AHR often invoke the idea of an Australian ecofeminist, Val Plumwood (1939-2008), who significantly contributed to and influenced the development of the ecological humanities not only in Australia. Her book, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* (2002) and the article "Nature in the Active Voice" (AHR, vol. 46, 2009) are recognized among the definitive texts for this research domain. Plumwood identified two major tasks of ecological humanities which are "to resituate the human within the environment, and to resituate nonhumans within cultural and ethical domains"<sup>39</sup>. In dealing with these challenges, the native knowledge(s) will offer help, as they have always viewed the relations of man with nature and the attitude to non-humans (animals, plants, things) in this very way while stressing their strong and close relations and co-dependency.

### **Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Native Knowledges**

Building a project of ecological humanities is connected with a significant reformulation of understanding of the status and the role of science (and humanities) and its determinants. In the ecological option with its basis in the structuring organicistic metaphor, the progress of knowledge is measured in the degree of its inclusiveness; the more inclusive the knowledge, the more progressive it is; and, in the presently proposed planetary perspective, the better it is, i.e., more open, holistic, integrating, the more "democratic". It is worth noting, that it's not only science that is at stake here. In Western thinking, science is recognized as the most powerful and the most credible source of knowledge; at the same time, with its mechanistic understanding of life processes, linear and progressive conceptualization of change, anthropocentric perception of the relations between man and natural environment, and its acceptance of the individual as the basal social unit, science is increasingly recognized as an anthropocentric myth, which has led to human and ecological catastrophes<sup>40</sup>.

38 S. Eben Kirksey, Stefan Helmreich, "On the Emergence of Multispecies Ethnography", *Current Anthropology*, vol. 25, no. 4 (2010): 545-576 (theme issue: "On the Emergence of Multispecies Ethnography").

39 Val Plumwood, "Animals and Ecology: Towards a Better Integration", quoted from: Rose, van Dooren (and others), "Thinking Through the Environment", 3.

40 Cf.: Chet Bowers, *The Culture of Denial: Why the Environmental Movement Needs a Strategy for Reforming Universities and Public Schools* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997),

One of the features of ecological humanities is its criticism of science as the privileged way of cognition. Science is, after all, one of many ways of acquiring and organizing knowledge, and, as it is indicated, not necessarily the best one. These are not new themes. They were present in the discourses of the representatives of the Frankfurt School, as well as the eco-philosophers<sup>41</sup>. Lately this theme has returned with a growing interest in posthumanism and posthumanities.

Recently Ivan Callus and Stefan Herbrechter proposed a useful definition of posthumanism:

Posthumanism (...) may therefore be seen as an attempt to create an interdisciplinary conceptual platform that draws together perspectives and investigations from the arts, the humanities and the sciences in the face of a radical and accelerated questioning of what it means to be human and what the re-imagined end(s) of the human might be. Accordingly, it focuses strongly on the contemporary technological, cultural, social and intellectual challenges to traditional notions of humanity and the institution of the humanities<sup>42</sup>.

Callus and Herbrechter do not mention traditional knowledges as one of the perspectives that might be used to create a platform for a new paradigm to emerge, which, I think, is a major lack in their definition of posthumanism. In the context of typical posthumanist criticism of anthropocentrism, Eurocentrism and cognitive imperialism of Western type of knowledge there is an increased interest in native knowledges. However, indigenous knowledges are recognized not so much as the subject of anthropological research as a platform for building an alternative understanding of the subject, community, the sacred, time, space, relations with non-humans.

It is worth quoting here from a speech of Russell Means (1939-2012) of the Lakota tribal nation, a charismatic leader of North American Indians,

---

115 and Franz J. Broszmitter, *Ecocide. A Short History of the Mass Extinction of Species* (London: Pluto Press, 2002).

41 Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (London: Continuum Press, 2004). With ecophilosophical outlook, Henryk Skolimowski undertook a critique of science in his book *Zmierzch światopoglądu naukowego* (*The Twilight of Scientific Outlook* – Polish edition) (London: Odnova, 1974) and in his *Living Philosophy: Eco-Philosophy as a Tree of Life* (Penguin/Arkana, 1992).

42 Ivan Callus, Stefan Herbrechter, "Introduction: Posthumanist subjectivities, or, coming after the subject ...". *Subjectivity*, vol. 5, no. 3 (2012), 250.

a well-known activist fighting for human rights, the protection and dissemination of Indian heritage, and for the preservation of the Earth.

Capitalism and communism are simply the opposite sides of the same Eurocentric coin. What the world needs is not a choice between capitalism and communism, between one aspect of euro centrism or euro-supremacism and another. What we need is a genuine alternative to the European tradition as a whole.

This quote constitutes, quite rightly, the motto for the program article by Raymond Pierotti and Daniel Wildcat „Traditional Ecological Knowledge”, in which we read:

What will be gained by placing TEK-based [Traditional Ecological Knowledge] into a broad-based system of knowledge is the ability to access a large amount of information and experience that has been previously ignored, or treated as mysticism. The additional knowledge, with its empirically derived emphasis on the natural world, can provide us with scientifically testable insights into some of the most pressing problems facing humankind today<sup>43</sup>.

It is worth noting here, that the growing popularity of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK here after) is linked to the phenomenon particularly conspicuous in American, as in Australian and Canadian, humanities, which Devon Mihesuah and Angela Wilson called *indigenizing the Academy*<sup>44</sup>. There is increasingly greater participation of the representatives of native cultures in research work which infuses humanities with traditional knowledge. The shift elasticizes the European “corset of knowledge”, especially with regard to the understanding of rationality, subjectivity, the relations between nature and culture, interspecies ties, and the place of humans in the world. Moreover, they begin to study white man in the way in which anthropologists once studied aborigines<sup>45</sup>. This fact might become, I think, of fundamental importance for the future of the humanities.

43 R. Pierotti, D. Wildcat, “Traditional Ecological Knowledge”, *Ecological Applications*, vol. 10, no. 5 (October 2000), 1339.

44 Devon Mihesuah and Angela Wilson, *Indigenizing the Academy: Transforming Scholarship and Empowering Scholarship* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

45 Cf.: Orin Starn, „Here Come the Anthros (Again): The Strange Marriage of Anthropology and Native America”. *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 26, no. 2 (2011), 195ff.



TEK assumes a critical approach to the Western tradition, criticizing everything that Europeans regard as great achievements of Western science, considering it the cause of human and natural catastrophes. Instead, it returns to native traditions stressing common interdependence among the components of the world existing in the world or in the cosmos, and especially, the definition of humans as part of an ecosystem and with the relations of human to non-human persons based on kinship. (Hence the interest in “new animism” and “new totemism”, which stress that people come from non-human organisms and that the plant-person or animal-person had existed before the human person, and, for that reason, in particular, are placed higher in the hierarchy of beings<sup>46</sup>). In this conceptualization, nature is home, and not an objectivized and ready to be used natural resource. Relations to nature and non-humans are focused on local places (hence interest in space, locality, epistemic places, which do not just contain, but also condition the achievement of knowledge) and rest on reciprocity and mutual respect. TEK is focused on co-operation, symbiotic coexistence, rather than competitiveness, and imparts the attribute of causality and autonomy to non-human beings in relation to people. Various indigenous sciences, partly through questioning the difference between metaphysics and science, make understanding of science more adaptable. They include Western science within their framework, but they also transcend it insofar as it lacks proper tools to consider the issues of an affective and intuitive essence of the world, so important to indigenous knowledges. Characteristic of this knowledge is the conviction, that human existence remains in a close, intimate relation with the environment and with other living beings, which is based on kinship. An important characteristic of this knowledge is the conviction that the Earth possesses causality and vital energy. Similarly to other trends in the humanities today, indigenous sciences recognize that their goal is to subordinate nature to humans, but with a respectful approach and responsibility for mutual fate<sup>47</sup>. The ecology promoted by TEK has therefore a kincentric nature, i.e., at its center lies the idea of kinship, strong ties, interdependencies, and the integration of vital processes, both physical and spiritual<sup>48</sup>.

The aforementioned Pierotti and Wildcat declare:

46 Graham Harvey, *Animism. Respecting the Living World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006). See also: Philippe Descola, “Human Natures”, *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale*, vol. 17, no. 2 (2009): 145-157.

47 Cf.: Robert W. Preucel, “Indigenous Archaeology and the Science Question”, *Archaeological Review from Cambridge*, vol. 27, no. 1 (2012), 131.

48 Cf.: Enrique Salmon, “Kincentric Ecology: Indigenous Perceptions of the Human Nature Relationship”. *Ecological Applications*, vol. 10, no. 5 (2000), 1328.

We consider TEK to be an intellectual foundation for an indigenous theory and practice of politics and ethics, centered on natural places and connection to the natural world, which is capable of generating a conservation ethic on the part of those who follow its principles. TEK is based upon empirical observations resulting from patient observation of the natural world and its patterns. TEK is inherently multidisciplinary because it links the human and the nonhuman, and is not only the basis for indigenous concepts of nature but also for concepts of politics and ethics. There are therefore no clearly defined boundaries between philosophy, history, sociology, biology, and anthropology in indigenous thought<sup>49</sup>.

Further on, the authors stress, TEK is opposed to romantic notions of the noble savage and the idea of closeness with nature, ideas fabricated by Western philosophy and later on used by those interested in environmental protection (a program undertaken in the interest of humans). TEK emphasizes that both nature and nonhuman beings have their own reasons for existence, which are totally independent of human ends and this independence must be respected. It is worth mentioning that TEK is based on experience (experience of the place); that it re-evaluates the ideas of politics and ethics, in which it includes nonhuman beings as independent subjects; it advances a new understanding of personalism whereby personality is attributed to various nonhuman beings, e.g., plant person, rock person<sup>50</sup>. It should also be noted that in the definition proposed by the researchers coming from native communities, traditional knowledge is not static but dynamic and subject to change. Moreover, the fundamental difference between TEK and aboriginal knowledge is often stressed, whereby the definition of aboriginal is used in opposition to globalized culture and is considered synonymous with traditional knowledge. TEK is more focused on the ecological aspects of traditional (aboriginal) knowledge and is tied to the conviction, that local ecological problems can't be solved without TEK. At stake here is the building of a comprehensive knowledge of sustainable growth and the issue of managing natural resources based on the needs and expectations of a community (*community based management*). It includes promoting the so called adaptive management, which reveals the practical aspect of TEK, resting on the conviction that nature cannot be controlled nor can its development be forecast. Hence, it is necessary to fit into

49 Pierotti, Wildcat, "Traditional Ecological Knowledge", 1335.

50 Graham Harvey maintains that the new animism is the kind of personalism. Cf.: Harvey, *Animism*, 22ff.

the natural cycles of regeneration and to harmonize the human use of the environment with these cycles<sup>51</sup>.

This raises the issue of the degree to which TEK and native knowledge can be compatible with Western science and “if and how the university can be a place for a different knowing – different epistemologies, different knowledge”<sup>52</sup>. Within posthumanism and relational ontologies they are often treated as equal. Articles are written, coauthored by scientists and natives. These interesting experiments bring forward the ways of obtaining knowledge and its aspects displaced by Western science, which refers to a specific rationality. Among such experiments is one dealing with the relation between intuitive knowledge based on practice and a science based on the methods of controlled observation, experiments and logical argumentation<sup>53</sup>. It is a significant feature of TEK that it starts with practice and rests on experience. It is possible that this very knowledge constitutes the needed model of knowledge that is of an interdisciplinary nature, inclusive, connecting the spiritual with the material, is based on co-substantial kinship, shared heritage and ancestry, and it is governed by a principle of relatedness and ethics of respect for all living things. What is more, indigenous knowledges have strong survival value, in fact these are “knowledges about how to survive”<sup>54</sup>.

51 Roy C. Dudgeon and Fikret Berkes, “Local Understanding of the Land: Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Indigenous Knowledge”, in: *Nature Across Cultures: Views of Nature and the Environment in Non-Western Cultures*, ed. by H. Selin (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), 85. Cf.: Gregory Cajete, *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence* (Santa Fe, New Mexico: Clear Light Publishers, 2000).

52 “Different Knowings and the Indigenous Humanities”. Daniel Coleman in Conversation with Marie Battiste, Sákéj Henderson, Isobel M. Findlay, and Len Findlay, *ECS: English Studies in Canada*, vol. 38, no. 1 (2012), 142.

53 Annette Wilson and Orville H. Huntington, “They’re here – I can feel them: the epistemic spaces of Indigenous and Western Knowledges”, *Social and Cultural Geography*, vol. 9, no. 3 (2008), 264ff.

54 “Different Knowings and the Indigenous Humanities”, 145, 157. Marie Battiste who for years work on the indigenous knowledges and their relations with academia, claims, that: “But indigenous knowledge and bringing it to the indigenous humanities is another way for us to be able really to expose Eurocentric knowledge systems as being dismissive, as being appropriative, as diminishing others in multiple ways. And it’s a way for us to talk back to them, to create an awareness of that and to recognize that that awareness of the philosophical traditions upon which they depend, Socrates and all those people, really is not talking to the generation of today, of people who are living in a particular place in a particular environment, trying to survive with the water they have, trying to survive on the land they have. And those are the kinds of survival issues that have always been part of indigenous peoples’ living in place and how so much more can be learned from indigenous people about how to do that sustainably and do that in such a way that relationships with each other become the foundation of

I would claim that in this context, archaeology has the capacity to serve as a bridging discipline and can play an important role in a cross-epistemological dialogue and in the process of connecting and integrating Western type of humanities and social sciences as well as life sciences<sup>55</sup> with indigenous knowledges (and ways of knowing). While dealing with the problem of heritage and contemporary pasts and variously understood sacred, archaeology already became a site for decolonization of the mind (to use Ngugi wa Thiong'o's phrase) and a liberating knowledge. I would even say that archaeology will be an indigenous archaeology or not be at all (as an important field of knowledge within inclusive and holistic body of knowledges of the past). However, I would like to stress, that in this paper, indigenous are various native beings living on the Earth (being earth-born) (only some of them are human) they are connected through certain kinship based on a co-substance of carbon life (carbon based life forms). By contrast non-natives that they live elsewhere and their life, as astrobiologists would say, is not carbon based<sup>56</sup>.

In this context, I would propose thinking about indigenous archaeology (I am aware that there are many different indigenous archaeologies and various definitions of this field), as a platform to rethink what future oriented archaeology understood as a particular knowledge of the past might be. Thus, indigenous archaeology will not be an archaeology "with, for and by" Indigenous people, but rather a "multispecies community archaeology" oriented toward the future of (multispecies) collectives and carbon based forms of life.

Let's imagine that the below definition of indigenous archaeology serves as a reference point for thinking about archaeology in general. Indigenous archaeology is:

an expression of archaeological theory and practice in which the discipline intersects with Indigenous values, knowledge, practices, ethics, and

---

a culture, rather than the economy, making money and having the almighty dollar decide how we do things, and so on. So there's a very different kind of humanity that emerges from our contrasting a Eurocentric humanity with an indigenous humanity to really say we could learn so much more". Ibid, 157-158.

55 Archaeology is already seen as a bridging discipline between social sciences and natural sciences: Danika Parikh and Katie Hall, introduction to a theme issue entitled „Science and the Material Record" of the *Archaeological Review from Cambridge*, vol. 27, no. 1 (2012), 3.

56 So, I am applying here not a global perspective, but a planetary one. I want to stress, that by universalization of a term "indigenous", I am not intending to de-politicize past and current issues related to fights of indigenous communities for their land, rights and ancestors, but I am proposing a future oriented vision of how our knowledge about the past might look like.

sensibilities, through collaborative and community-originated or -directed projects, and related critical perspectives<sup>57</sup>.

As such, indigenous archaeology is not only a critical discourse and a decolonizing discipline but also a space of cross-epistemological research and advocacy of alternative ways of thinking about heritage, relations between humans and non-humans, materiality, environment, agency, indigeneity; the sacred (and sacred places), tradition, etc.

In fact, indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing form probably the most interesting but difficult challenge to the humanities and social sciences. I think, that if academia wants to be inclusive it will indeed change dramatically our presuppositions of knowledge building, authorship and verification of knowledge. Surprisingly however, there are – it seems to me – few real problems with relations between indigenous knowledges and life sciences. Thus, the latest discoveries in the field of neuroscience confirm certain indigenous ideas about plants. So for example plant neurobiology allows challenges a traditional view of plants as passive and insensitive. Matthew Hall, in his book *Plants as Persons. A Philosophical Botany* (2011), writes that

plants and humans share a basic, ontological reality as perceptive, aware, autonomous, self-governed, and intelligent beings. Like other living beings, plants actively live and seek to flourish. They are self organized and self created as a result of interactions with their environment. (...) With guidance from animistic cultures and the evidence from contemporary plant sciences, the latter stages of this study argues for recognizing plants as subjects deserving of respect as other-than-human persons<sup>58</sup>.

Ecological humanities fits in and is part of discernible reconfigurations in the theory of social sciences and humanities which show through, e.g., the replacement of the vertical model of knowledge with the horizontal model, in which the importance of flat ontologies and relational approaches increases substantially<sup>59</sup>. It can be stated that the contemporary humanities and social

57 George P. Nicholas, "Native Peoples and Archaeology", in *Encyclopedia of Archaeology*, vol. 3, ed. by Deborah M. Pearsall, (Oxford: Elsevier 2008), 1660.

58 Matthew Hall, *Plants as Persons. A Philosophical Botany* (Albany, NY: Sunny Press, 2011), 12-13.

59 Such relational approaches (and flat ontologies) are exemplified by Bruno Latour's actor-network-theory and the new social theory by Manuel DeLanda (assemblage theory), and recently also by the relational archeology project by Ian Hodder. Harvey also includes the new animism into the category of relational epistemology. See: Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social*; Manuel DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society. Assemblage Theory and Social Complex-*

sciences focus on the issues of interrelations. Among many factors forcing this refocussing, the most interesting is the conviction, that “everything connects to everything else”, shared both by the traditional ecological knowledges, and by quantum physics, to which, by the way, we owe the notion of entanglement, extremely popular in today’s humanities, as well as in biology. It’s worth invoking here the principle of organicism, which states that: „it is such a system that an alteration or removal of any element would alter every other element or even destroy the whole system”<sup>60</sup>. However, as the above quoted Pierotti and Wildcat state, we should stress here with all force, that “it is not simply a homily or a romanticized cliché, but instead, a realization that no single organism can exist without the web of other life forms that surround it and make its existence possible”<sup>61</sup>. In the context of such reasoning, a pyramidal metaphor of a vision of reality has given way to the metaphor of convoluted relations, networks, assemblages, collectives, kinships, societies, and communities. The issue of the subject and the object become secondary to the problem of relations among them, connections and dependencies (relationalism), and the idea that things themselves became relational.

It might seem that ecology, which constituted itself in the 19th century as a subdiscipline of biology, presently plays the same role as did cultural anthropology in the time of domination of the postmodernistic trends, i.e., it prescribes the fields and the subjects of research for humanities and offers analytical categories, as well as the understanding of culture. I think, though, that we are not only dealing with an “ecologizing of the humanities”. The research conducted about contemporary humanities and social sciences<sup>62</sup> allows the

---

ity (London: Continuum, 2006); Ian Hodder, *Entangled. An Archaeology of the Relationships Between Humans and Things* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012); Harvey, *Animism*, 21.

60 Pepper, *World Hypotheses*, 300.

61 Pierotti, Wildcat, “Traditional Ecological Knowledge”, 1336. It is worth recalling the words of Thomas Kuhn: “the reception of a new paradigm often necessitates a redefinition of the corresponding science. Some old problems may be relegated to another science or declared entirely “unscientific”. Others that were previously nonexistent or trivial may, with a new paradigm, become the very archetypes of significant scientific achievement. (...) The normal-scientific tradition that emerges from a scientific revolution is not only incompatible but often actually incommensurable with that which has gone before”. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1970, [International Encyclopedia of Unified Science, vol. 2, no. 2]), 103.

62 See: my article: “Wiedza o przeszłości – perspektywy na przyszłość” (Knowledge of the Past – Prospects for the Future, in Polish), *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, vol. CXX, no. 2 (2013): 221-274. In this text I presented the results showing the condition of today’s humanities and social sciences based on the query, which included about 1200 issues of 300 journals representing various disciplines of humanities and social sciences, published in 2010-2012.

assumption that the phenomena described here, although currently characteristic of just avant-garde trends and approaches, might be a portent of not just the further shifts but of an upheaval. I am not alone with my hypothesis that we are on the threshold of a real revolution stimulated by processes occurring in the world (connected with climate change and with the degradation of the environment, as well as the cultural-political changes). These processes enhance the transformations occurring in academe, but they mostly stimulate discoveries within biological sciences, especially in molecular biology, cognitivism, and neurosciences<sup>63</sup>.

### Biohumanist Background of Ecological Humanities

The dreams of many researchers about producing knowledge connecting the humanities with life sciences<sup>64</sup> and the knowledge that can be defined as biohumanities<sup>65</sup> are advanced into reality. This field of study and its critical edges are determined, on the one hand, by neuroscience, and on the other, by traditional knowledges, introduced particularly into American, Australian and Canadian academies by the researchers representing native cultures.

63 Doris Bachmann-Medick also reaches this conclusion while considering contemporary research turns in humanities. She sees revolutionary symptoms on the scale of the Copernican revolution in the neurobiological turn. Doris Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns. New Orientations in the Study of Culture*, trans. by Adam Blauhut (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2016).

64 It is worth noting here the C.P. Snow's idea of the late 1950s about 'two cultures', i.e. the humanities and sciences, which cannot find mutual language. C.P. Snow, *Two Cultures* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1959); Edward O. Wilson appealed for unity of the two cultures in his book of the late 1990s: *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (New York: 1998).

65 The term „biohumanities” is used by Karol Stotz and Paul E. Griffiths in the article “Biohumanities: Rethinking the Relationship Between Bioscience, Philosophy, and History of Science, and Society”, *The Quarterly of Biology*, vol. 83, no. 1 (2008): 37–45. The authors define it as „the perspective on the relations between humanities (especially philosophy and history of science), biology and the society. In this option, the humanities do not only interpret the significance and influence of biological knowledge, but also contributes to our understanding of biology itself” (p. 37). Thus biohumanities of Stotz and Griffiths represents a constructive critique of science, which uses humanities to understand biology. In my considerations, while using the term biohumanities, I propose a different approach to this research perspective. My argument is about an incomplete understanding of the phenomena that are important to contemporary knowledge offered partially by the humanities, and in part, by sciences (the issues of identity, thoughts on the differences and relations between species, biopolitics, research of the environment, space, time, etc.) and I advocate the complementary nature of these two domains. The future educational perspective assumes studies (masters and doctoral) combining humanities and sciences. Examples of new biohumanistic disciplines include neuroesthetics, neuronal history of art, neuroanthropology, and neurotheology, which require studies of art history, anthropology, theology, as well as cognitivism.

These “explosive mixtures” give rise to various avant-garde approaches, which can be defined as multispecies theory of the humanities and social sciences.

The discoveries of neurosciences, as well as the progress in brain research (there is talk about “neuroscientific turn” and proclamation of the advent of the “neurocentric era”<sup>66</sup>), as well as zoological research (especially primatology) and botanical research (neurology of plants), in a significant way contribute to the questioning of the traditional idea of human nature and relations between humans and nonhuman animals, and plants. On the other hand, molecular biology, which deals with the influence of molecular properties (especially proteins and nucleic acids) on the functioning of living organisms, encourages a molecular level approach when talking about (bio-cultural) subjectivity and identity.

The discoveries made through research on the human microbiome, co-created by fungi, bacteria, viruses, living in the organism, allow us to see the human body in the categories of a specific ecosystem, and to see the human as a congregation of human and nonhuman elements. This is essential for today’s redefinition of the understanding of humans and their place in the world, their bodies and their lives<sup>67</sup>. As the authors of the manifesto “Anthropology of Microbes” maintain, “Studies of the human microbiome are helping us to evolve our sense of personal identity. We are seeing ourselves with increasing definition as a ‘supraorganism’ composed of microbial and human cells, as well as human and microbial genes, with the number of microbial components vastly exceeding the number of human (*Homo sapiens*) components”<sup>68</sup>. In the similar vein, the authors of an article “A Symbiotic View of Life: We Have Never Been Individuals” claim that:

All classical conceptions of [biological] individuality are called into question by evidence of all-pervading symbiosis. (...) Estimates that 90% of the cells that comprise our bodies are bacterial (...) belie any simple anatomical understanding of individual identity. (...) Neither humans, nor

66 *The Neuroscientific Turn. Transdisciplinarity in the Age of the Brain*, ed. by Melissa M. Littlefield and Jenell M. Johnson (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2012); Peter Becker, “The Coming of a Neurocentric Age?” *Medicina & Storia*, vol. X, no. 19-20 (2010): 101-128 and Jake F. Dunagan, “Politics for the Neurocentric Age”, *Journal of Futures Studies*, vol. 15, no. 2 (2010): 51-70. See also: Ruth Denkhausa and Mathias Bös, “How Cultural is ‘Cultural Neuroscience’? Some Comments on an Emerging Research Paradigm”, *BioSocieties*, vol. 7, no. 4 (2012): 433-458.

67 Peter J. Turnbaugh, Ruth E. Ley, Micah Hamady, Claire M. Fraser-Liggett, Rob Knight & Jeffrey I. Gordon, “The Human Microbiome Project”, *Nature*, no. 449, (18 October 2007): 804-810.

68 Amber Benezra, Joseph DeStefano, and Jeffrey I. Gordon, “Anthropology of Microbes”, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, vol. 109, no. 17, (24 April 2012), 6378.



any other organism, can be regarded as individuals by anatomical criteria. To capture this complexity, the term “holobiont” has been introduced as the anatomical term that describes the integrated organism comprised of both host elements and persistent populations of symbionts (...). [O]rganisms are anatomically, physiologically, developmentally, genetically, and immunologically multigenomic and multispecies complexes. Can it be that organisms are selected as multigenomic associations? Is the fittest in life’s struggle the multispecies group, and not an individual of a single species in that group? (...) As Lewis Thomas (...) commented when considering self and symbiosis: “This is, when you think about it, really amazing. The whole dear notion of one’s own Self—marvelous, old free-willed, free-enterprising, autonomous, independent, isolated island of a Self—is a myth”<sup>69</sup>.

It is at this molecular level that it becomes clear, that the human animal is a multispecies hybrid, a metacommunity being undergoing continuous process of symbiotic becoming and co-evolution. The level of bio-micro-neuro discourse shows that people, plants, and animals are not as essentially different as the humanities-cultural discourse would wish to show (and wants to prove). Donna Haraway says, paraphrasing Bruno Latour, that “we have never been human”<sup>70</sup> and – as the biologists mentioned above claim – we have never been individuals, in the way that the anthropocentric perspective and species chauvinism would have it.

In this context, research on plants is particularly interesting. Plants, as scholars of the rapidly developing neurobiology of plants claim, can choose among different ways of behavior, respond to stress, e.g., the lack of water), and even feel desynchronosis (jet lag), are able to distinguish between themselves and others, are autonomous beings (let us note that the notion of autonomous has been used solely in relation to man), and their life has intrinsic value<sup>71</sup>. The interest in plants furthered through various biohumanities projects has resulted in the emergence of a subdiscipline defined as sociology

69 Scott F. Gilbert, Jan Sapp and Alfred I. Tauber, „A Symbiotic View of Life: We Have Never Been Individuals”, *The Quarterly Review of Biology*, vol. 87, no. 4 (2012), 327, 331, 334.

70 See: Nicholas Gane, „When We Have Never Been Human, What Is to Be Done?: Interview with Donna Haraway”, *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 23, no. 7-8 (2006): 135-158. “We Have Never Been Human” which is also the title of part I of Haraway’s book, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

71 Federal Ethics Committee on Non-Human Biotechnology [ECNH], *The Dignity of Living Beings with Regard to Plants. Moral Considerations of Plants for Their Own Sake*, 2008. Cf. also: Hall, *Plants as Persons*.

of mushrooms<sup>72</sup>, which inspires researchers trying to consider the principles of social co-existence by researching the principles of the functioning of mycelium.

In stimulating changes occurring in the humanities, an important role has been played by the discoveries in the field of synthetic biology. This domain, having risen as the result of the integration of biological sciences (chiefly molecular biology) with engineering and mathematics, and seen as the future of biotechnologies, has opened up possibilities of creating new forms of life and modifying the existing ones. The publishing, in 2001, of the outline of human genome and a rapid development of synthetic biology in recent years, offers increased possibilities of manipulating DNA. In 2010, an American geneticist, Craig Venter, who had previously decoded the human genome, created the first synthetic bacterium, given the name Synthia. The creation of a self-dividing cell is considered a breakthrough in genetic engineering and an opening of the way to the creation of an artificial life, and the subsequent related discoveries cause revolutionary changes not only in medicine, but also in manufacturing. They also change the humanities, posing a redefinition of the understanding of life. This issue, however, cannot be raised only within the humanities, hence the necessity of complementary approaches in union with life sciences<sup>73</sup>.

## Conclusion

In the humanities of the late 1990s, there occurs the process, defined by Andrew Pickering, a sociologist of science, as “the posthumanist displacement of our interpretative frameworks”<sup>74</sup>. It can be said that this process reveals the emergence of diversified trends or approaches sometimes described as non- or post-anthropocentric or post-European humanities, and, sometimes, as posthumanities, ecological and/or environmental humanities. However,

72 Anna Tsing, “Arts of Inclusion, or How to Love a Mushroom”, *Manoa. A Pacific Journal of International Writing*, vol. 22, no. 2 (2010): 191-203.

73 The magazine *Environmental Values*, vol. 21, no. 1 (2012) devoted its special issue to synthetic biology, described there as a form of radical life engineering (as distinguished from genetic engineering). „The final goal – says Marianne Schark in her article „Synthetic Biology and the Distinction between Organisms and Machines” – is not to begin with the naturally occurring organisms and changing them, but a specialized assemblage of (micro-) organisms from the functional biological parts” (p. 20). This procedure raises an ethical dilemma regarding the status of organisms thus created („living machines”), and it complicates the understanding of relations between the artificial and the natural.

74 Andrew Pickering, “The Mangle of Practice: Agency and Emergence in the Sociology of Science”, *The American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 99, no. 3 (1999), 561.

in my opinion, we are no longer talking about further turns or avant-garde trends, about the redundancy of notions and names with the suffix *post* in anticipation of the future (post-human, post-secular, post-European, post-white, post-gender, etc.), but about a slow change in consciousness, noticed by many in recent years, a change in the way the world is perceived, and related attempts, observed in academe, of putting forward a different theory of knowledge and creating a new meta-language. Such knowledge is transformational, emancipating, and visionary.

Today's humanities are a part of the process of building holistic, inclusive, integrating, and complementary knowledges that would combine humanities and natural sciences, and would include indigenous ways of knowing into its framework. Moreover, the most radical idea, however, is that the human is not its only author<sup>75</sup>. The choice of ecological humanities as the preferred research perspective and interpretative framework is therefore the choice of a world-view connected with its background project of social transformation from industrial to ecological society. It is also an educational idea aiming at educating anyone sensitive to ecology and other forms of existence.

Where are today's humanities headed? They are headed for local, realistic utopias. Among the indications of this direction are the increasingly popular ecological humanities, feeding on the ideas of symbiotic relations based on mutually dependent human communities and non-human personae. These are the utopias in which the explanation of the historical process by means of theories of conflict is replaced with theories of cooperation, coexistence, and collaboration, and the hitherto ubiquitous notion of trauma as the basis of shaping the individual and communal identity is replaced by the notion of empathy and the subject capable of adaptation, revitalization, and

---

75 I refer to the research of primatologists and to texts published in scientific periodicals and coauthored by chimpanzees (specifically bonobo, the so called pygmy chimpanzee (*Pan paniscus*). See: Sue Savage-Rumbaugh, Kanzi Wamba, Panbanisha Wamba, and Nyota Wamba, "Welfare of Apes in Captive Environments: Comments On, and By, a Specific Group of Apes". *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2007): 7-19. Obviously, the apes (Kanzi Wamba, Panbanisha Wamba, and Nyota Wamba) did not write the article, but they communicated with the researcher (Sue Savage-Rumbaugh) and responded to questions about their needs. The article attracted considerable interest, as it questions human exclusivity as cognitive authority and it shows possibilities in multi-species authorship and in building a trans-species knowledge. (It should be noted that such coauthorship related not only to animal, but also intelligent machines). G.A. Bradshaw shows a radical approach when she maintains that "wildlife conservation must be transformed from the species conservation project to the project for social justice and auto determination, whereby epistemic authority decision making is not only shared with the other species, but it is also dictated by non-human species". Gay A. Bradshaw, "An Ape Among Many: Co-Authorship and Trans-species Epistemic Authority", *Configurations*, vol. 18 (2011), 28.

autoregeneration. Maturity in the human being is measured in the degree of adaptation and empathy: the more empathetic a human being is toward others, both humans and non-humans (capable of building neuronal connections?), the higher the degree of maturity. In this option, to be a person worthily representing human species is to be *homo empathicus*<sup>76</sup>.

*Translation: Bożena Gilewska*

---

76 It is about neuronal understanding of empathy. Due to the discovery of mirror neurons, called by Daniel Goleman „the neurons that connect people”, it is acquiring a special bridge status in humanities and neuroscience (i.e., in the emerging biohumanities). As a species, according to researchers, we are neurobiologically programmed to create ties, it is important, however, that these neurons be properly activated, which is the essential role of rearing and education. Roy Mukamel, Arne D. Ekstrom, Jonas, Kaplan, Marco Iacoboni, and Itzhac Fried, „Single-Neuron Responses in Humans During Execution and Observation of Actions”, *Current Biology*, vol. 20, no. 8 (2010): 750-756. Cf. also: Jeremy Rifkin, *The Empathic Civilization. The Race to Global Consciousness in a World of Crisis* (New York: Penguin, 2009), 9ff.

---

Joanna Zylińska

---

## Bioethics Otherwise, or, How to Live with Machines, Humans, and Other Animals<sup>1</sup>

---

DOI: 10.18318/td.2015.en.1.13

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

### Joanna Zylińska

– Professor of New Media and Communications at Goldsmiths, University of London. The author of five books – including *Minimal Ethics for the Anthropocene* (Open Humanities Press, 2014) and *Bioethics in the Age of New Media* (MIT Press, 2009; Polish translation 2014) – she is also a translator of Stanisław Lem’s *Summa Technologiae* (University of Minnesota Press, 2013) and co-editor of the JISC-funded project *Living Books about Life*. She combines her philosophical writing with curatorial work and photographic art practice.

---

1 This article was originally published in Tom Cohen (ed.) *Telemorphosis: Theory in the Era of Climate Change*, vol. 1 (Open Humanities Press, 2012), <http://www.openhumanitiespress.org>. Licence: CC-BY SA.

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 barrier<sup>2</sup>. 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”<sup>3</sup>. 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 pretence 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?”<sup>4</sup>.

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-centeredness<sup>5</sup>. To these Haraway adds a fourth, “informatic or cyborgian” wound, “which infolds organic and technological flesh”<sup>6</sup>. 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 writes<sup>7</sup>.

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”<sup>8</sup>. “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”<sup>9</sup>. 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 distinction<sup>10</sup>. 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 *zōē*) and their political organization into populations (*bios*)”<sup>11</sup>. 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 Zylinska *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 technicist 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 relationality<sup>12</sup>.

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.

<sup>12</sup> 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”<sup>13</sup>. 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

<sup>13</sup> 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 ethics<sup>14</sup>.

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”<sup>15</sup>. 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 insists<sup>16</sup>. Now, Haraway is very upfront about her affections: she loves her dog – “We have had forbidden conversations; we have had oral intercourse”, she confesses<sup>17</sup> – 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”<sup>18</sup>. 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...”<sup>19</sup>. 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”<sup>20</sup>.

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 human<sup>21</sup>? 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"<sup>22</sup>. 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"<sup>23</sup> 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"<sup>24</sup>.

What shall we do then with Calarco's postulate that "the human-animal distinction can no longer and ought no longer to be maintained"<sup>25</sup>? 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 continuism, 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 overcome<sup>26</sup>. In describing Derrida’s reluctance to “abandon the human-animal distinction” altogether as “dogmatic”<sup>27</sup>, 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”<sup>28</sup>. (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?<sup>29</sup>

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”<sup>30</sup>.

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

<sup>29</sup> Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 30–31.

<sup>30</sup> *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”<sup>31</sup> – 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”<sup>32</sup>.

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”<sup>33</sup>. 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”<sup>34</sup>, 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”<sup>35</sup>. By saying this she seems to fall prey to what Simon Glendinning calls the “cognitivist presumption” of humanism<sup>36</sup>, 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 continuism 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 world<sup>37</sup>.

### 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”<sup>38</sup>, 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”<sup>39</sup>. But even if we recognize, with Game, that in any training situation animals need to “allow people to teach them to be led”<sup>40</sup>, 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”<sup>41</sup>. 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”<sup>42</sup>. 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"<sup>43</sup>.

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"<sup>44</sup>. 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"<sup>45</sup>. 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"<sup>46</sup>. 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”<sup>47</sup>, 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 demand<sup>48</sup>. 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 compared<sup>49</sup>. 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?”



---

Grażyna Gajewska

---

## On Erotically Marked Objects from the Perspective of Object Studies

---

DOI: 10.18318/td.2015.en.1.14

### Eroticism: Between Nature and Culture

In his 1993 essay “The Double Flame: Love and Eroticism”<sup>1</sup>, the Mexican poet and essayist Octavio Paz considers the intricate relationship between sex, eroticism and love. Though connected, the three cannot be regarded as synonymous. Paz illustrates this phenomenon of simultaneous connectedness and difference using the metaphor of fire and the flame: nature kindles the fire of sex, over which quivers the subtle, blue flame of love. Neither red nor blue flames can exist without fire, and yet they are distinct from the fire above which they hover. The Mexican intellectual stresses that sex is the least human element of the triad, and the reason is that it applies to many other species besides *homo sapiens*, and its goal is reproduction. While sex belongs to the sphere of nature, the flames of eroticism cannot be placed unambiguously in the same sphere, as they belong rather to the field of culture. Eroticism is not some “unnatural” act, but it rather transcends the act, engaging unused deposits of sexual energy and desire. On the one hand, therefore, eroticism is closely linked to nature (we would not be erotic beings

---

### Grażyna Gajewska

– professor of the UAM, director of the Department of Contemporary Culture and Multimedia in the Institute of European Culture of the UAM. Author of two monographs and editor of a few other books, as well as of a few dozen of articles in the field of literary and cultural studies. Contact: gajewska@amu.edu.pl

---

1 Octavio Paz, *The Double Flame: Love and Eroticism*, translated by Helen Lane (Harcourt Brace & Company: 1996).

if we were not sexual animals first), and on the other, by separating desire from the reproductive function, it shifts the surplus of energy and the creativity that arises from it into the field of culture.

Zygmunt Bauman, following Paz's thoughts, writes: "That surplus is a standing invitation to cultural inventiveness. The uses to which that reproductively redundant and wasted excess may be put are a cultural creation"<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, Bauman emphasizes the impossibility of "liberating" that (cultural) eroticism from its (natural) sexuality: "(...) the reproductive function of sex is simultaneously the indispensable condition and a thorn in the flesh of eroticism; there is an unbreakable link, but also a constant tension between the two – that tension being as incurable as the link is unbreakable"<sup>3</sup>. While Bauman notes the ambiguous relationship between sex and eroticism and the impossibility of the latter's separation from the sphere of nature, George Bataille makes a clear distinction between sexuality and eroticism, and stresses that the move from the former to the latter is, in essence, a transgression from animal to human. In *Erotism: Death and Sensuality* (first published in English translation in 1962)<sup>4</sup>, he writes: "Eroticism is the sexual activity of man to the extent that it differs from the sexual activity of animals. Human sexual activity is not necessarily erotic but erotic it is whenever it is not rudimentary and purely animal"<sup>5</sup>. Eroticism is thus presented as a specifically human category, and is by the same token inscribed into the Western notion of the opposition between nature and nurture and the emphasis on the exclusive attributes that separate humans from the world of animals<sup>6</sup>.

2 Zygmunt Bauman, "On Postmodern Uses of Sex" in *Love and Eroticism*, ed. Mike Featherstone (London: Sage, 1999), 20.

3 Bauman, "On Postmodern Uses of Sex", 20.

4 George Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, trans. Mary Dalwood (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986).

5 *Ibid.*, 29.

6 The hierarchical relationship between humans and animals, or, more broadly, between humans and animate nature, has its roots in the Aristotelian and Judeo-Christian traditions. In his treatise *On the Soul*, Aristotle presented a tripartite and hierarchical division of beings. According to this concept, the lowest rung is occupied by plants, above them are animals, and at the top are humans. The criterion for separating plants from animals and people was both the soul (according to Aristotle, plants have vegetative souls, i.e. the kind found in all living beings) and the belief that animals are immobile and insensitive. Animals, in the philosopher's view, were by contrast endowed with both a vegetative soul and senses (though some have all the senses, while others only have some or just one, that of touch). Some animals also have an imagination, but lack rational perception. Reason, in Aristotle's view, is a special substance

From a contemporary – particularly posthumanist – perspective, the opposition between humans and animals, or rather humans and non-human animals, is becoming increasingly fluid, and even the sexual and erotic sphere is no longer an area characterized by a clear distinction between needs and behavior<sup>7</sup>. This does not, however, mean that we have only two paths to choose from in our thinking about eroticism: one with a clearly anthropocentric, humanist and culturalist tint that locates eroticism on the side of culture, in opposition to nature, or the other: a posthumanist path that extracts the interdependence between nature and culture and draws attention to the fluidity between the animal and the human. In the non-anthropocentric view, posthumanism is merely one of several possible options. At least two other non-anthropologically tinted strains of thought are currently being developed in parallel to posthumanism: transhumanism and material anthropology, among which the latter appears to be particularly inspiring with regard to extracting specific and hitherto unexamined aspects of eroticism. The relativity of people and objects and the symbiotic relationships between humans and both the animate and inanimate worlds emphasized by anthropological theorists enables one to examine eroticism as a sphere that exists and changes as a result of the influence of things, or rather as a result of humans entering into relationships with things/objects. More precisely, the erotic attractiveness of humans is largely shaped by things: shoes, clothing, accessories and jewelry. Furthermore, some objects such as shoes (particularly heels), lingerie and garters even appear to have erotic characteristics. In this article I propose that we examine these objects as active participants of erotic games, rather than passive things that are somewhere beyond people and the sexual and erotic sphere. In my non-anthropocentric view of eroticism, I emphasize the relativity, symbiosis and participation of things in shaping the erotic sphere

---

that is different from the vegetative and sensitive soul. Its formation in humans constitutes a separate problem, but the distinction between souls specific to various life forms was decisive in Aristotle's hierarchical division of beings. See Aristotle, *On the Soul*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (London: Penguin Books, 1986). In the Old Testament story of the creation of the world and humankind, on the other hand, we read that God said: "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground". Humans are not only separated from the rest of nature, as the only beings created in the image of God, but have also been given the right to rule over animals. This finds its confirmation in a later part of the Book of Genesis: "Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground". Non-human beings were given to humans so that they might fulfill the will of God. Genesis 1:26, 1:27, *The Holy Bible, New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984).

7 Intimacy (including sexual intimacy) across species boundaries is discussed in Monika Bakke, *Bio-transfiguracje. Sztuka i estetyka posthumanizmu* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo UAM), 119–125.

of human life, and thus attribute a certain agency (but not intentionality) to objects.

### **Towards a Non-Anthropocentric Humanism**

There are three varieties of contemporary non-anthropocentric humanism being developed. My aim is not to present each of these strains, but to point out the differences between them and to offer a more detailed presentation of material anthropology that will serve as the theoretical foundation of my discussion of eroticism. The first variety, known as posthumanism, questions the clear distinction between humans and animals (hence the use of the terms “humans” and “non-human animals” by posthumanist thinkers) and unmasks the arbitrary assumptions behind the hierarchical structure of animated beings: plants – animals – humans. This convention seeks to overcome humans’ condescending stance towards other life forms and their exploitative behavior towards nature in favor of building symbiotic interdependencies between various beings.

In the second variety, known as transhumanism, the emphasis is placed on tightening the relationship between people and high technology. This approach is linked to developments in the fields of medicine and technological science. The goal of transhumanism can be described as autoevolution: the desire to liberate humans from random biological evolution and to replace it with controlled development. If we function in symbiotic relationships with other life forms and inanimate matter; if we do not think of humans as a complete whole, then, at least from the transhumanist perspective, there is no reason for us to believe that the development of humankind is over. The stances and postulates of the transhumanists are not synonymous with those espoused by posthumanists. Transhumanism does not preclude an anthropocentric outlook; indeed, the point is to use technology for the purpose of improving humans’ quality of life and to improve humans themselves. In this sense, transhumanists pursue a model of human self-perfection that, from the posthumanist standpoint, is a conservative one, as they do not venture beyond the concept of humans as the standard by which all things are measured. Transhumanists, meanwhile, reject essentialist visions of the human subject, question the completeness of humans, proclaim the advent of a new being that operates in tight symbiosis with machines and electronics, and, consequently, their projects open up that which is human to that which is non-human.

In the case of the third variety, described as material anthropology or the study of objects, attention is focused on material culture, or “materialized” culture. However, this approach cannot be treated as a mere extension or

duplication of the study of material culture initiated several decades ago by historians associated with the Annales School (e.g. Fernand Braudel)<sup>8</sup>. The study of objects differs from modernist studies on material culture in its approach to the subject of study, its methodology and particularly the academic questions it poses – questions that are situated in different contexts than those posed several decades ago<sup>9</sup>. On the one hand, this new approach to material culture is the product of contemporary thinkers' critical analysis of the modernist approach to the topic, and on the other, their distancing themselves from the ontology and epistemology that developed as part of the so-called linguistic turn. This distance, perhaps even intellectual boredom, finds its expression in the 2003 article by the archaeologist Bjørnar Olsen, *Material Culture after Text: Re-Membering Things*<sup>10</sup>. Olsen argues that objects ought to be returned their reality and materiality, and stresses that the linguistic and literary perspectives are rather useless with regards to this issue. He attempts to bring the objectiveness of objects back into the fold of archaeological studies, yet his observations on the ontological and epistemological shift in the approach to things are themselves part of a broader spectrum of posthumanist reevaluations. For example, Olsen emphasizes that "that things, all those physical entities we refer to as material culture, are beings in the world alongside other beings, such as humans, plants and animals"<sup>11</sup>. He makes no attempt to blur the differences between these beings, but he does observe that this difference is one "that should not be conceptualized according to the ruling ontological regime of dualities and negativities; it is a non-oppositional or relative difference facilitating collaboration, delegation and exchange"<sup>12</sup>. In this perspective, it is not the symbolic value (meaning) of objects in culture that is stressed, nor their usefulness or consumption by people that is emphasized, but the interdependency, relativity and delegation between people and things. This perspective encourages us to treat things as relevant co-participants of social life – an approach that contrasts with the unambiguous concept of humans as the only or most important agent of transformation in the world.

8 Fernand Braudel. *Capitalism and Material Life: 1400–1800*, trans. Miriam Kochan (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973).

9 See Ewa Domańska, *Historie niekonwencjonalne. Refleksja o przeszłości w nowej humanistyce*, (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2006).

10 Bjørnar Olsen, "Material Culture after Text: Remembering Things", *Norwegian Archeological Review* 36, no. 2 (2003): 87–104.

11 Ibid., 88.

12 Ibid., 88.

The British anthropologist Alfred Gell stresses the social functions of things in his 1998 book *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*. Rather than follow the beaten path of presenting works of art in the context of sociocultural shifts caused by humans, Gell treats art objects as subjects participating actively in those shifts. At the same time, the author of *Art and Agency* distances himself from the semiotic research perspective that examines works of art as a system of signs that “reflects” social reality:

In place of symbolic communication, I place all the emphasis on agency, intention, causation, result, and transformation. I view art as a system of action, intended to change the world rather than encode symbolic propositions about it. The ‘action’-centered approach to art is inherently more anthropological than the alternative semiotic approach because it is preoccupied with the practical mediatory role of art objects in the social process, rather than with the interpretation of objects ‘as if’ they were texts<sup>13</sup>.

This research perspective enables Gell to see objects as agents or co-agents of events. While he does not endow things with intention, he does claim that that intentional beings perform their actions through these things.

Another thinker who emphasizes the agency of things is the Dutch anthropologist Peter Pels. According to him, objects come alive in a social space and that is where, in a sense, they begin to “act” or “reflect” the meanings ascribed to them by people. Pels emphasizes the feedback loop between people and objects as well as their mutual influence on each other, meaning that “things talk back” to us<sup>14</sup>. According to him, “not only are humans as material as the material that mold them, but humans themselves are molded, through their sensuousness, by the ‘dead’ matter with which they are surrounded”<sup>15</sup>. In this perspective, it becomes crucial to emphasize the material (carnal) foundations of human existence, a consequence of which is the perception of the human subject as always embodied and also connected to other organic and non-organic kinds of matter. One can hardly overestimate the scale of this mutual influence, as it plays a key role in socialization. We inhabit a complex web of relationships with human and non-human others, anchored as we are in material surroundings

---

<sup>13</sup> Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 6.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Pels, “The Spirit of Matter: On Fetish, Rarity, Fact, and Fancy” in *Border Fetishisms: Material Objects in Unstable Spaces*, ed. Patricia Spyer (New York: Routledge, 1998), 91–121.

<sup>15</sup> Pels, “The Spirit of Matter: On Fetish, Rarity, Fact, and Fancy”, 101.

that we create, transform and disseminate as we occupy them. Yet the point is not to treat matter (including material human bodies) as yet another topic to be addressed in our examination of contemporary manifestations of commercialism and consumerism, but to demonstrate that people are not isolated from the material and objectified world. It is not only humans, but also non-humans, including objects, that participate in the “weaving” of the complex web of social relations. In this perspective, the “discourse of things” is set in human discourse<sup>16</sup> and is governed by certain pragmatics involving identity building, social relations, the discourse of mourning, justice, fashion, etc. To this list of defined types of pragmatics one may also add eroticism; indeed, human erotic attractiveness is largely shaped and manifested through lingerie, clothing, accessories and jewelry. When discussing such relationships between people and things, one should also keep in mind the objects that are not outside of us in the physical sense, but have come to share the space of our biological bodies; they have literally become embodied. A ready example is that of silicone breast implants that are used not only to replace a mastectomy patient’s missing mammary gland or to correct a birth defect, but also to increase the size of existing breasts, which is often perceived as improving the visual attractiveness of the female body. Another example of the erotic relativity between people and things is the fascination and admiration evoked by artificial anthropomorphic bodies, i.e. mannequins such as those displayed in department stores and shopping centers. Contrary to the popular claim that mannequins fascinate us because they resemble people and that, in their non-living materiality, they represent living bodies, I claim that the point is not that they represent living bodies, but

---

16 I refer here to Ewa Domańska, who describes this view of the study of things as redundant, as it is still entrenched in the human perspective: “Paradoxically, subjectified objects share the fate of others who cannot speak for themselves (the dead, women, children, minorities, the defeated, etc.). Inevitably, it is people who speak in their name, and that means that the discourse of things will always be entrenched in us, in human discourse, in our needs and expectations, and will always be subject to certain pragmatics, whether they involve the acquisition of knowledge, identity building, social relations, or the discourse of mourning, justice, memory, heritage, fashion, etc”. Ewa Domańska, “Humanistka nie-antropocentryczna a studia nad rzeczami”, *Kultura Współczesna*, no. 3 (2008): 13–14. Domańska speaks in favour of locating the studies devoted to objects in the perspective of the humanities which renounce the idea of man as the measure of all things. In this perspective the studies devoted to things would be supposed to refer to “the pursuit of a resistant object which opposes human cognition and the attempts to appropriate this object by language”. *Ibid.*, 10. Despite the interesting supposition which open a broad field to a deconstruction and reformulation of trite ways of thinking about things, I consider that this proposition is not so useful for the analysis of the phenomena that I conduct. A more adequate methodological proposition which functions within the framework of the studies devoted to objects is the one that Domańska refers as a conservative proposition. In this reactionary version (let us repeat this point) the discourse of objects is installed into the human discourse and it is directed by a certain kind of pragmatics.

that they present a fantasy, one that often has an erotic tinge. In fact, the point of reference is not a body made of real flesh and blood, often imperfect, crippled and aging, but the fantasy of the perfect lover coming to life<sup>17</sup>. From the psychoanalytical perspective, a mannequin – particularly a quasi-female mannequin – is the apparition of “the woman who could fill out the lack in man, the ideal partner with whom sexual fulfilment would finally be possible, in short, The Woman who (...) does not exist”<sup>18</sup>.

Psychoanalytic theory can be useful not just in the search for erotic tension between people and the artificial bodies of storefront mannequins, but also in analyzing the erotic functions of clothing, footwear and lingerie. The central, organizing concept of this discourse will be the fetish, both in the Freudian (sexual fetish) and Marxian (commodity fetishism) senses. In the opinion of Peter Pels, the aforementioned theoretician of material anthropology, both of these paths in Western European thought reinstated the concept of the fetish (*fetisso*) – which had previously existed outside Europe – as a way of experiencing an object that changes how it functions in society<sup>19</sup>. In other words, some objects escape the boundaries of standard use defined by everyday practice, and function in a magical, religious order that is not quite subject to utilitarian or commercial regimes of evaluation (pricing). That is not to say that these things are granted intentionality or that they act “of their own accord” (though in the magical order, action is ascribed to them and they are equally often perceived as living things), but rather that due to the way they function in a given community, they elude attempts at rationalization, and particularly quantification, including commercial quantification. This concept of the fetish is most frequently used in the analysis of devotional objects such as those associated with practices like the manufacture and veneration of the images of saints<sup>20</sup>, though it can also be applied in the analysis of erotically marked objects. The effect of this erotic “untranscended materiality” becomes somewhat more apparent when we observe that clothing, shoes, lingerie and accessories serve not only the strictly pragmatic purpose of protecting their wearers from the elements, but also allow

17 The erotic marking of mannequins is discussed in Grażyna Gajewska, “Uwiedzeni przez manekiny, czyli o erotyce sztucznych ciał (na przykładzie opowiadania „Płaszcz Józefa Oliena” Eugène’a Melchiora de Vogüé)”, *Przestrzenie Teorii*, no. 2 (2011): 69–80.

18 Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 80.

19 Pels analyzes this phenomenon by juxtaposing the attitudes towards magical things and “uncontrolled materiality” observed among West African communities and Europeans during the rise of colonialism. Pels, “The Spirit of Matter”, 93–94.

20 See Tomasz Rakowski, “Przemiany, przesunięcia, przedmioty przejściowe. Antropologia rzeczy”, *Kultura Współczesna*, no. 3 (2008).



people to emphasize their social status and to shape their aesthetic and erotic image. Fashion and consumerism are allies of this creation, and place these objects in systems of supply and demand woven from notions of luxury and attractiveness, as evidenced by storefront displays of such items as lingerie and stockings in shopping malls and even directly facing the street (il. 1).



Il. 1. Advertisement for a boutique at Kempinski Hotel Bristol, downtown Berlin, 2012. Photo by J. Kalinowski

Yet these systems often break, and consequently reject things that are perceived by society as being too bold, obscene, vulgar or a threat to morality

or even to “good taste”; such objects are then relegated to a separate space, usually that of the sex shop. When examined from the anthropological perspective, erotic fetishes can be described as things that systems (e.g. fashion, consumerism) cannot entirely fill with meanings, but which will ultimately be harnessed by those systems and qualified as funny, frivolous, stimulating or arousing.

The two final qualifiers indicate the agency of these things: they elicit, or at least are intended to elicit, a certain response in people when placed in a certain context, and will be included in the erotic sphere as participants of the game.

### **Strutting Like a Peacock: on the Allure of Animal Bodies**

The plot of Anatole France's 1908 novel *Penguin Island* begins on a polar island where St. Maël arrives and, taking the penguins inhabiting the island for little people, decides to make model Christians out of them. *Book II* begins with the parable *The First Clothes*, which tells of an experiment that was intended to reveal how penguins would react to other members of their species when the latter were dressed in clothing. A female penguin of average beauty was selected as the first being whose nakedness was to be covered up. She had “narrow shoulders, as slack chest, a stout and yellow figure, and short legs”<sup>21</sup>. Magis, the monk who initiated the experiment, ordered the animal to put on laced sandals, convinced that they would “give an elegant length to her legs and the weight they bear will seem magnified”<sup>22</sup>. A hat was then put on the female penguin, her arms and neck were encircled with jewelry, her abdomen was bound in a linen band, and her body was draped in a flowing tunic. Thus equipped, the penguin was allowed to walk away, and she provoked great interest wherever she went, particularly among the male part of the population:

A male penguin, who met her by chance, stopped in surprise, and retracing his steps began to follow her. As she went along the shore, others coming back from fishing, went up to her, and after looking at her, walked behind her. Those who were lying on the sand got up and joined the rest<sup>23</sup>.

Satisfied with the results of his experiment, the monk Magis explains to St. Maël that the clothing had increased her erotic attractiveness, which she

21 Anatole France, *Penguin Island*, trans. A.W. Evans (New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1909), 45.

22 Ibid., 46.

23 Ibid., 47.

combines with mysteriousness and fantasy: “it was necessary that, ceasing to see it distinctly with their eyes, they should be led to represent it to themselves in their minds”<sup>24</sup>.

This scene is one in a series of parables based on the Old Testament that discuss the creation of humans, their separation from animals, and the formation of social order and moral norms. Though this parable is clearly satirical in tone, it unmasks and mocks the ways in which social order is built and moral norms are shaped (and also lampoons political life in France at the turn of the 20th century, in the latter half of the book), it nevertheless preserves the Judeo-Christian concept of humans who – as opposed to animals – cover their nakedness. I do not intend to analyze the issue of conscious nudity and the shame that, according to the Old Testament, Adam and Eve subsequently felt having eaten the apple from the tree in the Garden of Eden<sup>25</sup>. Rather, I am interested in the fact that the biblical characters put on clothes only after they had realized their heretofore taboo sexuality. In France’s satirical work, the dressing of the character in clothing, shoes and a hat also produces the effect of “covering” that part, but at the same time it triggers the onlookers’ fantasies, arousing their interest in the covered nakedness and increasing their erotic tension. In essence, *Penguin Island* expresses the idea that the passage from animality to humanity is a passage from sexuality to eroticism (the one so strongly emphasized one hundred years later by Paz, Bataille and Bauman), and that passage is tightly linked to the passage from the naked body to the clothed body. It is the clothing that makes the protagonist attractive and alluring.

The meaning of the scene described above is aptly conveyed by the German saying “the clothes make the man” (*Kleider machen Leute*), which is an anthropocentric notion that emphasizes the distinctiveness and uniqueness of humans vis-à-vis other species<sup>26</sup>. The posthumanist perspective, however, would eschew the stark dualism of naked animal vs. clothed human in favor of an approach that examines different ways of emphasizing one’s attributes. While animals and insects are equipped with various signs of expression, e.g. the brightly-colored face of the mandrill, the pink sexual organs of the baboon, the spotted fur of the leopard and the turquoise-blue feathers of the peacock, the human body is devoid of such distinct qualities. Charles Darwin,

24 France, *Penguin Island*, 48.

25 As Giorgio Agamben observes, “Nudity, in our culture, is inseparable from a theological signature”. Theologians emphasize the connection between sin and covering the body, as it was sin that caused them to feel ashamed of their nudity. See Giorgio Agamben, *Nudities*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 57–60.

26 Similar notions emphasize the language, consciousness, intelligence and creativity of humans.

and later Wolfgang Welsch, emphasized the role that the colored bodies and plumage of animals, particularly males, play in their efforts to win the favor of females. In order for mating to occur, males must not only vie with other males, but also demonstrate their attractiveness to females and, by displaying their colorful plumage, skin or fur, attempt to convince the females to breed with them<sup>27</sup>. According to Darwin, curiosity and aesthetics play an important role in the selection of sexual partners. In his 1871 work *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, the scientist offered an interesting comparison: "It would even appear that mere novelty, or slight changes for the sake of change, have sometimes acted on female birds as a charm, like changes of fashion with us"<sup>28</sup>. In this view, there is a certain parallelism (but not identicalness) between animal and human aesthetics, and also between the development of the aesthetic sense in human and non-human animals, and their sex drive. Rather than being inherently human aesthetic phenomena, style and fashion are simply different ways of emphasizing one's physical attractiveness, ways that have developed over the course of human animal evolution. If, in the process of evolution, humans have lost the physical attributes once used to attract partners, perhaps they have compensated for this loss with clothing, makeup and jewelry. For now, this question remains unanswered. We do not know the sources of the human aesthetic sense (it is doubtful whether it can even be said to have a source, particularly from the evolutionary point of view) and most existing explanations represent a culturalist or anthropocentric viewpoint, or, conversely, erase the differences between human and non-human manifestations of aesthetics. Welsch admittedly warns us in *Animal Aesthetics* about "the methodological error of basing the question as to whether there is an aesthetics of animals on the basis of highly-developed human aesthetics as binding criteria"<sup>29</sup>, but he fails to explain the differences between the construction of an aesthetic sense in human and non-human animals. Welsch does emphasize the evolutionary continuity of aesthetics, but

27 In the world of animals males predominantly "dress up", luring and delighting the females who lack such refinements as rich colors or plumage as the male representatives of their species. However, one should not that in the world of human animals there were periods when the external manifestations of "dressing up" were equally peculiar to women and men. Moreover, the latter even led the way in this respect. An example of this is the fashion of the upper classes in 17th and 18th-century France, when men emphasized their status and attractiveness by wearing colorful frock-coats, shirts with frilling, shiny shoes with clasps, wigs bound with knots.

28 Charles Darwin, quoted in Wolfgang Welsch, "Animal Aesthetics", *Contemporary Aesthetics* no. 2 (2004), accessed July 29, 2015, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.7523862.0002.015>.

29 Welsch, "Animal Aesthetics",

he focuses primarily on animals and stops short of extracting the similarities and differences between the aesthetic sense developed through the course of evolution and the sense developed as a result of cultural change. On the sexual-erotic plane, Welsch reduces the aesthetic sense to a sender-receiver relationship that is strongly sex-based: males present a range of visual attributes such as the color of their fur or plumage, while females (note that in the animal world, females are not as generously endowed in this regard) select their mates based on aesthetic criteria and/or the fitness of the potential partners, in order to guarantee the best possible genes for their offspring.

This matter is more complicated in the human world, where biological factors overlap with cultural issues, leading to myriad configurations between nature and culture, or rather within natureculture (one word, emphasizing the ambivalence and simultaneous inseparability of these categories). Suffice it to mention that the physical attractiveness of a potential partner can be tied to the sexual and erotic satisfaction experienced in an act that only ends in pleasure, rather than in a sexual act that only serves to produce offspring and, from the evolutionary perspective, to ensure the survival of the species. In postmodern times, where sexual intercourse has been separated from procreation, courting the opposite sex need not be motivated by procreative goals. It should also be noted that, in different periods and cultures, courting the opposite sex was and is not exclusively the domain of men, and both women and men are known to adorn their bodies and pay attention to external attributes of attractiveness. While I warn against the error of transferring the animal (nature) onto the human (natureculture), I want merely to point out that the concern with aesthetic attributes for the purpose of attracting the opposite sex is as characteristic of humans as it is of non-human animals, but the creation of fashion, styles of dress, and the use of them as external signs of erotic and sexual attractiveness seems to be limited to humans (or has thus far only been observed in humans).

For these reasons, it is worth considering clothing and apparel as things created by people not merely for the purpose of protecting themselves against the cold and rain, but also to accentuate their erotic attractiveness. The attitude held by Westerners with regard to nakedness and clothing appears to run the gamut from acceptance to the lack of acceptance of the animal condition of humans, and is encumbered by theological, Judeo-Christian (i.e., cultural) roots, which I will attempt to demonstrate in the next part of this article.

### **Seducing with Things**

I would venture the claim that human nakedness is a-erotic. This claim can be defended by analyzing the performance piece staged by Vanessa Beecroft at

the Berlin Neue Nationalgalerie on April 8, 2005. One hundred naked women of various ages and races stood motionless, their faces expressionless, provoking consternation in the viewers, who were waiting in vain for something to occur. The women seemed completely a-erotic in their nakedness and indifference, as if the intimate tension had disappeared along with their clothing and underwear, leaving behind “nothing but nakedness”, a quality of both human and non-human animals. The sole human touch was the shoes: translucent, high-heeled pumps covering the feet, and in some cases the calves, of the women, making the characters in the performance piece appear both clothed and unclothed; naked like animals, but clothed like humans; indifferent in their posture and facial expression, and yet displaying their bodies (long legs) by wearing the right style of footwear. The women participating in an earlier Beecroft performance at London’s Gagosian Gallery (May 9, 2000) were also naked and simultaneously dressed in shoes and draped with gauze veils, as if human nakedness could only manifest itself through things, i.e., pieces of clothing.

In his examination of the problem of Western attitudes towards nudity, Giorgio Agamben finds these artistic events to be examples of theological thought, seeing the sparing and discrete use of clothing as the pursuit of a trace of the divine clothing of grace that clothed people in Paradise (they were nude, but not denuded, as their carnality was covered by clothing of grace)<sup>30</sup>. The impossibility of returning to that state, caused by the sin of Adam and Eve, and the consequent donning of loincloths of fig leaves and, later, clothing, led to the development of a close association between nudity and clothing in our culture. The problem of sin and the consciousness of human sexuality and concupiscence also implies, in the theological sense, that clothing must be worn by humans (and only be humans, not other beings) as a kind of mark. From this perspective, clothing is closely associated not only with nakedness, but also with concupiscence.

The inseparable association between clothing and human concupiscence is manifested in many erotic or even soft-core pornographic images in which men and women rarely appear completely naked. Though the women featured in photo shoots (e.g. for the “Playboy” magazine) pose without clothing, they do wear shoes, garter belts, or at least jewelry, while men appear in their underwear or wear watches on their wrists, as if “naked carnality” were less attractive, less desirable than carnality equipped with additional accessories. In this sense, it is precisely the objects – garter belts, garters, corsets, heels, etc. – that make the body desirable (and, from the religious perspective,

---

30 Agamben, *Nudities*, 57.

sinful). Many sex shops offer their customers dresses, lingerie and fishnet stockings that serve not to cover the body, but to emphasize its qualities (il. 2).



Il. 2. Display case with fishnet lingerie and dresses at a sex shop, downtown Berlin, 2012. Photo by J. Kalinowski.

These objects are designed to evoke a certain response when worn on the human (usually female) body: to arouse the senses, stimulate erotic fantasies and to increase a person's sex drive. These objects are thus ascribed a certain agency that occurs in close correlation with the human subject. Though the



objects do not initiate anything themselves, as they are not endowed with intentionality, in certain contexts, when they interact with a human who uses them and who looks at them, they can (and are designed to) provoke a certain reaction: stimulation, arousal. Meanwhile, exclusive shopping centers and lingerie manufacturers often reference notions of luxury coupled with notions of beauty and eroticism: lingerie is advertised by models whose beauty emphasizes the attractiveness of the product, which in turn emphasizes the beauty of the models (il. 3).



Il. 3. Advertisement for lingerie at a boutique in a shopping center, Berlin, 2012. Photo by J. Kalinowski



Fashion, consumerism and eroticism reinforce each other in advertising lingerie-objects, which become desirable in two ways: as luxury goods and as objects that accentuate the attractiveness of the human body.

### Conclusion

The issue of human sexuality and eroticism is not a new topic in the humanities. Earlier studies focused primarily on the differences between sex and eroticism, classifying the former as a quality of animals (including human animals), while the latter as uniquely human. This point of view is entrenched in the anthropocentric perspective, as it emphasizes the uniqueness of human eroticism when contrasted with the universal sexuality and sex drive of other species. I do not claim that these premises are false, but I would avoid drawing a clear line between that which is human and that which is animal in the sexual and erotic sphere. Research conducted by Darwin and, in turn, posthumanists, suggest that the efforts made by non-human animals to attract partners are both complex and sophisticated, and that a broad repertoire of strategies (such as colorful plumage or fur, songs and mating dances) are deployed in order to arouse the partner. From the posthumanist perspective, it is more justifiable to speak of human and non-human animals as having various (though not identical) forms of emphasizing their own attributes than to stress the dichotomy between the animal (i.e., primitive) sexual instinct and the sophisticated human erotic sense. I believe that the repertoire of human strategies used to charm and attract the interest of a partner includes the use of things/objects/accessories, and it is here that I perceive the difference between the human erotic-sexual sphere and that of non-human animals. The preliminary study of the issue, the results of which I have presented in this article, involves such objects as clothing, lingerie and shoes, but does not exhaust the repertoire of erotically marked things and accessories.

The erotic and pornographic market offers whips, handcuffs, masks and other objects used by people to enhance and add variety to their sexual experiences. Objects such as these that bear the stigma of obscenity also warrant further investigation in the future. When we write about things, we should not forget about those that now share the biological space of the body, particularly implants and prostheses. From the perspective of posthumanism and the anthropology of objects, this theme can also open up new perspectives on the relationship between people and things in the sexual-erotic sphere.

*Translation: Arthur Barys*

---

Anna Barcz

---

## Posthumanism and Its Animal Voices in Literature

---

DOI: 10.18318/td.2015.en.1.15

**W**here do we come from? Who are we? Where are we heading? Gauguin's garden – full of animals, rootstock and half-naked figures – shows the ephemeral condition of the human being, or in a more general sense, the condition of an exotic creature whose life fills the space between birth and death. Multiple human and non-human forms provoke questions about a given community, certain “us” but is this community defined solely through that which is human?

In Bruno Latour, Donna Haraway or Ewa Domańska's texts, the question about posthumanism concerns the world shared with other nonhuman beings or even things having causative functions. “What is posthumanism?” is a question which is also asked in his book by Cary Wolfe<sup>1</sup>, a well-known theoretician of culture. His response and

---

**Anna Barcz** – PhD, lecturer in the Department of English Studies in the ATH in Bielsko-Biała, collaborator of the IBL PAN. Her research interests include: ecocriticism, cultural research of animals. Co-editor of *Zwierzęta i ich ludzie* (2015). Contact: anna.barcz@gmail.com

---

1 Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010). The issue 1-2 of *Teksty Drugie* (2013) contains a chapter from this book: *Animal studies, dyscyplinarność i post(humanizm)* in Karolina Krasuska's translation. Referring to it, however, I will be forced to point to the original publication. It is worth noting that Wolfe is the author of two more books which firmly establish his approach towards posthumanism: *Critical environments* (1998) and *Animal rites* (2003) and the editor of the series *Posthumanities* in the University of Minnesota Press.

the way of thinking he suggests seem – similarly to other theoreticians working in this area – to challenge traditional, fundamental assumptions of the humanities which place the human at the top of the hierarchy, promote anthropocentrism and assume the identity built upon the belief in one's ability to create knowledge about the world. As a matter of fact, Wolfe's posthumanism differs from the rest of "post" theories. His reformatory thought is exceptionally dynamic owing to a new sensitivity mainly focused on the presence of animals in the environment, culture, history – both before and after humanism, but also on the relations between animals and people. He formulates it even more explicitly by claiming that interest in animals needs to be confronted with posthumanism not only from the perspective of the subject of cognition, but also in terms of the method of cognition<sup>2</sup>. The human, modern and emancipated subject of cognition stops being an interesting point of reference.

### Why Wolfe's Posthumanism?

As a rule, new terms do not inspire trust. Some people believe that posthumanism resembles yet another "turn" in the humanities, just like many other ones which enthusiastically reach out to interdisciplinary nooks and crannies, edges of oblivion but not yet sufficiently explored in the discourse so that an illusion of cultural progress could be maintained, while in fact are subject to the mechanism of the market focused on unique, innovative interpretations. However, this judgement would not be fair because posthumanism aims at strengthening the status of theory in contemporary knowledge of which the humanities are an integral part, and at a more understanding, universalising but not universal language. Reading Wolfe inevitably brings to mind associations with the return of the great theory. It is perhaps a legitimate connotation, although it would have been the return of a theory formulated without sentiment, cautiously, with awareness of the outcome of earlier, totalising ideologies based on rationalistic foundations. Equipped with instruments typical of the 20th-century criticism, Wolfe analyses philosophy, literature, film, music, art or even architecture. He wants to popularise a certain concept by embedding it in the knowledge necessary to survive – despite appearances, not utopian but pragmatic and penetrating the very essence of thought ("the nature of thought itself must change if it is to be posthumanist"<sup>3</sup>) – and not in the problem of the subject cultivated by humanists. According to this

---

2 Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?*, 99.

3 Ibid., XVI.

ambitious project, the “post” humanities are able to go back to both the scientific and political debate as it generated adequate critical and interpretational instruments not only to help empirical sciences provide knowledge but also to protest when they violate the well-being of multispecies ecosystems and sentient individuals<sup>4</sup>. Wolfe’s project values the culture-forming role of beings other than humans, usually not existing in the world as subjects but participating in something that could be described as the community of life.

In the introduction to his book, Wolfe discusses Foucault’s belief about the decline of man expressed in *The Order of Things* (*Les mots et les choses*). The key principle of the posthumanities – that perhaps we do not deal with human beings anymore but with their remains – stirs up most controversies and misunderstandings. At first Wolfe seems to translate it to such a model of thinking about man which cuts him off from what is nonhuman, animal, natural. Agamben does something similar in his book *Open. Human and Animal* (*L’aperto. L’uomo e l’animale*) employing the notion of the anthropological machine<sup>5</sup>. Wolfe also perceives the genesis of posthumanism in the development of cybernetics and the systems theory. These inventions pushed *homo sapiens* down from the position of a privileged being knowing how to apply meanings and convey information, and having unique cognitive skills. Still, the scholar distances himself from the cyborgian faction of posthumanism – sometimes called transhumanism – because, as he underlines, it is created in the spirit of the Enlightenment rationalism with much emphasis on the transformation of man into superman, a certain stage on the linear path to perfection as in Condorcet’s or Kant’s philosophy<sup>6</sup>. Wolfe’s view is distinctive for avoiding futurology, diagnosing the state of the humanities,

---

4 To posthumanism, prone to empathy towards animals, it is vital that all vertebrates qualify as critters who are able to experience or are aware of experiencing – cf. e.g. Andrzej Elżanowski, *The moral career of vertebrate values* in *Evolutionary ethics*, ed. Matthew H. Nitecki, Doris V. Nitecki (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993). This knowledge mainly derives from natural scientists’ findings, since animals have long been the subject of biological, zoological or ethological research. Nonetheless, basic behavioral transformations in people’s treatment of animals, raising the question of their subjectivity, decreasing their pain and stress as well as legal adjustments have been elaborated in the area of the humanities and social science which denoted cultural changes.

5 Giorgio Agamben, *L’aperto. L’uomo e l’animale*, 2002 – chapter 9 in particular. Fragments of other chapters which mention the anthropological machine were translated by Paweł Mościcki and published in *Krytyka Polityczna* 15 (2008): 124–138.

6 Jean Antoine Nicolas de Condorcet, *Szkic obrazu postępu ducha ludzkiego poprzez dzieje*, trans. Ewa Hartleb, Jan Strzelecki (Warszawa: PWN, 1957). Immanuel Kant, *Co to jest Oświecenie?*, in: *Przypuszczalny początek ludzkiej historii*, trans. Adam Landman (Toruń: Comer, 1995).

for the evolutionary approach to language, acknowledgment of the biological origins of man and non-hierarchical treatment of humans and animals. He points to earlier concepts formulated by the eighteenth-century thinker La Mettrie, who – independently of the rationalist idea of progress which being developed already at that time – wrote in his *L'Homme Machine: A Study in the Origins of an Idea (L'homme-machine)*:

The transition from animals to man is not violent, as true philosophers will admit. What was man before the invention of words and the knowledge of language? An animal of his own species with much less instinct than the others. In those days, he did not consider himself king over the other animals, nor was he distinguished from the ape, and from the rest, except as the ape itself differs from the other animals, i.e., by a more intelligent face<sup>7</sup>.

Already before Darwin, this doctor and philosopher stigmatised vanity and belief in the superiority of human nature considered as unjustified on account of biological resemblances between the two species: sensitivity to pain, suffering, the ability to feel pleasure. For that reason he wrote that both man and animal co-create the organic and sentient machine. By that he wanted to underline how much all creatures have in common when they express joy, pain or produce psychologically more complex reactions<sup>8</sup>. And what is most important, he claimed that man is like a mole – more limited in his scientific research than he/she thinks in the moments when he/she haughtily marks the borders of knowledge to what has no borders, negates animals' intelligence without which they would not be able to perform their everyday activities and despite his/her resemblance to them, he/she keeps treating them badly<sup>9</sup>.

Wolfe must not be accused of being insensitive to the culture-forming function of memory in the contemporary humanities. He repeatedly stresses that the posthumanities do not reject but rather accept their historical dimension – contrary to e.g. Katherine Hayles with whom he often disputes in *What is Posthumanism?*<sup>10</sup>. Hayles, whose book *How we Became Posthuman* was published earlier than Wolfe's work, opts for separating informational reality

7 Julien Offray de La Mettrie, *Man a Machine*, trans. Gertrude Carman Bussey (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Co., 1912), <https://archive.org/details/manmachineoolame>.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?*, e.g. 120–122.

from bodily reality. According to her concept, following the creation of advanced computer “electronic prostheses”, the subject functions more fully in virtual reality which contributes to the failure of the liberally comprehended individuality. Hayles mainly concentrates on the development of technologies (Hans Moravec’s robotics) and speculations over the consciousness separated from the body in science fiction literature (in Philip Dick’s stories, among others)<sup>11</sup>.

Wolfe’s posthumanism emerges from the reflection re-evaluated through the experience of the human tragedies of the last century. The scholar deliberately follows this approach without exposing his method. It is not surprising, therefore, that his theory seems as if it aspired to alter ethical attitudes. Wolfe does not reject the recurring reflection concerning memory, trauma and sacrifice; he does not assess which of these categories are more or less critical to the human condition *hic et nunc* in the traditional humanities. Instead, he tries to show or remind us with subtlety that these notions are not reserved for man only. Hence his posthumanism is somehow the result of the remorse accelerated by inhuman crimes revealing evil in mankind; it is the sign of *katharsis*, atonement stemming from the natural need of adjusting to the changeable reality. This inhuman and sinister dimension of man also concerns the world which humans share with nonhuman animals. It is about a new alternative for the rationally legitimised rule of man over other creatures – an alternative expressed in a different, less emotional language than in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Such well-grounded critique of humanism appears to be most accurate from the ethical and political point of view because the culture-forming role of humanism in maintaining the anthropocentric perspective “validates whatever serves human interests and, as a consequence, projectively situates other animals, or animality in general (including the animal in the human being), in the position of bare life, raw material, or scapegoated victims”<sup>12</sup>. Through posthumanism, the meaning of what is human dissolves in favour of the ramification of the human in the nonhuman language understood here as an evolutionary construct reflecting pre- or postanthropocentric recesses – free of reflection and introspection of the critical subject in humanism<sup>13</sup>. Man, as underlined by Wolfe, evolved from various nonhuman and unhumanizable forms, hence the component of

11 Katherine N. Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago-London: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

12 Dominick LaCapra, *History and Its Limits: Human, Animal, Violence* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2009), 151.

13 Cf. Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?*, 122.

nonhuman otherness is permanently present in him/her. The posthumanist approach, therefore, exhibits a new genetic perspective – first taken up by Jacques Derrida in his *L'Animal que donc je suis* and *La bête et le souverain*, then continued by Wolfe – which raises questions about nonhuman or prehuman ancestors of man understood both literally and metaphorically, existentially. It is about such aspects of man and such relations between humans and animals which grew into culture and history, creating new constellations, new comprehension of existence in the world; and about such thinking which is now heard through numerous voices not at all reserved for humans – this is clearly visible in literature and animal narrations. Posthumanism admits other than human voices if they are constitutive to man who is in a stable relationship with them. Even the voice itself – always belonging to an individual – is not human by nature. According to Wolfe, this approach opposes the domination of the most human of all senses: sight, which may demonstrate the loss of the world's vision based on its visual side<sup>14</sup>.

Wolfe does not primarily interpret the prefix “post” as something that is “after” despite its meaning in Latin: “coming after”. The critique of humanism as a radical anthropological dogma which – in order to function with stability – requires extraction of human nature in the form that is immaterial, incorporeal and separate from nature, points to another Latin meaning of “post”, suggesting that *beyond* and *beside* humanism there exist alternatives. We are not the only ones to use symbolic language<sup>15</sup>. We are simply at such a stage of evolution when we have made language not only an effective instrument of power and ideology which sanctions human domination over other species but also an exceptional tool of art and understanding of the world around us. This duality is present in Wolfe's posthumanism but it does not prevent him from challenging the key normative idea of humanism, i.e. human

14 Ibid., 169–202 (the chapter in which Wolfe interprets the function of the voice in the film *Dancer in the Dark*).

15 Cf. research on teaching animals the language which gave astonishing effects in the case of: Rico, a Border Collie about which Cary Wolfe writes in *Thinking other-wise. Cognitive science, deconstruction and the (non) speaking (non) human subject in Animal subjects: an ethical reader in a posthuman world*, ed. Jodey Castricano, (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008), 127–128; Kanzi, a bonobo, a female gorilla Koko, the orangutan Chantek and common bottle-nose dolphins: Phoenix and Akeakamai described by David DeGrazia in *On the Question of Personhood beyond Homo sapiens in In Defense of Animals*, ed. Peter Singer (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 48. Accessed July 5, 2015, [http://sites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic983317.files/Readings%20October%2026/AgainstZoos\\_DaleJamieson.pdf](http://sites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic983317.files/Readings%20October%2026/AgainstZoos_DaleJamieson.pdf). Linguistic competences demonstrated by these animals are so high that researchers do not hesitate to admit that they actually use a symbolic language. They are also exceptional cases within their species. If they had human vocal cords, they would probably speak to us with their own voice.

subjectivity which usually reinforces discrimination of nonhuman animals and disabled humans. At the same time, this leads him neither to naturalisation of consciousness – close to the assumptions of modern cognitivism and philosophy of mind – nor to transhumanism proposed by Hayles.

In any case, being critical is not the only element of posthumanism – important because it leads to a pursuit of new forms of expression and literary strategies which take into account and affirm other subjects of life; strategies shedding new light on literature. This proposition is also different from the ones put forward by Hayles, Haraway or Latour. In *How we Became Posthuman*, Hayles privileges the informational dimension of the posthuman over the material one which leads to the futurological reflection regarding the impact of cybernetics on the immaterialised human existence and this approach is often confused with transhumanism. Haraway – certainly closer in her thought to Wolfe – discloses a palpable evolution of views in her book *When Species Meet*: from the cyborg to the reflection on inter-species encounters. First, she rejects humanism due to its non-emancipatory character (the cyborg demonstrated the desintegration of a certain arrangement of the body, sex and social class) to indicate subsequently the absence or even inabsorbability of the idea of love and partnership between biological species – which she experiences herself in her relations with dogs<sup>16</sup>. Latour, on the other hand, focuses on the narration of the twilight of modernism, the criticism of the ideologisation of nature and the decline of the idea of representation in developed democratic human societies; criticism which encourages opening of the heretofore anthropocentric society to other species of both plants and animals. Transformation of the human political system will locate man within the framework of a new collective (not a society any more) in which humans and nonhumans will be capable of creating “associations”, i.e. newly interpreted communities organised around environmental interests also understood in terms of non-anthropocentric goals<sup>17</sup>. This also explains the need to modify the language, to re-define the terms which will level up the political, the social and the natural. Obviously, these are not all propositions of changes that radically reject what traditionally belongs to humanism, i.e. what is human.

16 Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis-London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); cf. also Joanna Żylińska's article *Bioetyka inaczej, czyli o tym jak współżyć z maszynami, ludźmi i innymi zwierzętami*, to a large extent being a commentary to Haraway's ideas expressed in the above-mentioned book; the Polish translation of the article is reprinted in *Teksty Drugie* 1-2 (2013).

17 Among others, *Polityka natury. Nauki wkraczają do demokracji*, trans. Agata Czarnacka; introduction: Maciej Gdula (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2009).



Other authors who work on the theory of evolution – such as Elizabeth Grosz – also share the conclusion that man only constitutes a certain stage, unfinished and unready, in a lengthy process of changes<sup>18</sup>. There also scholars who use biographical narration to show the act of passing from *bios* to *zoe* which means that the category of life eliminates the subjective “I” from the centre of reflection in favour of the relation between bodies, species and machines<sup>19</sup>.

All those proposals, diversely privileging the posthumanist reflection, provide Wolfe with a significant context but are not sufficient to explain the need to claim posthumanism as an independent direction. Wolfe himself accentuates the variety of subjects of life – including the nonhuman ones – however, he also points out that the act of placing man in the world of technology plays a different role than his biocultural heritage and the consequences of the humanistically defined world<sup>20</sup>. Technologies benefit the exchange of information but what makes machines different from animals and humans is their inability to participate in the reality of organic life in which the act of hurting a living creature, although isolated, escapes the possibility or ability of articulation. This wound – often bloody, evoking cruelty and control of one over another – will separate the living from the merely functioning. And, even though life itself is too broad of a problem to research, posthumanism represented by Wolfe is about what is alive, feels and increasingly shares our experiences, both constitutive for man and the ones beyond him/her but staying in relation with him/her. That is the reason why mediation of animals is so important in this theory – mediation associated with development of animal studies which, to Wolfe, are meaningful methodologically as they reform the humanities and practices within the literary studies<sup>21</sup>.

18 Elizabeth Grosz, *The Nick of Time. Politics, Evolution and the Untimely* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); ead. *Becoming Undone. Darwinian Reflections on Life, Politics and Art* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

19 Cf. the entire issue of *Biography* vol. 1, no. 35 (2012).

20 Here the point is neither about the concept of man perceived as a defective being for whom technologies are the necessary supplement. Wolfe ceaselessly emphasises the impossible to maintain normative category of an independent human subject.

21 Monika Bakke was the first Polish scholar to write about the need to introduce this discipline, inspired also by Wolfe but above all by the development of animal studies abroad. At the same time, she underlined that the greatest obstacle on the way to carry out this undertaking in Poland is the lack of seriousness in treating animals as subjects of research (beside the empirical studies) – cf. Monika Bakke, “Studia nad zwierzętami: od aktywizmu do akademii i z powrotem?”, *Teksty Drugie* 3 (2011): 193–204.

### Bridge to Reality

In opposition to literary Darwinism desiring to “rescue” the literary studies from the “catastrophe” of poststructuralism, particularly by means of Joseph Carroll<sup>22</sup>, posthumanism is not that radical or it does not formulate such radical objectives. This is not to say that the theory of evolution and Darwin’s thought did not influence the forming of posthumanism. Among the important consequences of Darwinism which are significant to the theory discussed in this article, it is worth to mention the role of empathy, the raising of questions about ethics in relations with animals, extending the meaning of moral harm onto animals, using critical anthropomorphism in presenting them and the entire stream of the achievements of empirical studies which affected not only the change of the animals’ status but also practices of analysing and reading of texts of culture in which they appear. Posthumanism is the only contemporary intellectual direction to suggest that the previous vision of the Euro-American humanities with the central category of the human subject does not offer any alternative to nonhuman areas being under the hegemony of the human kind. By attacking anthropocentrism and species chauvinism, it mirrors the avant-garde intuition in thinking about the relation between man and the rest of the world, especially nature. What is questioned here is not only the line separating us from the nonhuman world but the separatedness itself, the emancipation of the human subject from other culturally unrecognizable subjectivities. And the assumptions concerning the ontological liquidity or the mystical identification and equalisation of all beings are unnecessary. It is man – multidimensional, relational in his/her existence in the world which makes him/her unexceptional because he/she experiences finiteness in its physical, material and mortal aspect – who still remains a model of others’ cultural inclusion due to his/her developed skills in managing instruments of expression, also the finite ones, whose functionality and otherness is so strongly underlined by Wolfe. The technological and nonhuman nature of the language, always being in a certain relation with the world, less often undergoes a reflection, while it turns out that notions, constructs, narratives and any linguistic entities that we perceive as “ours” are actually not ours which is also a kind of experience<sup>23</sup>. The feeling of strangeness in language, culture or nature entails the feeling of constant mediation. The animal’s appearance brings back the ability to experience reality and enables the reconstruction of our bonds with the outside world making it culturally significant. Thanks to external

22 Cf. Krzysztof Kłosiński, “Literaturoznawczy darwinizm”, *Teksty Drugie* 3 (2011), 33–51.

23 Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* 89 (in the context of the other subjectivity) and 119.

instruments, animals seem the closest, the most special connectors, mediators between people and the impersonal world of nature – and their anthropomorphisation also serves this purpose<sup>24</sup>. Anthropomorphisation, however, appears differently in the empirical discourse than in the literary one. Literature or art may have effects on the aesthetic level; it can still be a specific road to cognition because what cannot be gleaned with the help of discursive arguments, penetrates through imagination via an as if separate, nontheoretical channel.

So far, the goal of the reflection about animals in culture has been to discover something noteworthy about human nature. Posthumanism repudiates such an approach. The animal ceases to be a mirror of human desires, passions, anomalies; a carrier of permanent features of the moralistic character – like in fairy tales; it does not symbolise the world of humanist values any more mainly because it becomes a specific, individually characterised hero, a persona hiding a real creature behind the mask. In the posthumanist perspective, literature tries to abandon the notion of a person limited to a human being and expand research to other subjects of communication, while looking in people for something that allows us to receive information, signals, and stimuli from other nonhumans or that is an obstacle in communication with nonhuman individuals<sup>25</sup>. Simultaneously, it is implied that animals are much more strongly present in the reflection than in everyday life as modernity contributed to the elimination of the representation of the wild and the uncivilised from the human domain which, consequently, enabled the development of various technologies<sup>26</sup>. In this respect, the return of animals is also the return of the Other who arouses interest and enforces being referenced to but cannot be completely familiarised. Thus, numerous methods of anthropomorphisation in literature – when people and the language of their experiences become an intellectual model for animals – aim at not only bringing animals back to thinking (about them and with them) but also letting us understand them better, grasp what they feel and experience, see whether and how to come into contact with them. All this evokes our reflection which unveils another life – perhaps similar to ours, though not embedded in the complex system of notions. Questions such as “what is it like to be

24 It is possible that the animal resembles a medium in Régis Debray's broad understanding presented in his *Introduction à la médiologie* (2000), and although it is not there literally, it may participate in conveying culturally significant information.

25 Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?*, 115–118.

26 Akira Mizuta Lippit, *Electric Animal: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 2–3.

a bat"<sup>27</sup> hitherto considered as nonsense and reduced to absurd, especially in the field of analytical philosophy and its thriving branch – philosophy of mind – particularly when they are comprehended solely from the zoomorphic point of view (what is it like for a bat to be a bat or whether a human can have a neurophysiological structure of this mammal<sup>28</sup>), have a certain cognitive value, if we take into consideration the language of comparative psychology of animals and the possibility of reconstructing conscious, but not subjective, experiences of other forms of life<sup>29</sup>.

The majority of authors agree that anthropomorphism has a critical and sentimental tradition but thanks to the development of scientific research on the cognitive processes animals and the increasing awareness related with environmental ethics, anthropomorphisation began to be the expression of the need to understand and predict the behaviour of other animals. It also reflects the biological conditioning of a human being and the actual similarities between human and non-human animals. Natural sciences interpret the evolutionary continuity between people and other animals their own way but literature – which is devoid of such ambitions – considerably adds to the popularisation of their proper understanding, contributing to cultural changes in human-animal relations which inevitably go side by side with scientific diagnoses. This is, however, neither about comparing the humanities and empirical studies nor about the adequacy of rising “the question of animals” in the interdisciplinary perspective but about a response to what new and unique qualities may be introduced to this issue by a given discipline. This is why Wolfe states that, in this case, what is more accurate is transdisciplinarity understood as filtering the reflection through diverse discourses as well as deepening and a more acute analysis of issues that are common to all of them<sup>30</sup>.

### The Functions of Animal Narratives

Literature provides evidence that, contrary to the biological taxonomy, animals do not appear in the form of sponges, i.e. the first organisms belonging

27 Thomas Nagel, “What is It Like to Be a Bat?”, *Philosophical Review* 83 (1974), accessed July 5, 2015, [http://faculty.arts.ubc.ca/maydede/mind/Nagel\\_Whatisitliketobeabat.pdf](http://faculty.arts.ubc.ca/maydede/mind/Nagel_Whatisitliketobeabat.pdf), 435-450.

28 Ibid.

29 Cf. Lorraine Daston, *Intelligences: Angelic, Animal, Human in Thinking with Animals: New Perspectives on Animals*, ed. Lorraine Daston, Gregg Mitman, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 39-40.

30 Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?*, 118.

to the great animal kingdom and neighbouring with the plant world (the former name for a zoophyte suggests the permeation of these forms), but to a great extent they appear in the form of birds and, most often, mammals because these animals accompany humans most of the time and mean something to them. These are animals with which humans build relationships based on friendship and affirmation of their presence in the human world and also on exploitation and violence. Their anthropomorphisation is not subject to human expression, while species representation turns out to be of secondary importance – this is why they function between the world of humans and nonhumans. It is visible in selected animal narratives by Kafka, Bulgakov, Rilke and Zaniewski. Making an animal the narrator of a story or its fragments, attempting to record its thoughts or present something characteristic to it by referring to the senses that are peculiar to it to a greater extent (e.g. the sense of smell sensitive to stimuli), transferring animal behaviour to activities which require intellectual activities (a dog fond of “digging” in the past<sup>31</sup>), hierarchically perceived space (looking up to man) – these are not the only convincing strategies that individualise animals but most they are the ones that are most often applied. Significantly, their individuality and uniqueness may be but does not have to be confirmed by a human hero.

A key feature of animal literary narratives is realistic stylisation, often full of details aimed at recreating as much as possible from the world unknown to people from the inside as they observe it from the outside, that is from the anthropocentric point of view. One example of a detailed description whose role is to make the world seen and experienced by an animal more probable to a human but also to make it impossible for a human recipient to metaphorise it, can be found in Andrzej Zaniewski's *Rat*. The author has put a lot of effort to get acquainted with these animals which enabled him to present the world which alternately evokes pity, sympathy, disgust and, what is important, the world resisting allegorisation in the context of the human fate, despite the fact that their existence is strongly interlocked with the human one:

This book is both a fact-based description and a tale, a legend so cruel and uncanny, grey and painful like a rat's life and by that it is probable. The community of rodents, living next to us, literally under our feet, has accompanied us throughout centuries, participating in our prosperity and our poverty, in peace and war<sup>32</sup>.

31 Franz Kafka, *Investigations of a Dog* (New York: Schocken Books Inc, 1971), accessed July 2, 2015, [http://www.vanderbilt.edu/olli/class-materials/Franz\\_Kafka.pdf](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/olli/class-materials/Franz_Kafka.pdf).

32 Andrzej Zaniewski, *Rat*, (Warszawa: Kopia, 1995), 13 [translation mine].

Beginning with all spaces, often co-shared with people but inhabited and colonised by these animals, through events, experiences and expectations fit into the frames of a biographical novel, which sound so realistically that it is hard to read any other meaning to them than the literal one – although there were more attempts at allegorical readings – we are shifted to the rat's real world of murmuring pipes, waterworks, wild animals, abandoned warehouses, holes, traps, whiskers sensitive to touch and warm, female nests. Dangers to which rats are constantly exposed and the unmitigated desire to survive evoke associations with naturalistic literature but are not meant to illustrate human fate through the figure of a rat despite its anthropomorphisation – as it more plausibly happens in Dygasiński's works<sup>33</sup>. Thus, it may be worth asking a question here about the boundaries of even the most realistic animal literariness; on the one hand, about the possibility of confronting their representation with the reality beyond the text which is proposed by the scientific discourse<sup>34</sup>, on the other hand, about the capability of imagining and emphasising by the agency of the text that which happens in the animal world.

In this context, a remarkable example leading the entire group of animal narrators in "serious" literature is Red Peter from Kafka's story *A Report to an Academy*. The humanised ape, standing in front of the mentioned but absent professors representing a metaphorical tribunal of science, long before the paradigm change in the 1960s studies on primates, reveals the complexity and ambivalence of the process of its transformation into *homo sapiens*. Only under the influence of female researchers: Jane Goodall who was occupied with chimpanzees, Dian Fossey with gorillas and Birutė Galdikas with orangutans, and thanks to these women the bias towards these animals was reduced, at least theoretically. They were the first to examine primates in their natural environment without the burden of their usual academic practices, treating animals personally, giving them names, recognising their individual traits of character and discovering the unique personalities of each specimen they were in contact with.

In Kafka's story, Red Peter gives away the origin of his name – it derives from a scar he got at the moment of his capture but it turns out that the name is completely inappropriate and fails to represent his nature<sup>35</sup>. The main

33 Cf. the author's introduction to the novel – Zaniewski, *Rat*, 7–14.

34 Cf. also the introduction by Susan McHugh to her book *Animal Stories. Narrating across Species Lines* (Minneapolis-London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 1–23. Throughout her publication, the author suggests that animal literature builds our knowledge about other species and is the example of "narrative ethology".

35 Franz Kafka, *A Report to an Academy*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (Schocken Books Inc.), accessed July 2, 2015, <http://www.kafka.org/index.php?aid=161>.

character recounts his horrendous journey from the Gold Coast to Europe which he spent locked in a narrow and dark cage. For the first time in his life he felt that there is no way out which made him realise that he is a wild animal. In order to survive, it was necessary to stop being an ape. The abstract and typically human freedom is deliberately not spoken of – the narrator speaks of “a way out”, escape from the captivity. Due to the fact that people on the ship were not – in his understanding – cruel to him, he begins to learn by imitation, just like a human child. This resembles apes’ behaviour in contemporary reserves and research centres whose employees know how to gain the trust of animals for didactic purposes: “I did not think things out; but I observed everything quietly. I watched these men go to and fro, always the same faces, the same movements, often it seemed to me there was only the same man”<sup>36</sup>. Effectively, people seemed uninteresting to him but they were easy to imitate. This fragment, perversely diverting animals’ perception of man, may also reflect the lack of perspective which individualises representatives of another species which is characteristic of people’s mutual perception of each other – at least in developed Western societies. A breakthrough occurs when Red Peter drinks schnapps and utters a “human” shout owing to which he enters the human community that, as it turns out, has little to offer to a humanised ape: instead of the zoological garden, the main character chooses the variety stage as his final destination.

The story sheds a gloomy light on the period of African colonisation and the practice of bringing exotic animals to Europe. In a way, it gives us much more knowledge about primates than we had almost a hundred years ago when Kafka wrote his bitter report, exhibiting deformation and depravation of the wild animal through its humanisation. The very figure of Red Peter first of all illustrates the cynicism related with his acceptance in human culture: after shows and banquets, there sits waiting for him “a half-trained little chimpanzee” serving to satisfy his physical desires: “By day I cannot bear to see her; for she has the insane look of a bewildered half-broken animal in her eye; no one else sees it, but I do, and I cannot bear it”<sup>37</sup>. Łukasz Musiał suggests that this text is to be considered “the history of anthropogenesis in a nutshell”<sup>38</sup>. The human side of Red Peter is born through radical elimination or negation of the animal side, like in Agamben’s *The Open*. Despite the possible philosophical interpretation, the story is bizarre, completely impossible with regard to its ending, however its realistic components – an ape imitating human

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Łukasz Musiał, „ZwierzoczęłokoKafka”, *Konteksty* 4 (287) (2009), 70.

gestures and performing in the cabaret, self-aware and inclined to introspection – create an equivocal parallel. On the one hand, the same components point to modern research conducted by primatologists and ethologists, especially on primates' intellect, resulting in postulates concerning animals' basic rights such as the right to live, freedom and the prohibition of torture<sup>39</sup>, on the other hand, they remind us that apes are located in zoos, circuses, i.e. in labs serving people's interests, while their natural environment is even worse because to animals which survived till now, almost every man they encounter is a poacher. Red Peter enters the human world as if reflected in a distorting mirror because, in fact, there is no appropriate place in it for these developed mammals which are closest to people. Man either plays with them or tyrannises them – Kafka's character is fully aware of that when looking in the eyes of his half-wild, enslaved partner from the human, studied perspective.

A story similar to that of Red Peter, as it also concerns the transformation of an animal, although it unfolds in different circumstances and is extremely unsuccessful, is told in Bulgakov's tale – until the moment of a true metamorphosis – by a dog living in Moscow, accidentally called Sharik. At the beginning of the story, the character finds himself in a particularly unpleasant situation – he is howling in a gateway having been scalded by a cook from the proletarian canteen. Interestingly enough, Sharik perfectly knows the political reality of the surrounding world and mordantly complains about the "rational" improvements introduced by the equality system:

Dustmen are the lowest form of proletarian life. The dregs of the society, the most inferior category of humanity. Cooks vary – for instance, there was Vlas from Prechistenka, who is dead now. He saved I do not know how many lives of dogs [...] God rest his soul, a gentleman's cook who worked for Count Tolstoy's family and not for your stinking Food Rationing Board<sup>40</sup>.

A man called Philip Philipovich Preobrazhensky (the surname!), an outstandingly elegant and well-mannered professor from the upper classes, takes the dog under his roof. The dog sees it in his eyes that it is an exceptional man who will not hurt him and will feed him: "Eyes mean a lot. Like a barometer. They tell you everything – they tell you who has a heart of stone, who would poke the toe of his boot in your ribs as soon as they look at you – and who is

39 Cf. scientific and ethical premises as well as the criteria conditioning primates to be considered as persons according to "World declaration on great primates", accessed July 4, 2015, <http://www.projetogap.org.br/en/world-declaration-on-great-primates/>.

40 Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Heart of a Dog*, trans. Michael Glenny, accessed June 28, 2015, <http://www.masterandmargarita.eu/archieven/tekstenbulgakov/heartdog.pdf>, 2.



afraid of you"<sup>41</sup>. The refined scholar decoys Sharik to his home with the help of a sausage and bandages his wound – the dog, as most dogs would do, shows resistance because he does not know what will be done to him:

The dog opened a languid right eye and saw out of its corner that he was tightly bandaged all around his flanks and belly. So those sons of bitches did cut me up, he thought dully, but I must admit they have made a neat job of it<sup>42</sup>.

It turns out that to his new home, the professor's flat, people come to seek advice on various, most intimate problems. The dog observes patients but also the problems with the proletarian flat committee which his new protector has, claiming that he uses too many rooms of his apartment. Fattened, the dog starts to believe that he is very lucky. For the first time he has walked out in a dog-collar:

The dog trotted along like a prisoner under arrest, burning with shame, but as he walked along Prechistenka Street as far as the church of Christ the Saviour he soon realised exactly what a collar means in life. Mad envy burned in the eyes of every dog he met and at Myortvy Street a shaggy mongrel with a docked tail barked at him that he was a "master's pet" and a "lackey"<sup>43</sup>.

His good fortune ends soon, for he undergoes a bizarre operation. Human organs are transplanted into the dog: the testicles and the pituitary gland. Notes made by the assisting doctor report on the dog's transformation into a man called Sharikov. In his new body, he starts to behave in a vulgar way, he curses and spits, he organises drinking bouts – all this is later justified by the organs coming from a drunkard and a thief but has nothing to do with Sharik – the dog's former life in the streets. It turns out that the pituitary gland eventually affects one's personality. Sharikov cannot be humanised, i.e. civilised and taught good manners. It reminds the professor of the lack of culture presented by Bolsheviks from the flat committee, hence he considers his experiment as unsuccessful and useless. He explains to the investigating officers who want to arrest him for killing a man that science still does not know a good method to transform an animal into a man because he spoke a bit but finally went back

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 15.

to his original form: before the officers came, the professor decided to give a dog's pituitary gland back to Sharik. The story ends with an image of the dog lying calmly and happily in the scientist's warm and cosy flat, not knowing that his master by no means intends to stop experimenting.

It seems that in Bulgakov's story "the very transformation, described in a quite sketchy manner, is [...] a conventional idea serving the moral and political satire"<sup>44</sup>. This is why both the dog hero and partially the narrator could be subordinated to this purpose. Sharik, depicted with the use of the realistic convention – full of social details – resembles an ordinary dog but on account of the stream of consciousness technique which presents his life as very fortunate, the rescued mongrel attains – sometimes funny – individual traits and evidently and inimitably blends into the reality of Bolshevik Russia. Fantastic experiments conducted in a private flat, due to their extreme nature, are a separate motif in themselves although it is not neutral in the context of the reflection about the animal being the subject of these experiments. Essentially, the concept of the transformation itself is worthy of our attention. It results in creating a human being with the eponymous dog's heart who, by bearing resemblance to a Bolshevik, proves to be completely undesirable in the noble environment of the Professor. Human intrusion, which turns out to be senseless, reveals that even a trustful and pure heart of a dog is not able to resist it and change into a human without losing its animal, distinct personality portrayed with a great deal of fondness at the beginning of the tale. The realm constitutes a significant background to articulate something important not only by the dog hero but also about himself, on the margin of human matters.

In Kafka's *Investigations of a Dog*, another dog-narrator, this time a nameless one, speaks about his world from the point of view of a researcher who tries to resolve "dog" mysteries – for instance, where food comes from when it falls down from above – and on this occasion, goes into more complex communication issues. In his argument, people are consciously omitted. The character is different from other dogs and seems to be special among other animals, although he is aware of the conditions of living in a pack. It seems that the boundaries of his world, in accordance with Wittgenstein's *Treatise*, are marked by the language and ability to communicate with other dogs: "For what is there actually except our own species? To whom beside this species can one appeal in the wide and empty world? All knowledge, the totality of all questions and all answers, is contained in the dog"<sup>45</sup>. He is interested in

44 Janina Abramowska, *Pisarze w zwierzyńcu* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2010), 100 [translation mine].

45 Kafka, *Investigations of a Dog*, 321.

the dog's nature, culturally perceived as submissive and mute, but the more he thinks about it, the more acutely does he discover his loneliness and the more difficult it is for him to initiate contact with another specimen: "he gazes at me dully, wondering why I am silent and why I have broken off the conversation. But perhaps that very glance is his way of questioning me, and I disappoint him just as he disappoints me"<sup>46</sup>. These doubts, concerning any verbal and non-verbal communication whatsoever, show difficulties in building a relationship. A dog may be just as well lonely because, in the end, he is a social animal, even if we do not have sufficient knowledge on how he *de facto* communicates with other members of his pack. In Kafka's *Investigations of a Dog*, the author tries to prove that in the non-human world, an animal may be a conscious centre of thoughts and feelings, a remarkably isolated individual in spite of belonging to a species characterised by living in groups. In the story told by the dog, there are also attempts to include in the narrative the senses that are typically keen for his species: smell, hearing and touch. The final confession of the main character – that he appreciates freedom – is aimed at emphasising his autonomy which he misses so much not only in his "dog" world but also in the human one.

Musiał notices that even human characters in Kafka's stories are not completely human as they are prone to all types of corporeal degeneration<sup>47</sup>. They feel guilty and have dilemmas in view of the dark depths of the body, obscure affects. In other words, what resonates here is nonhuman because it is strange and unfamiliar to a human being. That is one of the ways to explain the multitude of Kafka's animal and hybrid characters. What is striking, however, is why all animals described above – Zaniewski's rat, Bulgakov's Sharik or Kafka's ape and dog – depicted by means of an inherently realistic convention and unpupated, seem to represent, convincingly and earnestly, the animal world which is probably to a lesser or greater extent hidden by the veil of human ignorance.

We find a similar problem in Kafka's short story entitled *The Burrow*<sup>48</sup> where the narrative is developed by an animal unknown to the taxonomy of species. What we know about it is that it digs itself into the ground, ceaselessly guards its shelter, and is vigilant and skittish. Due to its naturalism, the story resembles Zaniewski's *Rat* which differs from the hitherto promoted pattern of the story about man. In its reading, preceded by the posthumanist critique

<sup>46</sup> Kafka, *Investigations of a Dog*, 332.

<sup>47</sup> Musiał, *ZwierzoćlekoKafka*, 72.

<sup>48</sup> Franz Kafka, *The Burrow* (New York: Schocken Books Inc, 1971), accessed July 2, 2015, [http://www.vanderbilt.edu/olli/class-materials/Franz\\_Kafka.pdf](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/olli/class-materials/Franz_Kafka.pdf).

of anthropocentrism and the related approach restricting the discriminating power of the language, at least with regard to the species affinity of the hero, both animal characters may say something “from the heart” about their feeling of no right to a piece of land, the desire to live in a safe place which they are deprived of, being constantly menaced by other predators including the most dangerous of them all: man. Their narration either contradicts stereotypes associated by people with a given species, as in the case of *The Rat*, or the species stops being a significant point of reference, like in *The Burrow* where it gets blurred and consequently, retrieves the content from the rule of the senses. Kafka’s “burrow” and rat’s den, idyllically co-shared with the first and most important family, are testimony of the crucial role of place and shelter in the narratives of anthropomorphised animals but also reflect general needs of other sentient creatures which man can emphasise and which man can imagine through the language of literary transmission.

### **The Animal Closer than the Angel**

Human narratives about animals, even these closest to them, such as the biography of the cocker spaniel Flush proudly described by Virginia Woolf or a detailed observation of the pointer Bashan in Thomas Mann’s story *A Man and His Dog*, rather confirm the current hierarchical world in which animals, despite being admired and loved, are eventually subordinate to people. This is why it is worth to mention *A Meeting (Eine Begegnung)* – Rilke’s short sketch in which “the dog all at once appears, like a sudden thought”<sup>49</sup>, closer than an angel because it is real, material and persistently accompanying any man he accidentally comes across.

This narration, quite surprising by its short form, tells a great deal about relations between people and animals on the basis of the example of dogs living in their proximity. As presented by Rilke, even though the animal is busy with its “lower” activities, it keeps accompanying any passer-by selflessly and without a specific reason, according to its nature. It would seem that it is a quite typical situation showing the man and the dog as simplified character types who pursue – albeit for different reasons – reciprocity which looks like a philosophical parable.

The text underlines the dog’s emotions and enthusiasm with exclamation marks thanks to which man is distinguished as well. At some point, the dog

49 Rainer Maria Rilke, *A Meeting in Ahead of All Parting: The Selected Poetry and Prose of Rainer Maria Rilke*, trans. Stephen Mitchell (New York: The Modern Library, 1995), accessed on July 10, 2015, <http://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/154354/ahead-of-all-parting-by-rainer-maria-rilke/>, 283.

manages to stop a passer-by: "The excitement in the dog's eyes changes into embarrassment, doubt, alarm. If the man does not know what should come, how can it come? – Both of them have to know; only then will it come"<sup>50</sup>. The dog tries to look this man in the eyes. Their meeting is cast in the style of a conversation carried on in their minds. They confront, their eyes are fixed on each other which makes the dog begin to fawn, completely subordinated: "I'd like to do something for you. I'd like to do anything for you. Anything"<sup>51</sup>. In spite of the man's reluctance, the animal does not give up, wishing to endear himself to the man using all his creativity (not able to find anything valuable, he picks up a stone in his mouth). At the same time, the man inconclusively appeals to the dog's reason asking him to stop, even though the dog is overcome with emotions: devotion and the need of reciprocity. The man turns to him as to a partner but the dog: "is accompanying him, unobtrusively, devotedly, without an opinion of his own, the way a dog follows his master"<sup>52</sup>. The man realises that he would like to treat the dog as someone equal to him, rejecting the animal's natural proneness to submission. He asks the dog to go away and in order to make sure that he leaves him behind, he starts to run because that is the only way – urgent and surely obnoxious – to get rid of it. Eventually, however, when the dog is gone, he realises that he would be keen to talk with the animal as he would do with an unknown person – out of the "indescribable" yearning for a radically strange person but who might turn out to be close. This unconfirmed presentiment probably stemmed from the human character's loneliness. In such moments, animals often appear to be the closest friends, most devoted to us regardless of what we think about them. Similarly, anthropomorphisation may paradoxically unveil a conviction that we do not know much about them, so we confer human traits on them. Still, this closeness makes us anthropomorphise them because it seems to us that we know and understand what they feel<sup>53</sup>. Every time we take a certain risk, as in *A Meeting's* ending, when "there is no one to be seen", the dog or any other nonhuman animal.

---

<sup>50</sup> Rilke, *A Meeting*, 283.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 286..

<sup>53</sup> There is interesting related research on guardians of animals, particularly dogs and cats, who perceive animals as conscious and reasonable creatures that people can talk to and they understand; these people can also verbalise what animals under their custody feel – cf. Clinton R. Sanders, Arnold Arluke, *Speaking for dogs in: The animals reader. The essential classic and contemporary writings*, ed. Linda Kalof, Amy Fitzgerald, 61-71.

### Conclusion

Animal characters' narratives enforce a reflection upon several new matters, especially in the context of Wolfe's thought. A question is posed: what about the rejected human subject in whose speech even earlier one could hear an echo – so natural, albeit drowned out – of what is nonhuman, animal-like? Is it not so that human subjectivity, even in a weak sense, serves here as an instrument, a mediatory agent in conveying messages from other creatures, since their voice is uttered in other languages? Then the above-mentioned texts of animal narratives would function as a translation, an attempt to demonstrate the possible capacity of literary subjectivity which is not at all equal to the human one only but, in its essence, is posthuman or not only human<sup>54</sup>. Hence, entering the field of a literary text which necessarily affirms the non-human, always using tools *e x t e r n a l* to man and other animals such as the constructed language, we open up to possible mediation in literature but also in a broader context – in the language of art – to other points of view. Despite the technological nature of the language and the feeling of its alienation, animal narratives may be an example of familiarising these strange elements within which we function and which – by means of another stylised voice – give the possibility to go beyond the narrowly defined world of selfish human kind.

Summarising critical tendencies characteristic of posthumanism, Ewa Domańska wrote that nowadays, a “narcissistic” human subject is subject to criticism and the human community and collectives are increasingly spoken of as they are associations of humans and nonhumans but also a popular view is that man is a guest in this world, not its master<sup>55</sup>. The same situation applies to a text or any other product of culture which involves an animal narrative in the form of a nonhuman perspective. These texts are special for their hospitality – a nonhuman story representing realistically depicted animals contains a model of non-domination of man over text. Giving voice to animal characters brings the sense of environmentally oriented posthumanities because it is aimed at reconstructing heterogeneous relations in the world which we also share with other species, therefore it raises an issue of the boundaries and limitations of emphatic sensitivity but also makes it real to get closer to the world of nature from which we moved away so much, endangering the survival of both human and nonhuman ecosystems.

54 Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?*, 122.

55 Ewa Domańska, „Jakiej metodologii potrzebuje współczesna humanistyka”, *Teksty Drugie* 1-2 (2010).

Jarosław Pluciennik wrote about “cognitive empathy”, i.e. “representation of the observed subject’s state”, about “taking over the subject’s perspective”<sup>56</sup> and illustrated it with Szymborska’s poem *The Cat in an Empty Apartment*. In his opinion, in works featuring animal characters – and this also concerns the ones discussed in this text – the narration is produced by an observer who empathises with an animal but it also becomes a personal narrative created from the point of view of the nonhuman animal itself. In this aspect, human and animal experiences intersect, while the reader gets involved and faces the speaking subject regardless of its species identification. What is left in the end is the human community of diverse viewpoints supported by empathy as a keystone. What is important in the present article is to use the posthumanist reflection to go beyond the community constantly defined as human and to show possible overlaps with non-human Others, realistically depicted animals which represent themselves in the text and which are a relevant contribution to criticism of the humanities centralised around the category of the ruling human subject. Animal narrators may be subjects of creating knowledge and new channels of conveying meanings and, as new characters, they impose a reflection upon human attitudes towards them. Their characteristic literary voices can be perceived – after Wolfe – to have a special role in establishing a diagnosis of the condition of disciplines aiming at refuting the anthropocentric approach. Will we ever be able to hear their real voice, not mediated by anthropomorphisation, which literature tries to imitate?

*Translation: Marta Skotnicka*

---

<sup>56</sup> Jarosław Pluciennik, *Literackie i językowe punkty widzenia a empatyczne naśladowanie w tekście literackim* in: *Punkt widzenia w tekście i dyskursie*, ed. Jerzy Bartmiński, Stanisława Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska, Ryszard Nycz (Lublin: UMCS, 2004), 204.

---

Szymon Wróbel

---

## Domesticating Animals: A Description of a Certain Disturbance

---

DOI: 10.18318/td.2015.en.1.16

### Breeding

Sigmund Freud, in a significant chapter of *Totem and Taboo* entitled *The Infantile Recurrence of Totemism* analyzes a child's particular relationship towards animals. Freud suggests that the child does not display pride which is characteristic for an adult and requires one to make a sharp distinction between one's own nature and the nature of an animal. The sense of superiority of the adult human towards the animal is alien to the child and results from a long process of breeding for this "superiority", which will have the consequence of the sense of absolute loneliness and eccentricity of the human kind in nature. Initially, the child recognizes animals as his equals without hesitation – what is more, the child feels a greater connection with animals than with the adults, whom he perceives – as Freud writes – as "mysterious". The mysteriousness of the adult world is supposedly emphasized by the children's feeling of belonging to the world of animals, which seems to be closer and more familiar to them than the world of intelligent consequences of civilized people. The experienced kinship with the animal kingdom is therefore the other side of the still very uneasily felt alienation from the world of humanity. Over time, the alienation will swap places with familiarity: what is

---

### Szymon Wróbel

– psychologist and philosopher, professor in the Artes Liberales Department of UW and professor in IFIS PAN. His two recent books include *Deferring the Self* published in 2013 by Peter Lang Verlag and *Lektury retroaktywne. Rodowody współczesnej myśli filozoficznej* (2014). Contact: wrobel.sz@gmail.com



familiar will become absolutely alien, and what is alien will become absolutely familiar. I call this displacement of what is familiar and what is alien the process of “domestication”; in consequence, the “animal” becomes the representative of the domesticated regime of culture.

This essay is about the process of “domestication”, which was the beginning of breeding of both diverse species of animals and of the human species itself. However, because domestication is always the domestication of *something for someone*, strangeness and familiarity, mysteriousness and commonness, attachment and rejection, rooting and uprooting, they all constitute concepts which tend to shift positions rather than permanently define “objects” (human and animals) and the specific regions of reality (house or nature). Friedrich Nietzsche, in the seventh chapter of his *Twilight of the Idols* makes an excellent diagnosis of the process of “domestication” and its consequences, stating that the use for morality can assume two opposite forms. An improvement, writes Nietzsche, is what we call both the taming of the beast, i.e. breeding a “human” and perhaps even a “superhuman”, and the breeding of a particular species of a “human” – the docile, domesticated, deceptive, reactionary, and “inactive”<sup>1</sup>. Nietzsche cautions that the morality of breeding and the morality of domesticating match each other completely in the selection of means by which they can ensure their victory. Yet raising and breeding are identical in their selection of goals and in the effects of their actions. The effect of breeding in a human is a hundredfold more gentle and more rational than in the case of the “improvement” performed by a priest. The goal of breeding understood as an ascetic regime is not a person’s “self-control”, although in the case of “domesticating” (raising) we are dealing with exclusion – but it is not the exclusion of the beast from the human, but the exclusion from society of a group of beings, sub-humans, Tschandalas, identified with the illness, and as a result not included in the human race.

In this text, mainly by reading texts by Freud, Lévi-Strauss and Kafka, I would like to consider this intriguing difference between “breeding” and “domesticating” (raising), the difference between an *Übermensch* and a pseudo-human, a sick human and a human in full health, a human cross-bred with other species (beetle, spider, bat) and a human dramatically guarding his genetically pure humanity. I would like to enquire if humanity, empowered by kinship or even contamination with other species, and multiplied by other species, not only – to use Donna Haraway’s expression – companion species<sup>2</sup>,

1 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Duncan Large (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1998).

2 Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003).

would be a society which is sick, frail and ill-selected, or whether it would rather be a humanity which is active and audacious, looking for adventure, devoid of traces of resentment towards other living beings, and as a result the only one which is acceptable in the contemporary world?

### Disturbance

The condition of unity and full kinship with the world of animals does not last long in a child's life. Freud claims that between a child and an animal there appears a certain "disturbance" at one stage. "The child", writes Freud, "suddenly begins to fear a certain animal species and to protect himself against seeing or touching any individual of this species. There results a clinical picture of an animal phobia, which is one of the most frequent among the psychoneurotic diseases of this age and perhaps the earliest form of such an ailment"<sup>3</sup>. The child's phobia begins to apply to the animal which used to fascinate him, but since the choice of a specially marked animal in the city (a closed, territorial space) is limited to a few species – birds, dogs, horses, and as Freud writes – "very small animals like bugs and butterflies", phobias have a range which is very predictable and limited in content. According to Freud, this restriction of content (i.e. the representational poverty of our fears) is also the poverty of the mechanism or the fundamental motive causing fear, which always proves to be the fear of the father. The Father in this affective economy constitutes the object shifted to the position of the animal. In Freud, the animal always refers us back to the Father, whereby the totemic animal and the name of the Father refer to the name of the totem and also the rights of the Father. The fusion of the animal and the father gives the position of God.

In his already famous text entitled *Analysis of the Phobia of a Five-Year-Old Boy* which related fears of the little Hans<sup>4</sup>, Freud goes in a similar direction, allowing for the unification of three elements: totem, father, and name (God). Hans not only feared horses but also initially held them in respect mixed with fascination. Similarly to totemic tribes, Hans not only feared animals of one species but also treated them with utmost respect. What is important for this economy of affects and dealing with affects is the fact that when Hans overcame his fear he identified himself with the animal to such a degree that he started to jump like a horse and neigh like a horse, eventually becoming

3 Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo: Resemblances Between the Psychic Lives of Savages and Neurotics*, trans. A. A. Brill, (New York: Moffat, Yard & Co. 2010), <http://www.bartleby.com/br/281.html>

4 Sigmund Freud, *Analyse der Phobie eines fünfjährigen Knaben* ("Der kleine Hans"), in: *Jb. psychoanal. psycho-pathol. Forsch.*, I, 1-109; GW, 1909, VII, 241-377.

a creature which "bit the father". What is important, Hans identified his parents with other large animals, therefore introducing in the space of his imagination his whole family and the world which surrounded him. One could state that Hans overcame the mystery of the world of adults through its naturalization, i.e. the introduction of a false transcendence of culture and that which is social into a space of immanence of his "own nature". Personal fantasies on the subject of nature helped little Hans to neutralize the fears concerning the adult fantasies on the subject of nature.

A similar transformation of human to animal is experienced by little Arpad, cited by Freud and analyzed by Sándor Ferenczi; during his vacation, the three-year-old boy was pecked at the penis by a chicken while he urinated and as a result "he himself turned into a fowl". After this episode Arpad started to get interested in the fowl-house population to such a degree that he abandoned the human tongue, started to cackle and crow, and when he used human speech it was solely to spin yarns of chickens and other fowl. However, his behavior towards the marked animal was full of ambivalence and was expressed in an excessive, simultaneous hate and love towards chickens. Arpad adored chickens, but also his favorite game was to play at killing chickens. To him, slaughtering fowl was the greatest of holidays. Perhaps it is worth noting that when Freud describes Hans he uses the word "identification" with the horse, but when he describes little Arpad's case, he says that the child "himself turned into a fowl". This difference between "identification with the animal" and "turning into an animal" may prove to be symptomatic and crucial for our differentiation between "breeding" and "domestication". Perhaps the identification will prove to be a consequence of the raising (domestication) whereby turning into an animal will be strictly connected with the process of breeding. It may be important that to Freud a "holiday is permitted, or rather a prescribed excess, a solemn violation of a prohibition"<sup>5</sup>. Freud, therefore, talks about the necessity of a holiday, but not about the right to celebrate or the possibility of celebration. Hence, for Freud there exists a compulsion of transgression, which is a holiday.

I would like to enquire if today we are not living a world which already is a constant compulsion of transgression, and therefore a world of a never-ending holiday? The modern man's holiday is above all the transgression of borders of his closed humanity, it is a command to be something more than just a human. Nietzsche's *Übermensch* as a blond-haired beast is nothing other than a fantasy of a gregarious human, who "became a resentful chicken", incapable of affirmation, and desiring to abolish his decadent alienation through male fantasies of a new leader, capable of "biting the father" – Batman

---

5 Freud, *Totem and Taboo*.

or Superman. Breeding, especially ancient (ascetic) breeding could only have happened at the price of the emergence of the subject, which through its exclusion established a society of humans: improved and superior. Breeding in the time of mass democracy (raising) reverses those proportions – throngs of gregarious beings are to enable the breeding of a few tyrants, who also become their own creators – replicants. Science and biotechnologies are solely to help in realization of this intention. I ask, therefore, whether little Hans, analyzed by Freud, and Arpad, diagnosed by Ferenczi, announce the coming of this era of Batman and Spidermen, an era of horse-men, chicken-men, who will become the tyrants of the new breeding and of the new domestication?

### Totem

Freud, who analysed the relationship of children towards animals and the genesis of the children's neuroses, formulated a thesis of an infantile return of totemism. Totemism and children's neuroses have a trait in common: the totemic animal is called a father (ancestor) and the father is referred to by the name of the totemic animal (horse, chicken, etc.). "If the totem animal is the father", claims Freud, "then the two principal ordinances of totemism, the two taboo prohibitions which constitute its core – not to kill the totem and not to have sexual relations with a woman of the same totem – coincide in their content with the two crimes of Oedipus, who killed his father and married his mother, as well as with the two primal wishes of children, the insufficient repression or the re-awakening of which forms the nucleus of perhaps every psychoneurosis"<sup>6</sup>. According to Freud, the totemic system stems from the conditions causing the Oedipus complex, just like "little Hans" fear of the horse and little Arpad's perversion. What does it mean?

Oedipus's structure establishes both the rule of integration of the totemic system, which simultaneously wants to disclose and conceal the connection between the clan and the given totemic animal, as well as the structure of neurosis, which wants to simultaneously disclose and conceal its kinship to love and hate towards the father. Freud is aware of the power of his generalization but he does not avoid it and it seems that the analogy between a totemic human and the "little Hans", as well as the even smaller human, Arpad, looking for his kinship with animals: horses or chickens, is attracted not only as the model of any and all identification, but also as the model of any human psychic achievement. This achievement is connected above all with the establishment of rules of kinship and rules of culinary art, allowing for the making of a distinction of the permitted objects of desire from the prohibited, and

---

6 Ibid.

the edible from the inedible. This methodological stance of Freud's requires that we nonetheless ask the following question: what is a totemic animal and what does it have to do with the animal which is the object of our childhood phobias? Moreover, we should ask if the totemic animal and religious rituals come together and interconnect in our ambivalent affects for the father? Are God and the totemic animal just masks and disguises of the Father?

Freud writes about the domesticated and non-domesticated animals, small and large, herbivores and carnivores, water and land animals, mammals and insects, sacred animals and animals present in mundane experiences, sanctified by sacrifice and "merely" edible, but he always writes as if the animals were a constant source of human fascination. "Such animals as birds, snakes, lizards, mice", we read in *Totem and Taboo*, "are fitted by their extreme mobility, their flight through the air, and by other characteristics which arouse surprise and fear, to become the bearers of souls which leave their bodies. The totem animal is a descendant of the animal transformations of the spirit-soul"<sup>7</sup>. Let us repeat what Freud said, to hear his voice better and more clearly: animals are fit to be considered carriers of the souls which have left bodies. If so, one should ask further: who does the animal have to be, to become the vessel for the human soul, which has left its body? Who does that animal have to be, to be endowed with the power to shape our thinking and our imagination? And, in this animistic interpretation of totemism and neurosis, does Freud not cause a certain conflict of interpretation between the ideology of the Oedipus complex, in which the Father is the strongest element structuring religion, totemism and neurosis, and animal ideology, in which the totemic animal is the ur-motive incorporating the powers of the Name of the Father and God the Father, who are solely the incarnations of the Totemic Animal?

Originally, totems were animals and were regarded as ancestors of particular tribes. Totemic animals did not just constitute the name of the group members of a particular tribe, but they became the controllers of relationships of kinship and consumption. Humans grouped around the totem formed a production and consumer relationship: because the clan could not consume the given totem it supplied a valuable product to other totems and was in turn supplied with what the other totems took care of as a part of their duties. The situation was similar with kinship. The totem establishes the law, according to which the members of the same totem could not engage in sexual intercourse, and thus enter into marriage. If, for instance, a man from the Kangura (Horse) clan takes for his wife a woman from the Emu (Chicken) clan, their children will all be Emu (Chickens), regardless of their sex. The totemic rule

---

7 Freud, *Totem and Taboo*.

prevents the son from such a marriage from initiating sexual relations with his mother and sisters, who like him are Emu (Chickens).

Perhaps partly a new light on all those ambiguities formulated and abandoned by Freud in *The Infantile Recurrence of Totemism* could be shed by the analyses of Claude Lévi-Strauss in his memorable chapter of *The Savage Mind* entitled *The Individual as a Species*<sup>8</sup>, which returns to Freud's narration and talks about the infantile return of totemism under the guise of its humanizing.

In this chapter Lévi-Strauss seems to be intrigued not only by the forms of classification; his thought is not only provoked by the levels of abstraction and concretization of the "savage mind" and the complex relations between the species and the individual, but above all, Lévi-Strauss is interested in the proper names (necronyms and autonyms) and a constant presence of the forms of totemic thinking in the contemporary world, which culminates in the statement: "Everything takes place as if in our civilization every individual's own personality were his totem"<sup>9</sup>.

The thesis formulated by Freud and Lévi-Strauss that animals do not serve as food but as food for thought and completely determine our metaphors about the world, becomes clear when we take a closer look at the idea of the so-called totemic operator. As a starting point, Lévi-Strauss chooses the notion of a species. A species assumes, however, its empirical realizations: species of seals, species of bear, species of eagle, etc. Particular species contain a further range of individual organisms, i.e. seals, bears, eagles, etc. Following this anatomical lead, each animal can be broken down into: head, neck, spatula, etc. Further – heads, necks, spatulas, etc. lend themselves to grouping into both the species (heads of seals, necks of seals, spatulas of seals, etc.), and "together" due to the kind of the body part, and not the species affiliation: all heads, all necks, all spatulas, etc. What comes into being from this operation is the head as such, neck as such, etc. Linking parts of the body in such a way will give us a general understanding of the organism – we reconstruct a model of the individual in its reconstructed integrity. Thus, we have outlined the skeleton of the so-called totemic operator, in which the poles of abstractions are the species and the specimen<sup>10</sup>.

Thanks to the idea of the totemic operator it is easy to understand why Lévi-Strauss says that the dismemberment is supplemented by unification and the process of increasing the abstraction of thinking proves to be

8 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, trans. George Weidenfeld (Letchworth, Hertfordshire: The Garden City Press Limited 1966).

9 Ibid., 214.

10 Ibid., 119–121.

simultaneously its concretization. Dismemberment of the notion of species into particular species, and in turn each species to its distinct specimen and each of those specimens to parts of the body and organs finally leads to a merger of concrete parts into abstract parts, and the abstract parts into an abstract specimen. The dismemberment then happens in the course of merger. If then I understand the basic intuition of Lévi-Strauss, he is trying to say that totemism, consisting in naturalization of the social world, is the reverse side of socializing the natural world, and the projection of nature on culture is as dangerous as projecting culture onto nature. Totemism is a procedure contrary to antropomorphization encountered in fairy tales: it is not the animals that represent the human characters and desires, but it is humans that represent animal powers and antagonisms between species.

It is here, however, where we encounter an added value, which, I believe, Freud will come across in Vienna when he will be analyzing the behaviors of his younger and older patients. From the point of view of biology, humans of the same race can be compared to the varieties within the same species. However, social life causes in nature a peculiar transformation because it stimulates every biological specimen to develop their personality (individuality). According to Lévi-Strauss, the notion of personality is not associated with the specimen as a consequence of variety, but rather with "types of varieties or of species, probably not found in nature and which could be termed «mono-individual»"<sup>11</sup>. Personality from this perspective is therefore a species containing only one specimen. It is the synthesis of parts of the body and physical-chemical processes in the form of an organism (and it is in this sense that it is a mono-individual species), but it also destroys the notion of a species, enriching the distinctive traits which allow for identification of a specimen of a particular species with an infinite set of traits determining the singleness of a specimen – an original synthesis of ideas and behaviors. In this sense, the notion of a specimen is beyond the genotype, it is a purely phenotypical notion.

I claim that Freud will find such an organic and mental construction, i.e. mono-individual species, on his Vienna couch. What do I have in mind? Well, I claim that little Hans and the even smaller Arpad, just like judge Schreber, Dora, and the "Rat Man" are cases of totemic projection of one's personality by the human of new democratic breeding so mercilessly unmasked and criticized by Nietzsche. It is not even the case of Hans identifying himself with horses and Arpad with chickens in order to become a horse or a chicken or to allow in this way the chicken or the horse to become something more than the horse or the chicken. The important issue is rather that Hans, Arpad,

---

11 Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 214.

judge Schreber, Dora become a mono-individual species and that everything in their ontogenesis happens as if in Vienna or Paris in the beginning of the twentieth century each individual had its personality as its totem.

Yet what could this mean? Would it not mean that each individual wants to extrapolate one's being from within oneself? If my personality is a totem for myself, and a totem is a sign of my origin, would that not mean that Hans, Arpad, judge Schreber, Dora, and each of us experiences in this way their isolation from the world and from nature simultaneously? If I can find within me only the sources of my kinship, it means that apart from myself I have no relations, i.e. I am my own relative. Totem (my personality) is the symbol of my relative transcendence from the world of nature (the species of *homo sapiens*) but also from the world of culture (my father's family name). My given name constitutes my only family name. I become my own Father. Yet what role in this system do animals play, and in particular the names of the animals? Are animals – to paraphrase Freud once more – thanks to their unusual mobility, ability to fly, and other traits which cause astonishment and fear also in the twentieth and twenty-first century, suitable for being recognized as the carriers of souls which have abandoned their bodies?

## Names

Lévi-Strauss contemplates the rules of giving names to various species of birds, dogs, cattle and horses. Lévi-Strauss simultaneously warns that giving names is never a task purely nominal and innocent, it may also indicate the naming (categorization) of oneself. Lévi-Strauss says nothing about the names of hens, just like he does not mention the name of spiders, bats, and finally worms, especially beetles. Certain species of animals are beyond the reach of interests of the author of *Totemism* (*Totémisme aujourd'hui*).

Species of birds, easier than other zoological classes, are given human names only because they can allow themselves to be similar to people, especially that they are so radically different. Song Thrush, Grey Kestrel, Laughing Gull, Peregrine Falcon, Marsh Tit, Mourning Dove – they are all expressions describing some purely human qualities. Are being in mourning or having an excessive sense of humor not characteristics of our personality? Birds covered in feathers have wings, are oviparous, and differ from the human society through their physical environment, in which they have the privilege of moving. Hence, because birds form a community independent from ours but which due to the independence proves to be homologous to humans, they gain human names and the temptation to anthropomorphize birds is a constant temptation of human thinking. Lévi-Strauss himself says that the relation of bird names to human names is the relation of the part to the whole



(syntagmatic relation) only because birds constitute a metaphor of human society (paradigmatic relation).

Names of dogs are created in a completely different manner. Dogs do not form an independent society, but as domestic animals constitute a part of the human society (syntagmatic relation). That is why we appoint a different set of names for them: Butch, Coco, Stella, which almost exclusively sound like stage (theatrical) names form a parallel series to the names which are used every day, which means that they are metaphorical names (paradigmatic relation). Using the example of birds and dogs, Lévi-Strauss introduces the general conclusion: when the relation between species is understood as metonymic (the case of dogs) then the naming systems acquire a metaphorical character, and when the relation between species is understood as metaphorical (the case of birds) the relation between particular systems of naming acquires a metonymic character.

The situation of cattle is a different case entirely. The position of cattle is certainly metonymic in relation to the economic system of man, but is different from the position of dogs in that cattle are treated like objects and the dog like an individual. As a result, names which we give to cattle come from a series different than the names of birds or dogs; they are usually descriptive terms, alluding to the color of hide, posture, or temperament: Bessie, Carmella, Buttercup, Nellie, etc. Often the names have a metaphorical character and their goal is to suggest the servile character of the animal which is exploited in a given area of life. One can risk a statement that in our culture the culinary taboo includes dogs as a consequence of giving them names, which turns them into subjects, while the subordination of cattle to the culinary services leads to giving them names, which stress their complete objectification.

Finally, horses, especially exceptional horses, racehorses, whose social position is visibly separate from draft horses, are a peculiar culmination of the name nomenclature. Racehorses do not form an autonomous society like birds, nor do they form a society subjectively (dogs) or objectively (cattle) subordinate to human; they are rather a de-socialized condition of existence of a certain peculiar idle society: that which lives of the horse races and that which watches them. Names given to racehorses are selected with regard to particular regularities, subject to strict racial individualization, referring to the selected feature of a horse. It is impossible for two specimens to have the same name: Ocean, Azimuth, Telegraph, Elixir – creating names is free and nondescriptive. In this sense perhaps the names of the horses approach to the greatest extent the idea of a proper name. Lévi-Strauss states succinctly: if birds are metaphorical people and dogs – metonymical people, then cattle would be metonymical non-people and racehorses – metaphorical non-people.

Let us ask a question now which at first sight may seem impossible: do animals have a personality and would Lévi-Strauss also have the audacity to say that they constitute a mono-individual species? Are a bird table, stud, doghouse, or henhouse places where everything happens as if each specimen had its own personality as a totem? Could animals – horses, lizards, spiders, cattle, dogs and birds, or even dorbeetles, just like Hans and Arpad, like judge Schreber, Dora, and Rat Man, recline on couch of Freud's, who tries to capture not so much the complexities of their unconscious psychic life, as he wants to understand: what digestive and sexual prohibition are they subject to?

### Domestication

It seems that the answer to this tricky question is – no. Not every animal has its personality as a totem, although perhaps every animal, even the most primitive amoeba, can be endowed with a rich personality. Why do dogs and birds, horses and cattle not constitute totemic cultures? Well, this is caused mainly because of what Freud calls “disturbance”. This disturbance is nothing but a process of domestication of animals, or, to use Lévi-Strauss's language, a “Neolithic paradox”. “It was in Neolithic times that man's mastery of the great arts of civilization – of pottery, weaving, agriculture and the domestication of animals – became firmly established. No one today would any longer think of attributing these enormous advances to the fortuitous accumulation of a series of chance discoveries or believe them to have been revealed by the passive perception of certain natural phenomena”<sup>12</sup>. Certainly no one would think of attributing this Neolithic miracle to an accident, but some – many – would think of explaining the Neolith by an accumulation of accidents. This accumulation of incidents is referred to today as structural causality, which means that the replacement of mechanical causality that works linearly in a straight sequence of producing effects, causality, in which each of the elements connected in binding the new structure is also its product or effect<sup>13</sup>.

Let us have a look at how this structural causality works in Freud. It seems that initially for Freud all sacrificial animals were sacred and that their meat was forbidden and could be consumed only during ceremonious events, in which the whole family participated. Killing such an animal meant the violation of a prohibition and was only allowed as an act meant to make the

12 Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, 23.

13 See: L. Althusser, É. Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1970) <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1968/reading-capital/>, Luis Althusser, “On Genesis”, trans. Jason E. Smith, *Décalages*: Vol. 1: Iss. 2, <http://scholar.oxy.edu/decalages/vol1/iss2/11>

identification with a given species even stronger. Initially, man believed that God himself must be an animal or, in the later phase of evolution of religious feelings, believed at least that he developed from a totemic animal. I will repeat what my intuition tells me: Freud does not give a clear answer to the question about the reciprocal relations between God, the Father, and the Totemic Animal. Is the totemic animal a substitute for the killed father? Or, perhaps, the father is the substitute for the more primal totemic animal? After all, Freud also writes that in the scene of the sacrifice given to the Tribal God, the Father appears in a double role: as God and as the totemic sacrificial animal. It seems that the ontogenetic order leads Freud to a hypothesis about the primacy of the father over animals and gods, but the phylogenetic order gives primacy to the totem (animal) over gods and fathers. And there is no contradiction in this because we do not want to establish a linear series, which would order our events on a straight temporal axis, but to establish the rules of connecting dispersed events, seemingly distant from each other, into one formation, which speaks through its effect: domestication.

A milestone in relationships of the human and the animal was therefore the process of the domestication of animals. Domesticating animals and the emergence of cattle farming put an end to strict totemism of the early periods. Man's separation from the animal happens simultaneously with the fall of totemism, which happened as a result of the domestication of animals. Domestication of animals is the moment when all animals lose their initial holiness. They may only recover this holiness in the process of becoming something else, in the process of dislocation, displacement, which concerns both the mysteriousness of the human, and the totemism of the animal. This is the meaning of the famous formula of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari – “We think and write for animals themselves. We become animal so that the animal also becomes something else. The agony of a rat or the slaughter of a calf remains present in thought not through pity but as the zone of exchange between man and animal in which something of one passes into the other”<sup>14</sup>. We must take a closer look at this zone of exchange, in which not only we become animals but above all the animals become something else, and therefore not us.

## Beetle

Freud describes disruption as a process, which the child's ontogenetic history leads to the fact that the ambiguity of the rational world of adults moves

14 Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Graham Burchell and Hugh Tomlinson (London: Verso, 2003), 109.

to a position of familiarity of the animal kingdom, and the animals become a representation of the fears of the father. The infantile return to totemism is the return of Oedipus, who acquires both the structure of the child's phobias and totemic thinking. Kafka reverses the description and structure of this process thanks to which the son becomes the totem and the "mysteriousness" moves from the position of the animal to the position of the human. By writing *The Metamorphosis* (*Die Verwandlung*), Kafka offers us narration on the topic of the dedomestication of animals. It is not the child who suddenly starts to fear a certain species of animals and defend itself from the sight or touch of a specimen of this species, but the world of the adults suddenly starts to inspire fear in the child and makes it defend itself from its sight, as if from the attack of a malicious and dangerous species (an intruder).

Let us recall the reaction of Gregor Samsa's relatives when they saw him after the transformation into a horrible worm:

Gregor's mother — her hair, despite the chief clerk's presence, still disheveled from the night and right now standing on end — looked first with hands clasped together at his father, then took two steps towards Gregor and collapsed, surrounded by her outspread skirts, her face sunk and quite hidden in her breast. His father clenched his fist with a hostile expression, as if meaning to drive Gregor back into his room, but then he looked uncertainly round the living-room, covered his eyes with his hands, and wept so that his mighty breast shook<sup>15</sup>.

From the point of view of the family interactions, Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* is filled with actions of the mother to recover contact with her son, and the actions of the Father which have the goal of isolating his son. Gregor, however, contrary to little Hans analyzed by Freud or little Arpad analyzed by Ferenczi, failed to identify himself with the animal to such a degree as to start to walk like a worm and hunt like a worm, and never became a being which — according to Freud's wording — "bites his father". It is rather the father who struck his son by throwing at him the symbol of life — an apple: "(...) father had decided to bombard him. He had filled his pockets from the fruit-bowl on the sideboard and, without aiming very exactly for the moment, threw apple after apple"<sup>16</sup>. One of them literally got stuck in the stomach of the man-Gregor-worm. Gregor became a worm so that the worm could become something else.

<sup>15</sup> Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, trans. J. Crick, [in:] Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 88.

<sup>16</sup> Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, 58-59.

In his meticulous reading of *The Metamorphosis*, Vladimir Nabokov notes that Gregor transforms into an arthropod (*Arthropoda*) to which belong insects, spiders, myriapods and crustaceans<sup>17</sup>. Gregor Samsa is an insect, yet it is not clear what insect? Surely he is not, as commonly believed, a cockroach, because a cockroach is a flat insect with long legs, and Gregor is convex and has short legs, and more specifically: he has six short legs. Moreover, Gregor has strong jaws, which he uses to turn the key in the lock. In the German original, the cleaning-woman refers to Gregor as *Mistkäfer*, which means “dung-beetle”. Nabokov claims that the hero of *The Metamorphosis* is not a dung-beetle but simply a plain beetle, who never discovered that he has wings under the hard back. The greatest hidden and never used ability of Gregor Samsa was his ability to fly. Perhaps if he had discovered it he could have become someone like Spiderman or Batman or even Birdy from William Wharton’s famous novel.

Yet Nabokov’s most important discovery is his recognition that Gregor, despite his transformation, still thinks in human categories and remains a prisoner of human cognitive categories, e.g. he believes that the man on all fours represents a beetle on six legs. Gregor Samsa’s transformation is not complete, even more: it is only skin deep that Gregor becomes an animal and this transformation into an animal also concerns his speech, which with time ceases to be drawn into the circle of human affairs, and the brain, which initially even allows itself to be tempted with the fantasy about the bread and milk, but the beetle’s stomach and his taste buds do not agree with mammal food. The beetle has a stocky body, strongly curved, 15-20 mm long, brown or black, shiny and feeding on animal manure, fresh dishes are not to his liking, he cannot even stand their smell.

Let us repeat Lévi-Strauss’s fundamental thesis: when the relation between species is understood as metonymic (the case of dogs) then the naming systems acquire a metaphorical character, and when the relation between species is understood as metaphorical (the case of birds) the relation between particular systems of naming acquires a metonymical character. Therefore, the question is: what is the relation between insects (beetles) and the *homo sapiens*? Well, it has neither a metonymical character (beetles resembling only cockroaches are not part of the social system) nor metaphorical (they are also not a metaphor for social organization). I would venture a thesis that they are a negative part of social organization, namely that which is meant for unconditional extermination. Worms are metonymical non-people and due to that, they can take non-human, metaphorical, negative names.

17 Vladimir Nabokov, *Lecture on “The Metamorphosis”*, 2011, <http://www.kafka.org/index.php?id=191,209,0,0,1,0>

Probably the first person who truthfully and accurately diagnosed Samsa's problem, or rather the problem of the clan of worms, was his sister from whom we hear the following words addressed to the family (Father):

'It has to go,' cried the sister, 'that is the only way, father. You must just try to get rid of the thought that it is Gregor. Our real misfortune is that we have believed it for so long. But how can it be Gregor? If it were Gregor, he would have understood long ago that it's not possible for human beings to live with a beast like that, and he would have left of his own free will. We wouldn't have a brother then, but we would be able to go on living, and honor his memory. But as it is, this beast is pursuing us and driving away our lodgers; it obviously wants to take over the entire apartment and put us out to sleep on the street'<sup>18</sup>.

In principle, this statement contains all the necessary diagnostic elements, even a draft of a possible therapy. The worm has to be exterminated so that his name can be retained.

Let us recall that the sister is the person who feeds Gregor during the transformation. Yet the sister is not aware that Gregor retained his human heart, human sensitivity, tact, sense of shame and tragic pride. It is not just the fact that Gregor is called here a "beast", which pesters the family and tries to adjust the territory of the clan's existence to his own existential imperatives; neither is it about the fact that the family resents Gregor, who has undergone the transformation into a worm and shed his armor of a working clerk. And let us just recall that the plot of *The Metamorphosis* suggests that Gregor not only supported the whole family, but also found for it the apartment in which it currently resides. It is rather that by taking the form of an animal, Gregor still uses his proper name and feigns kinship with the clan, to which he physiologically no longer belongs. In fact, the sole solution is contained in the short command: It has to go. Gregor has to disappear not because he is useless, but because in order to retain the memory about kinship the worm has to disappear to retain the memory of a human: his name.

The main thesis emerging from the reading of *The Metamorphosis* is Nabokov's statement: "Gregor is a human being in an insect's disguise; his family are insects disguised as people. With Gregor's death their insect souls are suddenly aware that they are free to enjoy themselves"<sup>19</sup>. This thesis would explain why Gregor sees his only hope in his sister. Beetles reproduce by

<sup>18</sup> Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, 69.

<sup>19</sup> Nabokov, *Lecture on "The Metamorphosis"*.

digging underground tunnels with brood chambers filled with animal dung. In each chamber the female lays one egg. The larvae hatch in the spring of the next year and the adult specimens appear in the early summer. Gregor prepares in his room the territory for his sister, i.e. he creates corridors with brood chambers in which she could lay an egg. Gregor becomes one of the animals which, as Freud phrased it, "fitted by their extreme mobility, their flight through the air, and by other characteristics" cause astonishment and fear, suitable to be qualified as the host for the souls, which have left the body. Gregor is the bearer of souls, which have left the bodies of his family – his father, mother, and finally, sister. In a nutshell, one can say that Gregor becomes the totem of the Samsa family. This is why Kafka writes: "The family itself ate in the kitchen"<sup>20</sup>. The family eats in isolation from Gregor, alone, because totemism, as we have determined, is the regulator of relations of kinship and consumption. The beetle/totem draws not only the lines of kinship, but also the line of the sole culinary object, which constitutes a taboo.

Towards the end of the third part of *The Metamorphosis*, hearing the music made by his sister he is so enchanted, bewildered, delighted that he dares to enter the family (public) room. In this scene Kafka asks an excellent question: "Was he a beast, that music should move him like this?"<sup>21</sup>. It is the fact that music moved him and not the spoken word that is the best proof that Gregor has become something else than a human. Yet Gregor is a totemic animal, which means that Gregor has never been an ordinary animal, although his sister and his family were insects dressed as humans. Kafka writes about this moment of absolute elation of Gregor the beetle in the following manner:

He resolved to advance right up to his sister, pluck her by the skirt to intimate that he was asking her to come with her violin into his room, for no one here was rewarding her playing as he would reward it. He wouldn't let her out of his room ever again, at least not while he was alive; his terrifying figure should be useful to him for the first time; he would post himself by all the doors of his room at once and go hissing to meet his attackers<sup>22</sup>.

Kafka could not have stated it more clearly: Gregor's only object of desire is his sister. Gregor Samsa has turned into an animal, a beetle, a worm, to take the form equal to the wormish nature of his sister, which would allow him to become the sexual partner of the only object, which human culture has denied

<sup>20</sup> Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, 65.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 67.

him. It is not the Father, not the Mother, who is the main object structuring Kafka's novella, but the Sister.

### **Reproduction: Party of Life**

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari say that in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* there appears a distinction between two states (forms) of desire. The first form appears when Gregor "presses himself against" the portrait of a woman in fur, turning his head towards the door in a desperate attempt to stop something in the room, although it has already been emptied. Gregor tries to link desire with memory, with picture, with the representational register. It is a regressive form, which will never allow him to fully become an animal. Kafka describes the behavior of the hero thus:

[...] he really had no idea what to rescue first, when, hanging on the wall, which was otherwise bare, he was struck by the picture of the lady dressed in nothing but fur. He crawled up to it hurriedly and pressed himself against the glass, which held him fast and did his burning stomach good. This picture at least, which Gregor now covered completely, no one would take away from him — that was certain<sup>23</sup>.

The picture of the woman in fur does Samsa's burning stomach good. It is not the belly of a glutton, but the belly of conception, a symbol of the umbilical cord linking the son with his mother. In this sense, Gregor pressed against the picture is still Oedipus, which means that he is still a man. Greta, seeing Gregor's obstinacy, has to capitulate in her defense of the picture. "He was sitting on his picture and he wasn't giving it up. He would rather make a leap for Grete's face"<sup>24</sup>. Gregor Samsa would rather deprive Greta of sight, because this is what is meant by "leap[ing] for Grete's face", than to be deprived of the picture cooling his burning stomach.

The second form of desire appears when Gregor abandons the territory of his room in response to the sound of the vibrating violin coming from the adjacent room, and when in desperation he tries to kiss the throat of his sister, sticking to it like a ribbon or collar<sup>25</sup>. This time Gregor is not pressed against the "cooling" picture, but to the warmth of his sister's neck. Here the

23 Ibid., 55-56.

24 Ibid., 56.

25 Gilles Deleuze, Félix. *Guattari, Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. Minneapolis, trans. Dana Polan, (Minneapolis London: University of Minnesota, 1975), 5.



worm becomes a vampire and ceases to be a human. This a progressive form of desire, a form triggered by hearing, in which everything is seduction, and therefore music.

Meanwhile Gregor's sister had got over the bemused state she had fallen into after the sudden interruption of her playing, and, after she had held violin and bow in her drooping hands for a while and then gone on looking at her music as if she were still playing, she suddenly pulled herself together, put the instrument into her mother's lap [...] and dashed into the next room [...] <sup>26</sup>.

In this description, Samsa's sister is the picture of a woman after the sexual intercourse, she is the state of post-climax, post-copulation. Music and voice in Kafka's works always play an important role, suffice it to recall his short story entitled *Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk*, which tells the story of a cult mouse prima donna Josephine<sup>27</sup>. Josephine not only sings, but also whistles by blowing on the last hole of a wind instrument, so that it emits the highest possible tone. Josephine, like Gregor's sister playing the violin, urges the males to copulate, to reproduce.

Deleuze and Guattari write that they deeply believe in Kafka's politics, which does not have imaginary or symbolic character, just like they believe in Kafka's machines which are neither a phantasm nor a simple structure. Finally, they believe in Kafka's sense of experimenter, which is not subject to rules of interpretation and a simple process of giving meaning, but which is rather based on experience. But even they start to read Kafka from the figure of Baroque and an exaggerated, reconstructed Oedipus. In this sense, for Deleuze and Guattari *The Metamorphosis* is an exemplary story on the subject of re-Oedipalization, which means that the process of Gregor's deterritorialization through his turning-into-animal will find its end in the picture. Gregor does not dare to become a total animal. To satisfy his brother, his sister wants to empty the whole room, but Gregor refuses to allow the portrait of the woman in fur to be removed and holds on to the portrait as his last picture. Probably Gregor would rather become a dog, an animal which is Oedipal by definition, an animal very close to Kafka, if only because he writes *Investigations of a Dog* (*Forschungen eines Hundes*). According to Lévi-Strauss, dogs are metonymical people and Gregor is supposed to become a worm. Worms are

<sup>26</sup> Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, 67.

<sup>27</sup> Franz Kafka, "Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk" [in:] *The Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, trans. Donna Freed (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1996).

metonymical non-people and due to that, they can take non-human, metaphorical (negative) names.

Yet, we are not interested here in the question: what is the literature of the minority? We are not interested in Kafka's politics, just like we are not interested in his machines. We are not even interested in the answer to the question: what is the montage in Kafka's work? We are interested in a certain disruption, which is a result of domestication, i.e. initiating human raising and negative breeding. This initiation of raising and negative breeding results in reproduction of confused species, hybrids of our humanity with other species, unaffiliated with people. Let us look at some specimens of these mono-individual species, which wear our personality as a totem and start to populate planet Earth. Let us look at the effects of this negative breeding, reversed domestication, dedomestication initiated by Kafka's breeding.

Spider-Man is a species related to Freud's little Hans (horse-man) and Ferenczi's little Arpad (chicken-man). Peter Parker became an orphan when he was six, both his parents (in the *Marvel Comics* version) died in an airline catastrophe. During a presentation of waste handling from a nuclear laboratory, a spider gets in the field of the particle accelerator and becomes irradiated. With his arm bitten by the spider, Peter acquires some of his wonderful powers of spider-man. Peter's attitude to the spider is the same as Arpad's attitude towards the chicken, which pecked at his penis during urination. Spiders are arthropods belonging to the same family as Gregor. To somewhat exaggerate: the spider which bit Peter Parker is the transformed Gregor Samsa, who was supposed to be exterminated but survived with other waste materials.

Yet, let us look at another unclean, mono-individual species. Batman is Bruce Wayne – a calm, happy child of a couple of billionaires. We often hear that Bruce was not spoiled, his parents, despite the fortune which they possessed, were not snobs. Contrary to Peter Parker, Bruce experienced the pre-Oedipal period. One day, the family (father-mother-son) went together to cinema to see the movie *Zorro*. After the screening, they went home when suddenly, from around the corner, a bandit appeared demanding money and jewelry, and when the Waynes resisted he killed them without remorse as the boy watched. Bruce vowed vengeance against everything that violates the law. Yet the law is nothing but the name of the Father. Bruce becomes the incarnation of the voice of the Father, and so the executor of the voice of the Law. As a result, Bruce resembles little Hans more than little Arpad. Only the 2005 film version, entitled *Batman Begins* requires us to believe that Bruce's marking with the bats is a derivative of the childhood trauma that resulted from being trapped in an underground cave under the well, where he was bitten by bats like Arpad was pecked by chickens.

To paraphrase Lévi-Strauss, one can risk the following typology: if birds are metaphorical people (William Wharton's Birdy) and spiders (Spider-Man/Peter Parker) – metonymical people, then worms (Beetle/Gregor Samsa) would be metonymical non-people and bats (Batman/Bruce Wayne) – metaphorical non-people. Does anything link this formation of species, confused and unassociated? And yet this formation is still not complete, because what lacks is for instance elephant-man filmed by David Lynch – Joseph Merrick who was born in 1862 in Victorian England, only to discover an animal within himself when he was three years old: Symptoms (tumors, skin deformations) appearing on his body require him to play the role of an elephant-man in a circus. I repeat the question once more: is there a common trait linking the aforementioned mono-individual species, cross-species hybrids, confused, unclear?

We return here to the hypothesis and diagnosis of Nietzsche who announced in *Ecce Homo* the coming of a new party of life “which would take up the greatest of all tasks, the higher breeding of mankind, including the pitiless annihilation of all degenerates and parasites, will make possible again that excess of life on earth from which the Dionysian condition must rise again as well. I give promise of a tragic age: the highest art in life affirmation, the tragedy, will be reborn when mankind has put behind it the consciousness of the hardest but most necessary wars without suffering from it...”<sup>28</sup> We are not yet ready to tame this new party of life, however, we are ready to accept a disturbance – a new world, world full of dedomestication, in which fear is aroused by a named animal, which is neither a human nor a god.

---

28 F. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is & The Antichrist: A Curse on Christianity*, trans. Thomas Wayne (New York: Algora Publishing, 2004), 52.

---

Monika Bakke

---

## **"Between Us, Animals"** **Emotional Ties Between Humans and Other Animals**

---

DOI: 10.18318/td.2015.en.1.17

The fact that some people are silly about animals cannot stop the topic being a serious one. (...) We are not just rather like animals; we are animals.

Mary Midgley<sup>1</sup>

**I**n the western cultural context, emotional relationships between humans and other animals are as a rule determined by a deeply entrenched anthropocentrism<sup>2</sup> stemming from Judaic and Classical traditions, and later reinforced by Christianity and modern philosophy<sup>3</sup>, the latter reaching its negative culmination in the writings of Descartes and his followers. The French philosopher believed that only humans are capable of having an emo-

**Monika Bakke –**

teaches in the Philosophy Department at the Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan, Poland. She writes on contemporary art and aesthetics with a particular interest in posthumanism, post-anthropocentrism, and in cross-cultural and gender perspectives. She is the author of *Open Body* (2000) [in Polish] and *Bio-transfigurations. Art and Aesthetics of Posthumanism* (2010) [in Polish], co-author of *Pleroma. Art in Search of Fullness* (1998), editor of *Australian Aboriginal Aesthetics* (2004) [in Polish], *Going Aerial. Air, Art, Architecture* (2006) and *The Life of Air. Dwelling, Communicating, Manipulating* (2011). Since 2001, she has been an editor of the cultural journal *Czas Kultury*.

- 1 Moussaieff J. Masson and Susan McCarthy, *When Elephants Weep: The Emotional Lives of Animals*, (New York: Delacorte Press, 1995), 37.
- 2 This approach is also known as species chauvinism; the term itself was coined by Richard D. Rayder in 1970.
- 3 A synthetic approach to the history of anthropocentrism can be found, for example, in Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation*, (New York: New York Review of Books, 1990); whereas a broader and more interesting discussion of the matter can be found in Gary Steiner's *Anthropocentrism and Its Discontents. The Moral Status of Animals in the History of Western Philosophy*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 2005).

tional life which supposedly manifested itself as laughter, blushing and turning pale, shedding tears, etc., whereas animals were only perfect machines devoid of any semblance of spiritual life and unable to experience emotions. The results of these beliefs turned out to be nothing less than disastrous for animals in general, especially as vivisection became increasingly popular and the shriek of a tormented animal was considered to be synonymous with the sound a metal spring makes when it is hit. Clearly, Darwin did not share the Cartesian belief that emotions are unique to humans. In *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, he cautioned that "as long as man and all other animals are viewed as independent creations, an effectual stop is put to our natural desire to investigate as far as possible the causes of expression"<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, animal and human emotions can be considered to form a continuum and "he who admits on general grounds that the structure and habits of all animals have been gradually evolved, will look at the whole subject of expression in a new and interesting light"<sup>5</sup>. Employing the comparative method in his enquiries into the expression of emotions in a variety of non-human species, as well as in newborns, individuals with mental disorders, and non-European peoples<sup>6</sup>, Darwin concluded that some forms of emotional expression are instinctive and innate—and thus hereditary—therefore there should not be any intercultural differences in said expression.

In the second half of the 20th century, the question of animal emotionality, previously explored mostly by philosophers, began to interest ethnologists and animal psychologists who further linked the emotional capacity of animals with the question of their consciousness and intelligence. However, studies in this particular field are often accused of unintentional anthropomorphism, as was the case with Darwin's seminal *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, which contains the following passage: "Even insects express anger, terror, jealousy, and love by their stridulation"<sup>7</sup>. But we only know the traditional anthropocentric world criticized by Darwin and the modern world of cultural constructivism – this is essentially the place we inhabit. It is difficult therefore to underestimate the wide-ranging skepticism concerning our ability to gain any further insight into the world of animals and their emotions, shared by many scholars, including Brian Massumi, who claims that

---

4 Charles Darwin and Paul Ekman. *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 19.

5 Ibid., 19

6 Darwin believed that in these groups emotional expression was the most pronounced and the least inhibited by social customs.

7 Darwin and Ekman, *The Expression*, 347

it is meaningless to interrogate the relation of the human to the nonhuman if the nonhuman is only a construct of human culture, or inertness. The concepts of nature and culture need serious reworking, in a way that expresses the irreducible alterity of the nonhuman in and through its active connection to the human and vice versa. Let matter be matter, brains be brains, jellyfish be jellyfish, and culture be nature, irreducible alterity and infinite connection<sup>8</sup>.

However, few animal behaviorists call for radical change of the status quo, as most believe that anthropomorphization may be helpful in the long run. To quote James Serpell, it has been widely adopted in fields like experimental psychology and behavioral animal psychology: "it allows us (...) to predict how others would behave in similar circumstances. If this is the case, then it logically follows that we should use precisely the same criteria to judge and predict the behavior of non-humans, since they are obviously similar to us in a great many respects"<sup>9</sup>.

The growing research interest in animal emotionality and its interspecies manifestations goes hand in hand with a growing critical interest in interspecies relationships that humans enter into. A favorable context for these changes was created already in the last century in the context of environmental philosophies and ecologically-oriented social movements, especially those with a non-anthropocentric slant like the animal liberation movement or various forms of deep ecology<sup>10</sup>. Both our perception and the language we use to discuss the psyche of other animals are changing slowly but surely. These changes are evident, for instance, in the shifts in studies on animals and pain, where researchers are now considering not only physical but also psychological suffering. We are interested in those aspects that connect us to other animals, we are looking for continuity and symbiosis, not for irreducible alterity. In the humanities, anthropocentrism is in decline, a process that is fairly slow but very prominent.

Although currently we no longer question the existence of animal emotionality, which moderates, to a certain extent, the difference between "us" and "them" on a worldview level, the way we practice and portray (which itself is part of the practice) our relationships with other animals changes extremely

8 Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 39

9 James Serpell, *In the Company of Animals: A Study of Human-Animal Relationships*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 173

10 See: Carolyn Merchant, *Radical Ecology. The Search for a Livable World* (London-New York: Routledge, 2005)

slowly and, to some degree, it still follows deeply entrenched anthropocentric patterns. In this essay, I will focus on the two most common and simultaneously radically opposite emotional attitudes towards other animals, including apparent interspecies approximation, that is forcing animals into frameworks created specifically to describe interpersonal relationships, also called oedipalization; and the belief in total and therefore absolutely irreducible alterity between "us" and "them". Both attitudes, and the practices stemming from them, are anthropocentric in nature.

### Oedipalizing Animals or On Disservice

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari distinguish three types of animals, one of which comprises "individuated animals, family pets, sentimental, Oedipal animals each with its own petty history, «my» cat, «my» dog"<sup>11</sup>. This fairly common process of "humanization" quite effectively protects the animals from being eaten, however it does not give rise to any sort of animal autonomy. On the contrary, it forces animals into culturally approved mechanisms of exploitation by humans for their own emotional purposes or for the sake of their whims. One classic example of an anthropomorphic depiction of the oedipalization process was the case of Flush as portrayed by Virginia Woolf: the relationship between Miss Barrett and her dog was sophisticated and intimate, she "loved Flush, and Flush was worthy of her love"<sup>12</sup>. Her devotion, however, was short-lived and petered out at the first sight of Mister Browning, as the dog, mute by nature, could not compete with a poet. He was completely outmatched by the human challenger because, as Woolf anthropomorphically describes it, it was obvious even to Flush himself that "never had such wastes of dismal distance separated them. He lay there ignored; he might not have been there, he felt. Miss Barrett no longer remembered his existence"<sup>13</sup>.

11 The other categories include: "animals with characteristics or attributes, (...) animals as they are treated in great divine myths. (...) Finally, there are more demonic animals, packs of *affect animals* that form a multiplicity, a becoming". This classification, however, is neither definitive nor exclusive. Any animal can join either of the categories and move freely between them: "There is always the possibility that a given animal, a louse, a cheetah or an elephant, will be treated as a pet, my little beast. And at the other extreme, it is also possible for any animal to be treated in the mode of the pack or swarm; (...) Even the cat, even the dog". Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, (Minneapolis-London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 240-241.

12 Virginia Woolf, *Flush*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 33.

13 *Ibid.*, 39.

Speaking out against similar practices, Donna Haraway categorically declared that we “should always see animals as animals”, not furry humans. But are we truly up to the task? In *The Companion Species Manifesto. Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*, Haraway points out that the term “significant other” is in no way limited to humans and can easily mean members of other species. The author claims that human expectations of being unconditionally loved by canines are based on unfounded beliefs and are demeaning to both dogs and children as they lead to mistaking the former for the latter. This does not mean, however, that we should give up on any sort of emotional relationship with these animals. Haraway admits that she finds “the love of and between historically situated dogs and humans precious” and then goes on to justify her position:

contrary to lots of dangerous and unethical projection in the Western world that makes domestic canines into furry children, dogs are not about oneself. Indeed, that is the beauty of dogs. They are not a projection, nor the realization of an intention, nor the telos of anything. They are dogs; i.e., a species in obligatory, constitutive, historical, protein relationship with human beings. The relationship is not especially nice; it is full of waste, cruelty, indifference, ignorance, and loss, as well as of joy, invention, labor, intelligence, and play<sup>14</sup>.

Haraway clearly indicates that requiring a canine to give humans unconditional love places a burden on it that is as heavy as any other one. Even if in the majority of cases this coexistence turns out to be satisfying and pleasant for both parties, it puts the dog in a risky and ultimately untenable situation, in that its failure to fulfil the emotional expectations or fantasies of humans can result in its abandonment<sup>15</sup>, as the relationship is always determined by the human party. Moreover, Haraway supports the idea that in our relationship with canines we should abandon training in favor of proper communication, despite apparent differences between both species. In such a context, it becomes possible to discuss the matter of “animal happiness”, as does Vicki Herne, the dog trainer and author mentioned by Haraway in her book<sup>16</sup>. This particular happiness may arise when the animal and the human communicate

14 Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto. Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*, (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), 11–12.

15 *Ibid.*, 38.

16 Vicki Herne, “Horses, Hounds, and Jeffersonian Happiness: What’s Wrong with Animal Rights?” <http://www.dogtrainingarts.com>



properly, which in turn shapes the rights that both parties can claim in this relationship. Animal rights or human rights with respect to animals are never imposed in a top-down fashion, they are always shaped by individual relations, therefore not only does the human have legitimate expectations towards the animal but so does the animal towards the human. We should strive towards a state of affairs wherein these sorts of relationships are based on reciprocity.

### Wild at Heart

Our emotional relationship with wild animals – historically understood as a part of the wilderness, that is space not yet colonized by civilized peoples – should be examined by means of different categories. The concept of wilderness framing it as a space hostile to (civilized) humans and the domain of wild animals as well “wild” humans was formulated in the times of Ancient Greece<sup>17</sup>. The Romantic period, however, purged the connotations of hostility and associated the wilderness with pristine, untainted land that man has not yet sullied with his presence and which still has the power to restore his spiritual balance. Nowadays, that Romantic perception of nature is extended onto areas protected from human interference, like nature reserves, whereas the very concept of nature as hostile to humans is projected primarily onto the so-called “urban jungle”<sup>18</sup>. Nevertheless, there are still swaths of wilderness where human’s existence is threatened by the local wildlife, adverse weather conditions, etc. These places, however, no longer elicit the trepidation they used to, nowadays they are challenges to be overcome by city dwellers who go there to seek entertainment, excitement, and most of all, themselves.

The case of Timothy Treadwell which I will examine here, would never stir up that much interest and controversy if its conclusion were less tragic. Treadwell’s story was recounted multiple times in newspapers, books, and even in Werner Herzog’s documentary *Grizzly Man* (2005). The film, made up of handheld video footage captured by Treadwell during a series of trips to Alaska which combined a unique account of a life spent amidst wild animals with elusive moments of the life of the animals themselves, especially grizzly bears.

---

17 Our ideas about the inhabitants of the wilderness have changed over time; nevertheless, for a very long time the general consensus was that the wilderness is roamed by monsters and spiritual entities under various guises, often hostile to humans. A modern take on that myth can be found in the subject matter and popularity of the *Blair Witch Project*.

18 See Andrew Light, “Urban Wilderness”, in *Wild Ideas*, ed. D. Rothenberg. (Minneapolis-London: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

The headline of *Anchorage Daily News* from October 8, 2003 reads: "Wildlife author killed, eaten by bears he loved". The wording suggests a confrontation between emotionally fragile beings, that is humans, and ruthless, brutal animals capable of killing "in cold blood". This incredibly biased headline, like many others that cropped up after Treadwell's demise, is clearly crammed with anthropomorphic projections revealing themselves in the sentimental expectation of reciprocity and unconditional love that many humans demand from pets. This anthropomorphically constructed opposition of love and death is anchored in the juxtaposition of the feral and the civilized, itself the cornerstone of the Classical concept of nature<sup>19</sup>. What we are dealing with here, then, is a fusion of the Romantic and Classical visions of the wilderness, wherein love is the ultimate human value and death the obvious evil, lurking in a remote, hostile wilderness. Thus, Treadwell's story became a reiteration of the manifestly anthropocentric tale of the gulf separating the human from the non-human: if the distance between "us" and "them" is not maintained, the consequences are bound to be fatal.

Unfortunately, even Herzog's *Grizzly Man* documentary falls prey to the same anthropocentric depiction of the wild animal as total, impenetrable, and hostile otherness. Herzog manipulates the emotions of both the people he interviewed as well as his audience to conclude that the non-human sphere, the sphere populated by wildlife, is permeated with violence and death, and therefore should be avoided or treated with utmost caution. The pronounced emphasis of anthropophagy, as well as cannibalism sometimes practiced by bears, is supposed to elicit repulsion in the audience and thus reinforce the viewers' anthropocentric beliefs. The director assumes the mantle of the enlightened sage who protects humans from fatal encounters with the animal other and decides that only he will listen to the original audio recording of the deadly attack (the movie shows Herzog listening to the recording that he denied the audience).

While Herzog clearly reveals himself to be a proponent of the Classical notion of a wilderness which is hostile to humans, his cinematic interpretation of Treadwell's behavior invokes the Romantic concept in a very peculiar, nearly parodic fashion, plainly evident both in the naive and sentimental way of its conceptualization and the paternalistic attitude towards wildlife. Some of Treadwell's assumptions are patently absurd, like for example his belief that predators should peacefully coexist with their prey and flies should "have more respect" towards the carcass of the fox he favored and tried to domesticate.

19 Light notes that there are three elements specific to Classical wilderness: 1. separation from civilized areas; 2. savagery of its inhabitants, the non-human beasts; 3. superiority of the civilized man; Light, "Urban Wilderness", 197.

Even more problematic is the oedipalization of wildlife not only through domestication but also through giving animals human names and drawing up human-like genealogies for them, the latter apparent in Treadwell's numerous stories about a group of bears he was close with. Treadwell himself uses phrases like "he's been with me for over a decade", "my animal friends", etc. By trying to domesticate the animals or simply getting them accustomed to human presence, he was doing the bears a great disservice and exposing them to potential dangers stemming from encounters with humans.

Herzog also revealed footage implying that Treadwell sometimes forgot the conventions of the nature documentary as well his own story he wanted to expound. In these moments he acts on impulse, disregarding both the camera and the clarity of message, and his interactions with animals are such as to completely contravene every convention of the wildlife film. These moments, or rather those bits of footage, are seldom shared by Herzog himself, maybe it is simply because they are not that frequent in the recordings Treadwell left behind. Based on these cracks in the conventional façade, we can easily infer the intensity of experiences devoid of conventionalized emotions generated in front of the camera for the sake of future audiences. These moments of escape are the result of a frank, visceral reaction to animals whose presence was often a completely random occurrence. There can be no talk of indifference here because, as Braidotti explains, "not rationality but rather affectivity counts here; (...) That implies that the crucial mechanism by which the subject operates is the expression of his or her innermost core, that is affectivity and the capacity of interrelations"<sup>20</sup>. And thus, this undeniable connection with animals and the obstinate desire to live within their natural habitat led Treadwell to a world where survival was a struggle but without which he struggled to survive.

### **Appetite for the Other**

Eating is usually associated with killing, therefore questions revolving around individual dietary preferences can inspire a lot of mixed emotions. The difference between what is edible and what we consider food becomes very important as, in the words of Glenn Kuehn, it reflects the way in which we define our own selves: "In this context, food is indicative of what we think we are and what we wish to be"<sup>21</sup>. Treadwell was fully aware that all along he

20 Rosi Braidotti, *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 205.

21 Glenn Kuehn, "Dining on Fido. Death, Identity, and the Aesthetic Dilemma of Eating Animals", in *Animal Pragmatism*, ed. Erin McKenna and Andrew Light, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 245.

risked being eaten and that knowledge infused his life with new intensity. His choice to live among the bears brought him to the razor's edge between life and death on which he successfully balanced for years, and it was living in this persistent gloom of death that paradoxically delayed Treadwell's demise. Close proximity to mortal danger was what fueled him, made him feel like he was living life to the fullest, but it worked like any other addiction: imbibing allows the addict to function, in order to get another shot, another high, another drink. In Braidotti's words, "the proximity of death suspends life, not in transcendence, but rather in the radical immanence of just a life, here and now, for as long as we can and as much as we take"<sup>22</sup>. Treadwell's potentially fatal encounters with animals did not sap his resilience, on the contrary, they breathed new life into him, brought him joy and even pleasure. "Whatever gets you through the day"<sup>23</sup>, writes Braidotti, is just fine, and in Treadwell's case it was living among the bears. Each day became the penultimate one until his dying day arrived, long delayed but always expected. Still, the fatal encounter with the animal was surprising, terrifying, affective. In contrast to previous penultimate confrontations, the final one was never supposed to be contextualized and recounted in front of a camera. It took place at the affective level and remained there, and the affective level is, to quote Massumi, "situational: the full extent of events impinges on the context"<sup>24</sup>.

The media perspective portrays Treadwell's death as gruesome. But what was so horrific in that particular event? It inspired emotions strong enough to produce further ursine victims, killed so that human remains could be extracted from their bodies (Treadwell's girlfriend was also killed in the bear attack) in order to ultimately cremate them and spread the ashes in the exact spot where the act of incorporation took place. The absolutely unnecessary killing of bears only highlights how anthropophagy is still considered taboo in human culture. As we can clearly see forms of corporeal communion with animals are precisely defined and strictly controlled, and incorporation can only be unilateral – only human animals are allowed to consume the bodies of other animals. There can be no symmetry in that regard, and even thinking about it seems transgressive and horrifying. Additionally, episodes of

22 Braidotti, *Transpositions*, 211.

23 *Ibid.*, 205.

24 Massumi, *Parables*, 28. That stands in contrast with emotions, defined by Massumi as "subjective content, the sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal. Emotion is qualified intensity, the conventional, consensual point of insertion of intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progressions, into narrativizable action-reaction circuits, into function and meaning. It is intensity owned and recognized". (*ibid.*)

anthropophagy leave humans scrambling to immediately separate human flesh from the non-human. As Alphonso Lagis writes,

we alone are the uneaten ones, the unexchangeable value, the cosmic dignity. We have buried our corpses out of the reach of scavenger animals, dogs and hyenas; have encased them in stone mausoleums and steel coffins; have mummified them and have injected them with formaldehyde so that they will not be food of larvae or cremated them to make them inedible even to bacteria<sup>25</sup>.

Treadwell, however, was more than just an underachiever and a bear enthusiast, he became part of a process that transcended all individual experience—the process of becoming other-than-human. It was initiated, or we may even say Treadwell was infected by it, in the course of his direct encounters with the ursine population of Alaska. As he himself admitted, when he came into contact with the animal world, it engulfed and infected him, and thus he crossed over and within to embrace his obsession. The process, however, was different than in the case of Gregor, the protagonist of Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, whose transmutation into an animal was hampered time and time again by re-oedipalizing forces<sup>26</sup> which ultimately resulted in his doom, whereas Treadwell's death was not the result of his fear of crossing over to the other side—quite the contrary. The appetite for something/someone is rooted in the desire to consume or to be consumed, in the irresistible need to meld, to fuse and confuse, therefore in the will to lose oneself.

Episodes of anthropophagy have always inspired terror, even if the truth is that they have not been all that frequent throughout history. Nevertheless, images produced by mass culture, like for example *Jaws*<sup>27</sup>, have become part and parcel of our idea of human encounters with wildlife. In our mass consciousness, wolves, crocodiles, Komodo dragons, sharks are "killing machines" devoid of any emotion. However, recreational encounters with these predators usually bring in heavy crowds, as there can be no *ersatz* for the fear arising from the very real possibility of being bitten or devoured. As noted by Lingis, in the world of the human animal, the reverse Eucharist seems to be the only

25 Alphonso Lingis, *Trust*, (Minneapolis-London: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 147.

26 See: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka. Toward a Minor Literature*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 14.

27 The average global annual number of deaths from shark attacks is five, whereas falling coconuts kill over 150 people all over the world every year. Nobody, however, would even dream of shooting thrillers about deadly coconuts. This little bit of trivia was first brought up by Christian Frei.

rule, its message being: “do not eat my flesh, do not drink my blood”<sup>28</sup>. In the symbolic sphere, anthropophagy is permissible only in the form of cannibalism, whereas the consumption of human flesh by non-human entities is always an affront to the anthropocentric order of things and is a severe violation of the carefully guarded anthropogenetic limits. In the words of Bakhtin: “Man’s encounter with the world in the act of eating is joyful, triumphant; he triumphs over the world, devours it without being devoured himself. The limits between man and the world are erased, to man’s advantage”<sup>29</sup>. What, then, would happen were we to make the relationship reciprocal? Firstly, man is reduced to fodder and thus loses his subjective status and, as a result of the latter, loses identity, is deprived of his privileged position and his power. In such a world, humanity, as defined by its taxonomic and singular individuality, ceases to exist and is merged directly with the great chain of life that we call *zoe*; this is simultaneously terrifying and enthralling.

As noted by Caillois<sup>30</sup>, there is a direct relationship between pleasure derived from eating and sexual pleasure, and sexual intercourse, as another form of carnal interaction with the animal, is subject to even more stringent taboos. Interspecies affection has to remain platonic and interspecies sexual desire cannot transcend corporeal boundaries – in contrast to food consumption, sexual incorporation is strictly forbidden for both parties. Therefore, the coupling between Leda and the swan that has animated European imagination for centuries and inspired numerous retellings in both Western art and literature, has to remain a fantasy; otherwise, such an act would undoubtedly constitute, in the words of Roland Barthes, “unrefined” pleasure, the experience of which does not reinforce man’s own subjectivity and his status as the master of the animal kingdom – on the contrary, it induces him to lose himself<sup>31</sup>. In Christian Europe<sup>32</sup>, pleasure derived from sexual contact with animals, and maybe even experienced in a mutual manner, was considered “the most heinous and unspeakable of crimes”<sup>33</sup> and was punishable by death; this stands in direct contrast with the traditions of polytheist Europe where

28 Lingis, *Trust*, 108.

29 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 281.

30 Roger Caillois, “The Praying Mantis”, in *The Edge of Surrealism: A Roger Caillois Reader*, ed. Claudine Frank, (Raleigh, Duke University Press, 2003).

31 See: Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975).

32 Bestiality was expressly forbidden by the Old Testament, the Talmud, the Hittite code, cf. Serpell, *Company*, 34.

33 Serpell, *Company*, 34.

practices that in later centuries were considered to be a threat to subjectivity were part and parcel of the cultural mores. Lest we forget, sexual contact between humans and animals so prevalent in Classical mythology resulted in the birth of not only dangerous half-breeds, including monsters like the Minotaur, but also humans of exceptional beauty, like Helen. Peter Singer, whose concern for animal welfare garnered him an equal measure of both admiration and disapproval, thinks that even if interspecies sexual relations are not necessarily normal or natural, they surely are not "an offence to our status and dignity as human beings"<sup>34</sup>. Lingis, on the other hand, notes that when we have sex with a member of our own species, "we also make love with the horse and the dolphin, the kitten and the macaw, the powdery moths and the lustful crickets"<sup>35</sup>. Our orgasmic flesh reveals extensive linkage to the world inhabited by other forms of life, becomes part of a world greater than the human domain.

### **We, the Postanthropocentric Others**

In many circles, anthropocentrism is considered unwarranted, even arrogant and anachronistic. However, we find ourselves only at the beginning of the journey which will open us up to the world of the unknown, non-human other. "Naturally, we will recognize it in ourselves", writes Jolanta Brach-Czaina, "I mean sand, leaves, claws. We will discover our demolished stony constituents, breathe new life into the despised animal spirit, but still we will have no peace to speak of"<sup>36</sup>. It is a new experience that will surely allow us to lose ourselves, or more precisely, to shake the gene-deep feeling of certainty and superiority ingrained into us over the course of millennia spent in our privileged position. All was cut to man's measure as man was the measure of all. Donna Haraway inquiries into the unpredictable consequences of radical approaches to the concepts of nature and culture, animal and human, object and subject. Her expectations of change and her concern for the ontological status of humans and animals are voiced in her questions:

What happens if Western philosophers truly reopen the question of the relation of the subject and the species? What happens if thinkers in these traditions – which have depended fundamentally on the category of the

34 Peter Singer, "Heavy Petting". Accessed July 31, 2015. <http://www.utilitarian.net/singer/by/2001----.htm>

35 Alphonso Lingis, *Dangerous Emotions*, (Berkeley-London: University of California Press, 2000), 37.

36 Jolanta Brach-Czaina, *Blony umysłu*, (Warszawa: Sic!, 2003), 123.

animal in order to generate and legitimate the class of humans – really ask, not knowing the answer, if non-humans are subjects?<sup>37</sup>

Attempts to overcome the hegemony of the anthropocentric subject are on the rise, new critical voices continue to surface. The subject problem is raised in a range of approaches, therefore it seems valid to ask not only about objects or objectified animals becoming subjects (as do Haraway or Singer) but to commit to a broader inquiry focused on who/what we are becoming/will become once we discard our anthropocentric beliefs.

Our emotional relationships constitute but a fraction of the complex symbiotic relations with non-human others, that is the organic and inorganic environment that we inhabit and which we actively shape. To frame it in the sense of Spinozan *affectus*, we impinge and are impinged upon, “we move in an environment of air currents, rustling trees, and animate bodies”<sup>38</sup>, and if we were only able to free ourselves from bodies defined by form, individuality, and subjectivity, claims Lingis<sup>39</sup>, we would be free to realize and liberate the multiplicity of movements and intensities in us, the animal and vegetable, the organic and inorganic. Elizabeth Grosz remarks that “the human is in the process of becoming other-than-human, of overcoming itself”<sup>40</sup>, and from such a perspective, existence cannot be considered as solely the life of an individual. Life understood as *zoe*, the biological life, proceeds ever onward regardless of individual deaths, it multiplies everywhere in its mindless intensity and multiplicity of form, in affect!

*Translation: Jan Szelągiewicz*

---

37 Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory*, (Chicago-London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), back cover.

38 Ibid., 29.

39 Lingis, *Emotions*, 29.

40 Elizabeth Grosz, *The Nick of Time. Politics, Evolution, and the Untimely*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 63.





**teksty** DRUGIE • 1 [7] • 2015

index 337412 • PL ISSN 0867-0633

---

*other special issues*

---

*Texts and the Body*

*Holocaust in Literary and Cultural Studies*

*Anthropology in Literary Studies*

*Postcolonial or Postdependence Studies?*

*Nonfiction, Reportage, Testimony*