

***Of Zoogrammatology:
A Derridean Theory of Textual Animality***

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Cardiff, 2017

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This work has not been submitted in substance for any other degree or award at this or any other university or place of learning, nor is being submitted concurrently in candidature for any degree or other award.

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Date: 29 September 2017

Statement 1

This thesis is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PhD in Critical and Cultural Theory.

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Summary

Of Zoogrammatology: A Derridean Theory of Textual Animality

This thesis aims to ‘apply’, as it were, some of Jacques Derrida’s conclusions regarding the age-old distinction between ideal and material to an understanding of animality and how it emerges in texts. I propose the paleonym “arche-animality” to understand the workings of animality in texts. In the field of Literary Animal Studies, some challenging questions concerning animals in texts seem to mirror Derrida’s topics in his early works. On the one hand, we can conceptualise animals as radically different from humans due to their embodiment, but, on the other hand, we can take them to be only differently embodied subjectivities, not unlike the human’s as it is thought to be housed in the body. Both positions are fraught with problems and are, in fact, entangled with the relationship between materiality and ideality. These challenging questions – especially concerning animal embodiment – must be approached with an eye towards paleonymy, the procedure by means of which Derrida was able to propose arche-writing as the origin of both vulgar writing and speech. To demonstrate the appropriateness of paleonymy, I uncover the *arche-animal* in different texts of different genres and varying degrees of ‘animal presence’: a ‘theoretical’ text (Sigmund Freud’s *Totem and Taboo*), a film (Darren Arofnosky’s *Black Swan*), a novel (Clarice Lispector’s *The Apple in the Dark*), and a poem (Ted Hughes’ ‘The Thought-Fox’).

Acknowledgements

This thesis is dedicated to my partner and husband Fernando Pabst, without whom it certainly wouldn't exist. I thank him for the constant support, contribution, and love, from the very genesis of this research project, through his reading of each chapter, and to the proof-reading and editing in the final stages of giving it (to) the light.

I am thankful to my supervisor Neil for his constant support, supervision, and dedication to my research and this thesis.

I would like to thank the Brazilian government's Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Ensino Superior (CAPES) for funding my doctoral studies.

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The alleged derivativeness of writing, however real and massive, was possible only on one condition: that the “original,” “natural,” etc. language had never existed, never been intact and untouched by writing, that it had itself always been a writing. An arche-writing whose necessity and new concept I wish to indicate and outline here; and which I continue to call writing only because it essentially communicates with the vulgar concept of writing. The latter could not have imposed itself historically except by the dissimulation of the arche-writing.

Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*

Animal language—and animality in general—represents here the still living myth of fixity, of symbolic incapacity, of nonsupplementarity. If we consider the *concept* of animality not in its content of understanding or misunderstanding but in its specific *function*, we shall see that it must locate a moment of *life* which knows nothing of symbol, substitution, lack and supplementary addition, etc.—everything, in fact, whose appearance and play I wish to describe here. A life that has not yet broached the play of supplementarity and which at the same time has not yet let itself be violated by it: a life without *différance* and without articulation.

Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*

Ecce animot. Neither a species nor a gender nor an individual.

Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*

Introduction

This thesis aims to challenge a common practice in Animal Studies scholarship regarding literary representation so as to theorise more fully the nexus between animality and the literary. This common practice consists of an extreme materialism in framing the 'animal question' with respect to (literary) language, to the exclusion of other frameworks. In short, materialism is portrayed as the only channel for a literary theory of animality insofar as 'animals in literature' are believed to be relevant (only) due to their supposed material embodiment. Kari Weil refers to this tendency as the 'counter-linguistic turn', in which animals' supposed lack of language is refashioned as an asset reliant on their bodiliness:

Although many current projects are intent on proving that certain animals do have language capabilities like those of humans, other sectors of animal studies are concerned with forms of subjectivity that are not language-based. Instead, they are concerned with ways of knowing that appear to work outside those processes of logocentric, rational thinking that have defined what is proper to the human, as opposed to the nonhuman animal.¹

James Berger points out, in 2005, that

with increasing influence over the past fifteen or twenty years we can see in the academic humanities, in some literary fiction, and in areas of popular culture varieties of what we might call a counter-linguistic turn. [...] Their central claim is that there is an other of language, whether or not this other can be conceptualized, and that language does not go "all the way down."²

¹ Kari Weil, 'Killing Them Softly: Animal Death, Linguistic Disability, and the Struggle for Ethics', *Configurations*, 14 (2006), 87-98 (p. 87).

² James Berger, 'Falling Towers and Postmodern Wild Children: Oliver Sacks, Don DeLillo, and Turns against Language', *PMLA*, 120 (2005), 341-361 (p. 344).

As one of the symptoms of this linguistic turn, Berger cites ‘studies across several fields that stress materiality or physicality. This work often focuses on the body, which serves as a crucial and contested boundary marker for the limits of language’.³ And in neurologist Oliver Sack’s popular writings, he argues that ‘the deepest experience of living as a human animal, the most basic form of consciousness, is not symbolic or linguistic. It is bodily, a sense of at-homeness in the body’.⁴ This focus on the animal side of the human, or on what we could call our uncanny proximity to animals, functions to stress their *distinct* type of embodiment, since the material existence we share with them encounters in our linguistically saturated nature a limit to this proximity. The emphasis on bodily matter engendered by such similarity would serve to posit matter once again as that which would ground ontology, as a way of writing it out of ‘theory’ and the constitutive powers of language. Such matter could easily be found in objects, or the mineral and vegetal kingdoms, but the fact that humans and animals are otherwise extremely similar works to underscore this materiality – and its push into language – in ways not available to other beings. Animals would represent, then, an exteriority to language, conceptuality, reason, and literature, exposing literary texts to their own limitations. I shall attempt, however, to expose the metaphysical foundation of such an analytical frame by revisiting Derrida’s critique of the simple evocation of matter. His complication of the material/ideal dichotomy will be shown to represent a more productive response to this duality and this will have crucial

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., p. 350.

consequences to a thinking of animality as grounded on bodily materiality. Crucially for literary studies, the materialism I shall be critiquing more often than not goes hand in hand with a methodological anti-formalism: literary texts are read as intricate forms of paraphrase of the real, material, embodied lives of animals, which means their textual form is secondary.⁵

Interestingly, a radical formalist approach to texts could be attempted in the name of very focus on embodiment and materiality that guides the interest in animals within Literary Animal Studies. Hence, this formalism could be defended as a type of anti-speciesist literary criticism. If we read this in Cartesian terms, this sort of formalism would suggest an independence of the (animal) body (*form* as the body of the text) from the soul-or-mind, or even some kind of radical materialism that prioritises bodies before souls. However, as we saw, many literary scholars approach animals as objects in literary texts, as subject matters that can be and indeed are at stake at any other medium. At the level of object, this approach attempts to circle the specificity of animality as a different form of embodiment, while at the level of method, the text itself, as the form or embodiment of signification, is overlooked.

For example, Robert McKay frames the emergence of Literary Animal Studies by stating that '[i]n the mid- to late-1990s, very few scholars were concerned with the near omnipresence of nonhuman animals in literary texts', and he accuses those works which did try to address 'the animal question'

⁵ Cf. Kenneth Shapiro and Marion W. Copeland, 'Toward a Critical Theory of Animal Issues in Fiction', *Society & Animals* 13 (2005), 343-346.

before then of ‘coming nowhere near capturing the fullness of animals’ *presence* in literary and cultural history’.⁶ Similarly, Marion W. Copeland praises Literary Animal Studies which ‘approached canonical literature [...] and found rich *untapped sources of information* on both human relations with and attitudes toward other animals’, sources whose ‘mining [...] has become one goal of Literary Animal Studies’.⁷ McKay and Copeland defend seemingly disparate views on the relationship between animal ‘presence’ and textuality: whereas the former believes animals are present *in* texts (*omnipresent*, in fact), the latter seems to suggest that literary discourse is a medium capable of delivering us hard nuggets of important information about animals, who one assumes are therefore very present, albeit elsewhere. But McKay’s subtle shift from ‘omnipresence in texts’ to ‘presence in literary and cultural *history*’ points towards a belief in that material presence of animals *despite* and *outside* texts. If animals are ‘present’ in texts, they are apparently *represented* therein, à la Copeland, as pieces of information. She finally confirms hers and McKay’s similarity by asserting that some ‘poetry [...] brings readers into the *presence* of other-than-human animals’.⁸ The ‘presence of non-human animals in works of fiction’ is also mentioned by Shaviro and Copeland, who also decry (the presence of?) animal ‘absent referent[s]’.⁹

⁶ Robert McKay, ‘What Kind of Literary Animal Studies Do We Want, or Need?’, *Modern Fiction Studies* 60 (2014), 636-644 (p. 637, my emphases).

⁷ Marion W. Copeland, ‘Literary Animal Studies in 2012: Where We Are, Where We Are Going’, *Anthrozoös* 25 (2012), supplement, 91-105 (p. 99, my emphasis).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Shapiro and Copeland, p. 343.

Two interrelated gestures are performed in these position papers. On the one hand, we have the belief that animals can be made to be present in texts by means of appropriate writing or reading practices. On the other, there is a clear sense in which animals inhabit a completely separate realm against which the literary pushes. Both are joined in the assumption that some sort of presence may be evoked by means of textual networks of references, and, more importantly, that this evocation is the overarching work of textuality and literature. This formulation owes its logic to the very concept of form and how it has been understood in poetics.

However, as I shall discuss in more detail, there are many reasons why a formalist textual approach that could rightfully be called anti-speciesist is ultimately untenable. Still, as we saw, the animalised meanings that underpin the very formulation of formalism would seem to invite us to strive to make formalism work in the name of a non-speciesist poetics and criticism that would liberate the body of form from subjugation to the soul of content. The whole problem seems to stem from the double pressure exercised on form – that it be the way texts appear but also that it always point to a *what* other than itself – and this connects to some of Derrida’s complications of the material/ideal duality in the concept of the signifier.

Another contribution to the area of Literary Animal Studies is Pieter Vermeulen and Virginia Richter’s introduction to their edited volume of the European Journal of English Studies titled *Modern Creatures*, where they put forward the privileging of the concept of ‘creature’ and of ‘the creaturely’ as

key frameworks in the work of animal studies.¹⁰ Their main reference point is the work of Anat Pick, whose definition of the creaturely they cite: '[t]he creaturely is primarily the condition of exposure and finitude that affects all living bodies whatever they are'.¹¹ And it is crucial to their project that Pick situates her emphasis on creatureliness as part of a resistance against the tendency to project human traits onto animals. Another important influence is the work of Eric Santner, whom they credit as also responsible for the scholarly relevance of the term 'creaturely'. However, they underline some differences between Santner and Pick regarding creatureliness, especially the former's understanding that human vulnerability and exposure is not only a product of its biological, animal nature. For him, human contingency is determined by only to its embodied vulnerability, but also by its exposure to 'spiritual forces' and 'social textures [...] that uncannily animate the human body'.¹²

In the area of Literary Animal Studies, Susan McHugh's writings are among the most perceptive to this problem and to the perceived necessity of some kind of formalist poetics of animality. For her, animals 'at once serv[e] as a metaphor for the poetic imagination and voic[e] the limits of human experience'. But, beyond that, their 'peculiar operations of agency, these ways of inhabiting literature without somehow being represented therein, present tremendous opportunities for recovering and interrogating the material and

¹⁰ Pieter Vermeullen and Virginia Richter, 'Introduction: Creaturely Constellations', *European Journal of English Studies* 19 (2015), 1-9 (p. 2).

¹¹ Ibid., p. 3.

¹² Ibid., p. 5.

representational problems specific to animality',¹³ but also to literature, since she entertains that 'species being works in literary texts as a function of what we think of as their literariness'.¹⁴ She argues that 'the problem of animals [is] written into the metaphysics of speech and subjectivity'.¹⁵ Despite her discussion of animal agency, she criticises the temptation of transferring subjectivity onto animals, suggesting that 'sublimation of cross-species violence [...] derives from the valorization of psychic interiority as the defining quality of the human in literary research' and such 'subjectivity entails a very specific and limiting story of agency'.¹⁶ She understands that

the focus on embodiment, surfaces, and exteriority [...] perhaps most clearly distinguishes animals as agents of an order different from that of human subjectivity—more precisely, as actors operating in accordance with a logic different from that of intentionality or psychological interiority.¹⁷

However, she does not believe that privileging this beyond-human embodiment is the answer to the methodological problems posed by animals, since this reliance on animal transcendence misses the point of the enmeshing of animality and text. She holds that the argument for the irrelevance of literature and textuality for animals is groundless, since 'messy entanglements of human and animal agents become sedimented even in cultural practices without immediate ties to animals'.¹⁸ Therefore, she defends the argument I am putting forth that one must find an answer to animal representation which is at

¹³ Susan McHugh, 'Literary Animal Agents', *PMLA*, 124 (2009), 487-495 (p. 487).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 488.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 489.

¹⁶ Susan McHugh, 'Modern Animals: From Subjects to Agents in Literary Studies', *Society & Animals*, 17 (2009), 363-367 (p. 365).

¹⁷ McHugh, 'Literary Animal Agents', p. 491.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 490.

the same time a methodological and theoretical position. She couples the issue of how to account for animal subjectivity (and/or animal embodiment) with the cultural practices that support and are supported by the very concepts of animal being. Thus, in literature, for example, McHugh would suggest both that one not privilege texts *about* animals being portrayed as transcendent to textuality or to the human world, and that one be attuned to how textuality itself as a cultural practice is suffused with the very issues it is trying to represent. As it is, her thinking is not only a call for a different thinking about animals, but also a qualified call for a formalist criticism attuned to the animality of textuality itself, to the 'countless animal aspects of texts'.¹⁹

However, McHugh arrives at a conundrum. Texts exhibit animal aspects and animal being is enmeshed into textuality, but that still does not tell us about the texture of animal agency. An animal subjectivity similar to a human's threatens to efface any animal specificity, and misses the fact that even human subjectivity is constructed on the basis of a metaphysics of inside and outside wholly organised by concepts such as body and soul. On the other hand, ascribing to the animal a transcendence to language and text suggests wishful thinking, and ignores the extent to which this transcendence is prescribed by language itself. McHugh's way out is openly guided by 'the Deleuzian assumption [...] that animality permeates language, literature, and everything as a line of flight or potential for becomings',²⁰ a position with which I not only agree but that I also explore to some extent in Chapter 3. I believe, however,

¹⁹ McHugh, 'Modern Animals', p. 363.

²⁰ McHugh, 'Literary Animal Agents', p. 493.

that there is a second, Derridean answer to the problem, which is more attuned to the issues raised by literary signification.

Several other literary scholars have approached the issue of animality from a Derridean perspective. In their introduction to *Seeing Animals after Derrida*, Sarah Bezan and James Tink stress the importance of considering Derrida's work on animals (and the wider 'nonhuman turn' in the humanities) against a backdrop of questions and challenges posed to Derrida and his overall thought.²¹ For example, they identify in readings of Derrida's *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, even by those supportive of its general project, a disappointment with the text's apparent refusal 'to consider fully what the animal is as such' and with the 'lack of specificity' of Derrida's animal.²² A different approach underscored by them is reading the animal in Derrida as part of 'the ongoing problem of the trace of the Other': the argument goes that, even if the animal as a motif only emerged in his later texts, it came about as continuation of the issues of *différance* and the trace. As they put it, 'in this case the condition of the living is far from being a state of the human being that could be simply attributed as animality, but instead an idea of arche-writing, as in an organization of traces and signs as a text that are the preconditions of understanding subjectivity and being'.²³ However, the 'restatement' of the early Derrida of arche-writing in the animal lectures is not an uncontroversial observation, since literary studies, critical theory, and philosophy have seen a

²¹ Sarah Bezan and James Tink, 'Introduction', in *Seeing Animals After Derrida*, ed. by Sarah Bezan and James Tink (Lanham: Lexington, 2018), pp. ix-xxii (p. ix).

²² Ibid, pp. x, xii.

²³ Ibid., p. xii.

turn towards ‘ideas of life, the bioethical and the affect, and indeed ecocriticism, which are sometimes leveled against deconstruction’, in the years after Derrida’s death.²⁴ Bezan and Tink then identify Timothy Morton and Claire Colebrook as two examples of thinkers who are attempting to bridge deconstruction with the recent ‘non-textual turn’. Finally, Bezan and Tink’s own project is to explore the visual aspect in Derrida’s anecdote of being naked before the cat’s gaze in order to inquire ‘how the human comes to be exposed and made vulnerable in relation to the (in)visible animal’.²⁵ For them, the ethical project before us involves acknowledging ‘the inherent meaning of nonhuman materiality’, and ‘the limitations of human perception’. This ethical call is similarly polarising, since it also separates the field of animal studies in two. They cite Giovanni Aloï’s diagnosis of two different views on the issue of animal visibility, with one group reliant on the posthumanist distrust for visibility as ‘truth-constructing’ and another counting on visibility as an epistemological strategy.²⁶

Sarah Bezan connects Derrida’s project in *The Animal That Therefore I Am* to some emerging areas such as new materialism, speculative realism, and object-oriented ontology.²⁷ She sees those fields as allies to animal studies, as she argues that ‘a wide variety of scholars in the environmental humanities, ecocriticism, posthumanism, and animal studies more broadly’ are united in

²⁴ Ibid., p. xiii.

²⁵ Ibid., p. xiv.

²⁶ Ibid., p. xv.

²⁷ Sarah Bezan, ‘The Anterior Animal: Derrida, Deep Time, and the Immersive Vision of Paleoartist Julius Csotonyi’, in *Seeing Animals After Derrida*, ed. by Sarah Bezan and James Tink (Lanham: Lexington, 2018), pp. 65-86 (p. 66).

‘dismantling transcendental humanism’ and criticising ‘*the human’s strategies of mediation of the natural world*, whether it be through consciousness, language, [or] spectrality’ by means of of a ‘combat’ against the ‘transcendental mediation of “Nature”’.²⁸ This is a very sweeping statement, as the fields she mentions clearly contain a wide range of different view of materiality. Timothy Morton, especially, whom she mentions in this context, writes against the belief in the possibility of simply doing away with the mediation of ‘Nature’. More serious, however, is the mischaracterisation of the Derridean position by his inclusion in this list (nominally, but also as an important thinker for many within those fields). The so-called linguistic turn with which Derrida is commonly associated actually emerges in his work as a *rejection* of transcendentalism that still constantly rejects any kind of simple material reality. Derrida addressed the pitfalls of materialism as a solution against transcendentalism several times in his writing, and answered questions directly on this issue in interviews. I shall discuss these positionings throughout the thesis and more specifically when I analyse Donna Haraway’s similar critiques of him.

A crucial contribution to the field of Derridean Animal Studies is the edited collection *The Animal Question in Deconstruction*. In her introduction, editor Lynn Turner states clearly that the collection's remit is 'to take Jacques Derrida seriously when he says that he had always been thinking about the company of animals and that deconstruction has never limited itself to

²⁸ Ibid., p. 69.

language, still less "human" language'.²⁹ Apparently as a response to the title 'The Autobiographical Animal' -- the conference in which the *The Animal That Therefore I Am* lectures were given -- Derrida provides a helpful overview of animal figures that populated his texts. However, Turner argues that 'these [...] animals have largely escaped wider attention'. On the other hand, she points out that many scholars have emphasised that 'Derrida's work pointed to the deconstruction of the elevation of "man" above all others well before the pedagogical "tipping point" of *The Animal That Therefore I Am*'.³⁰

Thus formulated, the remit of the book seems two-pronged. On the one hand, it is concerned with the exploration of animal figures in Derrida's texts that have been overlooked in Derridean scholarship (the insect of 'Tympan'; the sponge in *Signsponge*; the wolves, elephants, and lions in *The Beast and the Sovereign*; the mole in 'Freud and the Scene of Writing'; the lion in his 'Introduction' to Husserl's *Origin of Geometry*; not to mention the more famous hedgehog from 'Che Cos'è La Poesia' and the cat from *The Animal That Therefore I Am*). On the other hand, the book strives to locate the importance of animality as a structural concept for the very project of deconstruction (embedded in a discussion of more-than-human language, for example) *even when animal figures are not being directly discussed by Derrida*. It is arguable that the book excels mostly in the former endeavour, but it is the latter venture that I am especially concerned with. Throughout the thesis, the decision to privilege

²⁹ Lynn Turner, 'Introduction: The Animal Question in Deconstruction', in *The Animal Question in Deconstruction*, ed. by Lynn Turner (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), pp. 1-8 (p. 2).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

structural – rather than topical – animality will be continuously argued in theoretical, methodological, philosophical, and ethical terms.

Therefore, I argue that it is symptomatic of the co-implication of animality and language as they are understood by philosophical tradition that this conundrum concerning the animal is the one Derrida faces when deconstructing the linguistic sign. More specifically, the question of how to approach the materiality of signs is the problem that opens the way for Derrida to propose most of his ideas. In his lengthy intervention in Husserl's thought, Derrida attacked phenomenology's disavowal, in the name of ideal transcendentalism, of all that is bodily and material. This attack did not entail a triumphant materialism, since Derrida's deconstructive reading, instead of simply refuting what Husserl proposes, identified in his formulation the unspoken possibility of both Husserlian idealism and of a naïve empirical materialism. Originary difference, its play and work, *différance*, the trace, iterability – these are all names for that which is enmeshed in its material support but which cannot be reduced to it. Literary Animal Studies can, therefore, find both the specific materiality of the animal and the bodily form of texts in the impure undecidable of that which is neither material nor immaterial. Similarly, it is well known that, in *Of Grammatology*, Derrida frees writing from its subordination to speech to show that all of language depends on a certain scriptural function derived from what he terms *arche*-writing.

Just as *arche*-writing is situated 'before' the common differentiation between speech and writing, I argue that 'before' the distinction between human and animal as the metaphysical distinction between spirit and body,

there must be a sort of *pure* difference, a pure inscriptional space where the differentiation between body and soul might be possible. I call that the *arche-animal*. Leonard Lawlor has discussed this Derridean recourse to old names as the ‘second phase’ of deconstruction, after the initial moment of overturning the classical hierarchy (e.g. speech/writing, human/animal). The second phase ‘reinscribes the previously inferior term as the “origin” or “resource” of the hierarchy itself’, so that this term ‘becomes what Derrida calls an “old name” or a “paleonym”’.³¹ Lawlor sees these terms as ‘the experience of a process of differentiation that is also repetition’, or as ‘the experience of language where language is taken in a broad sense’.³²

In a Derridean Literary Animal Studies, animals cannot be regarded as simply matter, since it is clear that they are anima-ted matter, whose spark of life engenders auto-affection and movement. Their bodies cannot, however, be wished away in a repetition of speciesist, Cartesian conclusions that would consider these bodies to be simply cases for animal minds. As we saw, an animal subjectivity, constructed in the human mould, would make the animal itself vanish. And if this entire formulation is, as I argued, co-extensive with the structure and functioning of signification, it should be both possible and desirable to read the animated matter of texts, their play of form. The form of a text (its grammar) should be detachable from both its content (semantics) and its substance (phonology, graphematics, typography, etc.), in order for us to get

³¹ Leonard Lawlor, *This Is Not Sufficient : An Essay on Animality and Human Nature in Derrida* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 30.

³² Ibid.

at the animal aspects of texts. But is that even possible? Is form ever identifiable in texts in any way separable from its meaning and material support?

The representation undertaken by signs is without a doubt essentially linked to animality. As I shall show, there could be no representation without animals, insofar as they provide us with the play of form. However, it is impossible for it to emerge phenomenally, in texts, *as such*, for that would require the process of signification to appear without actually signifying anything. Similarly, there is no signification which is not, in a way, *trapped* in the support of a substance, since there are no signs without a sensible face. It is therefore only possible to identify the moment when or the site where textuality reveals the scar of the impossibility of simply signifying. In a text, signification appears to collapse into either dumb marks on a page or abstract, conceptual meaning, both of which I believe to be counter-productive objects for Literary Animal Studies. But pinpointing signification *as such* – that which makes specific meanings possible – would be crucial for understanding the arche-animal as it works in literary texts and I shall explore whether signification *as such* can be an object of literary analysis.

Other scholars have also stressed the enmeshing of animality and textuality. Kári Driscoll, discussing animal literature under the name ‘zoopoetics’, advances that the latter is engaged with the ‘constitution’ of the animal in language but also with the constitution of language in relation to the animal. He entertains that zoopoetics might even be ‘the most fundamental form of poetics’, since it involves the fundamental distinction between human

and animal as it is usually based on language.³³ Driscoll includes an important historical aspect to his point, since he maps an explosion of zoopoetics around the time of early twentieth-century literary modernism and industrial modernity. The crisis of language, or *Sprachkrise*, explored by the animal texts of the early 1900s, represents, for Driscoll, a diminished faith on the representative powers of language, which he views as intrinsically intertwined with a crisis of anthropocentrism and a crisis of the animal. An acute awareness of the 'prison-house of language' and the desire to escape it led artists and writers to explore zoopoetics, since 'any attempt to escape the boundaries of linguistic consciousness must proceed via the animal, which exists on the boundary of language and meaning, forever eluding conceptualisation, slipping toward the ineffable'.³⁴ Ultimately, Driscoll defends that the question of language itself has always been (also) the question of the animal. In his view, literary animal studies approaches animals as 'present[ing] a specific problem to and for language and representation'³⁵ and he justifies this position with reference to the privileged position of animals in the mythical accounts of the origins of art, music, poetry, and language.

Responding to the question of the 'creaturely', Sarah Bouttier starts from Anat Pick's work in order to make the point that texts can be thought as creaturely as well. This textual creatureliness stems from a text's 'being embodied and finite at the same time, in a way that redefines their materiality

³³ Kári Driscoll, 'The Sticky Temptation of Poetry', *Journal of Literary Theory*, 9 (2015), 212-229 (p. 223).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

and referentiality'. Their materiality as texts secures their bodiliness while their struggle to establish 'their objects' presence in the world' opens them up to finitude - they are constantly being denied an embodiment which is other than their textual selves.³⁶

She suggests that not all texts can be considered to be creaturely, however, even if a creature textual object is not a 'sine qua non fore creaturely textuality'.³⁷ Rather, she views objects which are creatures as facilitators for the creatureliness of texts. Bouttier grounds her understanding of text on Derrida and 'deconstructionist theory', since they portray the text as constantly 'navigat[ing] between self-referentiality and a gesturing towards the outside' (113-4). Starting from Derrida's description of a poem as a hedgehog, Bouttier entertains that 'the poem is theorised as embodied because it binds together letter (itself) and meaning (a reference to what is outside itself)', and is defined by this 'double allegiance'.³⁸

She suggests that the most successful a text can be in representing animal reality's creaturely embodiment is by precisely offering up its own textuality – it is textuality itself and not its capacity for representation that is most productive for referencing the animal. 'The text intimates a sense of the creaturely by gesturing towards a creaturely reality without trying to express it in a mimetic manner, but rather by being something itself and sharing that presence with the creaturely.'³⁹

³⁶ Sarah Bouttier, 'Creaturely Texts, Texts on Creatures', *European Journal of English Studies*, 19 (2015), 111-122 (p. 111).

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 114.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 115.

She also addresses what I am going to call the issue of ‘corpus selection’, namely: how does one choose *which* text to analyse when the overarching argument being made is about the very character of textuality itself? Would a strategy of careful selection (choosing texts *about* animals, for example) undermine the argument for the importance of textual materiality and the secondarity of referentiality? She concedes that ‘it remains that the representation of the creaturely impacts a text’s form to the point that it changes genres’ and she calls attention to the fact that Deleuze and Guattari, when writing about becoming-animal, ‘invariably choose texts and works of art dealing with animals’. For her, ‘this is consistent with their idea that the animal object plays an active part in the creative process of becoming animal - it is not only chosen by but actively alters the work of art and its producer’.⁴⁰ In short, she proposes that the creatures referenced by creaturely texts, rather than simply furnish a target for linguistic representation, turn out to actively ‘account for the [text’s] form’.⁴¹

Thus, within that context, I call the study of the arche-animal in literature *zoogrammatology*, since it mirrors *grammatology*, the scientific study of arche-writing as proposed by Derrida. *Of Grammatology* initially appears to propose a scientific field that would study (arche-)writing, but Derrida denounces the impossibility of such a project from the start: ‘writing is not only an auxiliary means in the service of science—and eventually its object—but first

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 117.

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 117-8.

[...] the condition of possibility of ideal objects and therefore of scientific objectivity. Before being its object, writing is the condition of the *epistémè*'.⁴²

By a process of substitution already familiar to *Of Grammatology*, one could write: Animality is not only an auxiliary means in the service of literature—and eventually its object—but first the condition of possibility of signs and therefore of representation. Before being its object, animality is the condition of mimesis.

Literary Animal Studies, or zoogrammatology, can work to reveal this condition. However, just as writing eludes the scrutiny of science since it turns out to be merely the effect of a repression of the 'older', more generalised arche-writing, it is likely that these animal conditions of signification are effaced by the very procedures that seem to offer readers *the* animal, the intended referent or meaning of an 'animal' text. How does one go about 'ignoring' the animal meaning in order to read the animal conditions? For Judith Butler,

this is no easy matter. For how can one read a text for what does *not* appear within its own terms, but which nevertheless constitutes the illegible conditions of its own legibility? Indeed, how can one read a text for the movement of that disappearing by which the textual 'inside' and 'outside' are constituted?⁴³

Therefore, the thesis takes as its starting point that the practice of paleonymy is one of the main aspects of Derrida's deconstructive readings, especially the ones which are concerned with the tension between the

⁴² Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Fortieth Anniversary Edition, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 2016), p. 29.

⁴³ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On The Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 37.

materiality of bodies or signifiers and the ideality of subjectivity or signifieds. I propose paleonymy – by putting forth the arche-animal – as necessary *both* to properly approach animals as objects of study or of representation in literature *and* to devise an appropriate critical methodology. As I hope to show, the aporias regarding animal being feed into and are fed by similar aporias regarding the character of texts and the meaning-making they enact. Thus, the series of readings I offer below takes seriously the invitation for a more formalist approach to literary texts: they do not focus on texts *about* animals and, even if they do, they do not privilege the animal *content* of those texts. Rather, I strive for a third option, dissimilar from either formalism or paraphrase, which attempts to locate the conditions and consequences of the signification process: that which happens at the interface of form and content. These conditions and consequences, due to the co-implication of object of study and methodological approach that I have suggested, will ultimately be the arche-animality of the text. In other words, I attempt to read the arche-animal because it represents a more productive object of study than the usual, heavily loaded concept of ‘the animal’, but, at the same time, this arche-animal is also the focus of a methodological approach that tries to skirt both formalism and idealism.

Initially, in Chapter 1, I situate the analytical strategy mentioned above of foregrounding animal embodiment in J. M. Coetzee’s *The Lives of Animals*, and I underscore such a strategy’s inadvertent admission of the constitutive powers of language in literature’s attempt to grapple with embodiment. Next I discuss in more detail the co-implicated character of language and materiality

and offer a critique of some interventions in Animal Studies and their reliance on a thinking of the body. I then shift the discussion onto a Derridean ground by revisiting his early writings on Husserl where he exposes the similarities between language and animality, and I conclude by discussing how Derrida's deconstruction of the linguistic sign and introduction of the *trace* opens a space for thinking the animal differently.

Assuming that linguistics and animal embodiment share the same origin, in Chapter 2 I turn to a reading of Sigmund Freud's *Totem and Taboo* as a way of providing a genealogy of the materialisation of both animal and linguistic bodies so as to map the extent to which they overlap. In my reading, I show that the totem animal discussed by Freud has to be thought as an arche-animal that is neither ideal as the notion of species it belongs to, nor material and singular as one specific member of that species. This is especially important because the totem animal, in Freud's account, provides totemism with its symbolising capacity. The emergence of totemism is presented by Freud as the shift from nature to culture, so that this shift will be grounded on a totemic language dependent on the arche-animal. This semi-mythical shift, caught up as it is in Freud's infamous notion of the 'primal crime', furnishes some of the same aporias as the passage from natural symbol to conventional signifier, whose discussion is central to Derrida's deconstruction of the linguistic sign. The strange temporality of this passage is explained by Derrida by means of *Nachträglichkeit*, a concept from Freud himself. Finally, this chapter addresses the concept of the arche-animal in its relationship to materiality and ideation in more detail.

Chapter 3 continues some of the psychoanalytic focus but changes textual genres completely by analysing Darren Aronofsky's 2010 film *Black Swan*. I start my discussion with a brief outline of the film's plot as evidenced by my analysis of one crucial scene, along with what could be called a standard Lacanian interpretation. After that, I delve more deeply into some of the thematic strands that organise the textuality of the film and set up its investment in arche-animality. I move on to discuss animal representation more specifically, which leads me into its role in psychoanalysis in general, and especially in Freud's case-study about the Wolf Man. I read Freud's account for its disruptive arche-animality, before connecting it both to Deleuze and Guattari's becoming-animal and the film's becoming-swan. Rather than reading the swan referred to in the title as a metaphor, or the ballet plot both in the film and in the libretto as metaphors for the psychosexual madness suffered by the protagonist, I analyse the assumptions made by the film regarding representation and its relationship to material embodiment. I argue that the film presents a duality between (artistic) representation as grounded in formal technique – which I call *dancity* – and representation as occurring when these techniques are transcended, which I call *transcendanse*. Both options are shunned, however, by the becoming-swan depicted in the film, which I claim to be a figure of arche-animality.

Chapter 4 analyses animality in Clarice Lispector's novel *The Apple in the Dark*, as it is crucial to the novel's concern with the human passage (or the re-treading of the passage) from nature to culture. Rather than a stage in such a journey, the animal is revealed by the novel as an arche-animal, an articulating

supplement which precedes – and thus makes possible – the differentiation between stages in an evolutionary scale. I locate the paleonymy of arche-animality primarily in the poetics of light and dark prefigured in the title, but also in the novel's concern with temporality and (animal) mortality. This concern is channelled primarily through the figure of giving birth. 'To give birth', in Portuguese, is intrinsically connected to light, since one would say, to mean 'to give birth to someone', either *dar a luz a alguém* ('to give the light to someone') or *dar à luz alguém* ('give someone to the light'). I read the flicker in the novel between the two variants of the expression as indicative of a paleonym that not only interprets the poetics of light and dark but also critiques common understandings of animal embodiment.

Finally, in Chapter 5, I read Ted Hughes's poem 'The Thought-Fox' for its zoogrammatological contribution to debates concerning the nature of poetic language. I start by discussing Derek Attridge's presentation of Roman Jakobson's 'poetic function' and the aporias it raises, which I argue are derived from the repression of arche-animality. I then review Gérard Genette's account of theories of linguistic representation and how different strands of poetics dealt with them. This segues into a discussion of the benefits and traps of formalist criticism and the historical background of the concept of 'form'. The apparent advantages of formalism is called into question by a revision of Derrida's critique of the material and ideal aspects of the linguistic sign in *Of Grammatology*. Finally, I analyse how 'The Thought-Fox' responds to these concerns by means of its intertwining the very nature of poetic representation with animal representation. I argue that the poem acknowledges the arche-

animality of the fox in its constitutive role in the functioning of linguistic meaning. By associating successful poetry-making with an animalistic visual onomatopoeia (the use of repetition of the letter w to represent fox pawprints), the poem identifies the work of poetry with accurate representation of reality, *at the same time* as it equates that accuracy to a certain reverie brought about by the arche-animal.

Chapter 1: Animal as Text

Introduction

Why do animals matter for literature? Would they constitute only another 'end' to be then conveyed by any given 'medium' – literature, for example? On the one hand, animals have indeed been portrayed in literary texts for millennia, but so have other subject matters that similarly traverse human existence. Animal representations have been easily employed as just another component of the optical system of literature, seen as the humanistic, mediatic 'Mirror of Man'. On the other hand, the recent scholarly attention towards literary animals highlights a more radical relevance of animality beyond that of mere topic: it could be argued that in recent criticism illuminated by posthumanism and Animal Studies, animals matter precisely due to their matter.

The material embodiment of animals is believed to offer a stark contrast to the linguistic constitution of textuality, to the extent that animals 'in' literary texts are said to illuminate – and sometimes challenge – the workings of literature. This view is easily encountered and widespread, and can be close-read in an array of scholarly work dedicated to 'the question of the animal' in literature. As a privileged example, one can read J M Coetzee's musings on animality in *The Lives of Animals* as both an instance of, and an incentive for, this kind of criticism. With it, Coetzee – by the means of his character Elizabeth Costello – has encouraged the privileging of embodiment as the tenor of literary research into animals.

In this lecture disguised as novel, the fictional novelist Elizabeth Costello is invited to give a talk at an American university on a topic of her choosing, and she decides to speak about animals both in philosophy and in literature. The novel is basically divided into two parts, each corresponding to one of the talks she gives at different university departments. Her contribution to the approach to animals mentioned above is based on her focus on the animal's radically alien being-in-the-world as compared to human reason and abstract thought:

To [human] thinking, cogitation, I oppose [the animal's] fullness, embodiedness, the sensation of being – not a consciousness of yourself as a kind of ghostly reasoning machine thinking thoughts, but on the contrary the sensation – a heavily affective sensation – of being a body with limbs that have extension in space, of being alive to the world. This fullness contrasts starkly with Descartes's key state [*cogito ergo sum*], which has an empty feel to it: the feel of a pea rattling around in a shell.¹

Coetzee has in fact become a sort of patron for literary research into animality, having been invited to contribute chapters to books on the topic and to give talks in Animal Studies conferences, as well as by being an author whose work is often the focus of said research.² Accordingly, Costello offers later in the novel her take on good and bad uses of animals in literature. Comparing the poem 'The Panther' by Rilke with Ted Hughes's 'The Jaguar' and 'Second Glance at a Jaguar', she argues: 'In that kind of poetry, [...] animals stand for

¹ J. M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 33. All further references are given parenthetically in the text.

² The interdisciplinary book on animal rights *The Death of the Animal*, edited by Paola Cavalieri, not only includes contributions by Coetzee but also seems to reference his Costello lecture in the title. The second Minding Animals conference of interdisciplinary Animal Studies, held in Utrecht in 2012, had Coetzee deliver the opening lecture (again a short piece of fiction featuring Costello) and also contained a series of Literary Animal Studies panels on his work.

human qualities: the lion for courage, the owl for wisdom, and so forth. Even in Rilke's poem the panther is there as a stand-in for something else' (p. 50). To this ancient fabular textual animality – widely criticised nowadays as anthropomorphic³ – Costello contrasts Hughes:

Hughes is writing against Rilke. [...] With Hughes it is a matter—I emphasize—not of inhabiting another mind but of inhabiting another body. That is the kind of poetry I bring to your attention today: poetry that does not try to find an idea in the animal, that is not about the animal, but is instead the record of an engagement with him. (p. 51)

This approach has proved immensely popular with literary scholars, to the point that poetry (metonymically standing for all of literature) and animality are said to be aligned in challenging human linguistic and rational limitations.⁴ Even beyond that, it has been suggested that what we may call the literary branch of Animal Studies can contribute basically that: a representation – and a defence – of the otherness of animals. Again, Costello offers us the model:

Writers teach us more than they are aware of. By bodying forth the jaguar, Hughes shows us that we too can embody animals—by the process called poetic invention that mingles breath and sense in a way that no

³ Tom Tyler has analysed in detail the symbolic work animals are required to do in philosophical and literary texts in his *CIFERAE: A Bestiary in Five Fingers* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012). I shall return to his theses in my third chapter.

⁴ Two famous quotes which are constantly cited in such context are one by Bataille and another by Derrida: 'nothing [...] is more closed to us than this animal life from which we are descended. [...] In picturing the universe without man, a universe in which only the animal's gaze would be opened to things, [...] the correct way to speak of it can overtly only be poetic, in that poetry describes nothing that does not slip toward the unknowable. [...] The animal opens before me a depth that attracts me and is familiar to me. [...] It is also that which is farthest removed from me, that which deserves the name depth, which means precisely *that which is unfathomable to me*. But this too is poetry...' (Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, trans. by Robert Hurley [New York: Zone Books, 1989], pp. 20-2. Emphases in the original.) 'Thinking concerning the animal, if there is such a thing, derives from poetry. There you have a hypothesis: it is what philosophy has, essentially, had to deprive itself of. That is the difference between philosophical knowledge and poetic thinking.' (Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. by Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. by David Wills [New York: Fordham University Press, 2008], p. 7)

one has explained and no one ever will. He shows us how to bring the living body into being within ourselves.⁵ (p. 53, my emphasis)

It is clear, therefore, that the argumentation depends wholly on the distinction between body and mind. Only insofar as animal being is taken to be saturated with embodiment can Costello argue that animalistic literary texts are able to account for a 'bodily engagement' with something other than language. In truth, it remains to be determined whether such animal embodiment is anything other than merely the Other of language. If the very concept of non-linguistic, non-rational animal life whose phenomenality would challenge the powers of referential language can be shown to be caught up with linguistic function, then Costello's 'poetic invention' would in no way transpose the limits of textuality.

As it is, Coetzee's wording itself exposes the doubling effect that referentiality produces with respect to the *matter* of animal being: while the materiality of *bodies* (always first and foremost an *animal* body, even though Costello stresses the commonality of embodiment across the living) is taken to be that which lies outside of language marking its limitations, the same matter is also at work *within* language as that which makes representation possible –

⁵ It is curious, therefore, that literary scholars would defend a role for literature that differs very little from manifesto or awareness raising material. Philosopher Martha Nussbaum's work on animal rights, for example, 'insists that the power of "sympathetic imagining" of the lives of nonhuman animals of the sort made available by literature (but not only there) is important and relevant to questions of moral judgment.' (Cary Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010], p. 78). Wolfe shows, however, that 'for Nussbaum literature serves as a kind of kinder, gentler supplement to analytic philosophy's project of "sentimental education" stirring in us identifications, empathetic responses, and projections that may then be readily formalized in analytical propositions' (Ibid., pp. 78-9.). And he quotes Geoffrey Harpham's contention that 'in Nussbaum, the specificity of literature as a discourse, an object of professional study, is almost altogether erased and replaced by a conception that treats it bluntly as moral philosophy.' (Harpham, quoted in Wolfe, *Posthumanism*, p. 79.)

as the phenomenal, signifying *breath* which must be articulated with (signified) sense in order for 'poetic invention' to be. Therefore, within language itself, a corporeality which is always animalistic can 'already' be found, even 'before' linguistic signs attempt to reach for the supposed extra-linguistic matter of animal embodiment: the *signifier* as the material face of the linguistic sign, the concrete *breath* which is articulated with sense in order to produce meaning and reference.

Animals that matter

Geoffrey Bennington has stressed the specularity which creates a double effect of materiality in two distinct sites in the network of elements associated with the linguistic sign – the referent as well as the signifier:

This tripartite division [signifier, signified, and referent] gives us the appearance of a reign of ideality (signified, concept, the intelligible) which touches on both sides a realm of materiality. Upstream, in first position, things, the world, reality; downstream, in third position, the signifier, the phonic or graphic body that linguistics has always thought of [...] as that of a *word* [...]. Following a specular structure, we can valorize either the domain of ideality [...] or the 'hard' materiality of things and, via a perilous extension, of the signifier. We can distribute as we wish the values of truth and illusion in these two realms without escaping the basic schema: the sign has always been thought of on the basis of this distinction between the sensible and the intelligible, and cannot be thought otherwise.⁶

The accusation of radical linguistic relativism (in which referenced bodies would always already be only the result of the very act of referencing) can be staved off if 'the phonic or graphic *body*' of the linguistic sign be

⁶ Geoffrey Bennington, 'Derridabase', in *Jacques Derrida*, ed. by Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 3-316 (pp. 26-7).

considered in its irreducible affiliation to an entire metaphysics of the *body* as the animal component of human existence. To the extent that even the bodies of humans can only be thought in articulation with animal embodiment,⁷ the sensible/intelligible schema, so succinctly gathered under – or maybe even produced by – the body-and-soul structure, owes its intelligibility to the concept of animality. In other words, it is not that Costello is wrong because animals are always already language, she is wrong also because any language (even the Rilke poem she derides) appears to be haunted by the materiality which is made possible by the concept of animality – that of the signifier. However, the primordially of either the animal body or the signifier – with respect to their matter – can never be sufficiently determined and one will continuously haunt the other, both as product and matrix. In other words, it is unclear – and perhaps even aporetically impossible to know – whether materiality flows from the signifier to the animal body, or vice-versa; whether the *body* is primordially an animal phenomenon that influences language, or an effect of the material aspects of language itself. It would be necessary to concede that the linguistic signifier and the animal are co-dependent.

As Judith Butler has consistently argued, the body whose materiality is supposedly undisavowable is constituted by language and the sign as their

⁷ The formulation *animal rationale* which defines the human in the metaphysical tradition engenders the merging of an animal body with a heavenly spiritual supplement. This is responsible for the unstable self-image of humanity as trapped between base animality and sacred divinity, which is one source of the constant anxiety over and discursive policing of that internal border. Thus conceived, the human is therefore a *hybrid* and Cary Wolfe has indeed argued that in the confusion of pure essences at play in hybridism the very notion of purity is fabricated (Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003], pp. 201-2.). There is, therefore, no body which is not also an *animal* body.

constitutive outsides. Insofar as signs work to signal and reference 'bodies', the latter are marked by that operation of referentiality:

The body posited as prior to the sign is always *posited* or *signified* as *prior*. The signification produces as an *effect* of its own procedure the very body that it nevertheless and simultaneously claims as that which *precedes* its own action. If the body signified as prior to signification is an effect of signification, then the mimetic or representational status of language, which claims that signs follow bodies as their necessary mirrors, is not mimetic at all. On the contrary, it is productive, constitutive, one might even argue *performative*, inasmuch as this signifying act delimits and contours the body that it then claims to find prior to any signification. This is not to say that the materiality of bodies is simply and only a linguistic effect which is reducible to a set of signifiers. Such a distinction overlooks the materiality of the signifier itself. To posit by way of language a materiality outside of language is still to posit that materiality, and the materiality so posited will retain that positing as its constitutive condition. [...] Can language simply refer to materiality, or is language also the very condition under which materiality may be said to appear?⁸

Cary Wolfe approaches the same issue as a frame to understand different attempts of overturning humanism. Insofar as 'the human' traditionally

is achieved by escaping or repressing not just its animal origins in nature, the biological, and the evolutionary, but more generally by transcending the bonds of materiality and embodiment altogether,⁹

trying to simply affirm the materiality of embodiment does not escape the realm of humanism, since embodiment's status-as-material is co-extensive with its disavowal by humanism. Rather, Wolfe's posthumanism

names the embodiment and embeddedness of the human being in not just its biological *but also* its technological world, the prosthetic coevolution of the human animal with the technicity of tools and external archival mechanisms (such as language and culture) [...]—and all

⁸ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 30-1.

⁹ Wolfe, *Posthumanism*, p. xv.

of which comes before that historically specific thing called “the human”.¹⁰

Wolfe’s Derridean approach enables him to indicate the conceptual

contraband at play in posthumanisms which fail to skirt metaphysics:

What Derrida helps us to see [...] is that just because a particular discourse [...] presents itself as a materialist rendering of the problem of consciousness in relation to embodiment, does not mean that the discourse is not metaphysical.¹¹

As suggested above, Costello intends to engender, by way of literary language, the possibility of engaging with extra-linguistic animal embodiment, but she is ‘positing by way of language a materiality outside of language’ when she reveals that poetic invention can only work by mingling ‘breath and sense’. Butler is writing against the strategy according to which the body is invoked as a reality whose ‘hard’ matter has to be conceded by the constitutive powers of language. Akin to such strategy is the invocation of animal reality as foreign to human conceptuality and language, a reality whose concession rests once again on the persuasive powers of the rhetoric of materiality. Therefore, a more refined analysis is needed of such common rhetorical moves and how they relate to the constructive character of language.

The materiality of language and the signifying body

Against Judith Butler’s suggestion that the very concept of materiality – thought to secure a space outside the grasp of language – can only be intelligible by means of language itself, one may object that the talk of

¹⁰ Ibid., emphasis added.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 43.

‘intelligibility’ and ‘rhetoric’ in no way leaves the realm of the linguist, and that the animal – as non-human – and its body (or bodies in general) represent (a word which might also be refused in the same gesture) the break and end of language as world-building. Accordingly, theorists of animality have consistently been criticised for dwelling on merely *conceptual* problems when real animals are supposed to clearly inhabit a different sphere. More radically, theoretical issues in Animal Studies are sometimes derided as totally unrelated to *real* animals, whose *life* (another term in the rhetorically powerful chain of materiality) is a power with which theory has to reckon as something absolutely exterior. Finally, there are those who, while conceding that language shapes the world in one way or another, would argue that the animal – precisely for being non-human – is the shape of existence beyond a linguistically saturated world.

The issue of whether ‘reality’ or the ‘real world’ in fact exist independently of their apprehension by language is too ambitious a topic to tackle here, but it should suffice to point out that animals-as-exterior-to-language is still a *concept* of such exteriority and, as such, in no way leaves the realm of language or avoids the burden of intelligibility. ‘Matter’ is supposed to mark a radical exteriority to conceptuality, but, as Butler puts it, ‘to have the concept of matter is to lose the exteriority that the concept is supposed to secure’.¹² Another related issue, even if only chiasmically, is the constitutive role of animal corporeality in the shaping of the linguistic signifier, which will then be

¹² Butler, p. 31.

accused of always failing to represent that very corporeality. In other words, the invocation of (or call for) the reality of animals beyond the cultural and philosophical issue of access (as cultural, linguistic access to reality) makes recourse to the supposedly unavoidable materiality of animal being, but that is precisely the meaning and effect of the concept of *animal* as produced by or alongside textuality. As I suggested above, the material appearing of language (the efficacy of signifiers) cannot exist without the materiality it borrows from animals' bodies, but the latter can only be intelligible by the means of the material linguistic signifier. That will mean that *(the materiality of) language and (corporeal) animality are co-implicated*. Butler strongly supports my point when she argues that

the materiality of language, indeed, of the very sign that attempts to denote "materiality," suggests that it is not the case that everything, including materiality, is always already language. On the contrary, the materiality of the signifier (a "materiality" that comprises both signs and their significatory efficacy) implies that there can be no reference to a pure materiality except via materiality. Hence, it is not that one cannot get outside of language in order to grasp materiality in and of itself; rather, every effort to refer to materiality takes place through a signifying process which, in its phenomenality, is always already material. In this sense, then, language and materiality are not opposed, for language both is and refers to that which is material, and what is material never fully escapes from the process by which it is signified. [...] Apart from and yet related to the materiality of the signifier is the materiality of the signified as well as the referent approached through the signified, but which remains irreducible to the signified. This radical difference between *referent* and *signified* is the site where the materiality of language and that of the world which it seeks to signify are perpetually negotiated. [...] Language and materiality are fully embedded in each other, chiasmic in their interdependence but never fully collapsed into one another, i.e., reduced to one another, and yet neither fully ever exceeds the other. *Always already implicated in each*

*other, always already exceeding one another, language and materiality are never fully identical nor fully different.*¹³

In a similar problematising vein, Jean-Luc Nancy, in his dense essay on the body, 'Corpus', delineates the constraints which traditionally limit thinking of the body: 'properly speaking, we only know, conceive, and even imagine a signifying body [*corps signifiant*]'.¹⁴ Despite the fact that for the most part of the essay Nancy will attempt to propose new modes of thinking, he also describes the traditional metaphysical formulations that have shaped our concept of the body as always already a *signifying* body, caught up with the concept of *sense*: '[the body] should operate as the place-holder and vicar of sense'.¹⁵ He describes the trappings of a concept of the body which always portrays it as the body of sense:

We can only conceive of completely hysterical bodies, paralyzed by the representation of an *other* body—a body of sense. [...] The signifying body—the whole corpus of philosophical, theological, psychoanalytic, and semiological bodies—*incarnates* one thing only: the absolute contradiction of not being able to be a *body* without being the body of a *spirit*, which disembodies it.¹⁶

¹³ Butler, pp. 68-9. Last emphasis added. On the difference between the materiality of language and that of bodies, Butler stresses that it is crucial that we attend to the ways in which bodies materialise, a process which she will read in Lacanian and Kristevan terms. In her reading, she suggests that the material relations in the 'real world' will shape the materiality of language as that which vicariously substitutes for the loss of those very relations. An account of the materialising process of bodies and language – with the respect to animal embodiment – follows in my next chapter in my reading of *Totem and Taboo*.

¹⁴ Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Corpus', in *Corpus* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), pp. 2-121 (p. 67).

¹⁵ Ibid. It should be kept in mind that Nancy plays with the polysemy of the word *sens* in French, which can mean 'sense', both as signification and sensorial ability, or 'direction'. Also, one must follow carefully in Nancy's text the system composed of the words *sign*, *sense*, and *signification*. 'Sign' would be, to a certain extent, synonymous with 'signifier', while 'sense' would be near the concept of the 'signified' – or, exploring Nancy's two senses of the word – that which orients the signifier towards its referent, or such orientation itself. 'Signification' could best describe, for Nancy, the combined work of 'sign' and 'sense'.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 67, 69.

It is, therefore, often a failure to recognise the limitations of both idealism and naïve materialism that will result in the exteriority of animal-as-embodiment to language. Such formulation has, at any rate, been adopted in Animal Studies circles as a philosophical strategy in the attempt to attack speciesism and anthropocentrism. Next, I shall attempt to briefly critique three such strategies for their reliance on a problematic understanding of the body of animals, as they can be found in the work of Carol J. Adams, Cora Diamond, and Donna Haraway. My textual engagement with them is limited, but I hope I have identified in the passages below a certain structural element of their argument.

Rhetorics of the body

Carol J. Adams, in her otherwise outstanding work in the intersections of misogyny and carnivorism, displays some problematic writing on the body when she introduces her concept of the ‘absent referent’ to refer to the slaughtered bodies of animals who get turned into meat: ‘through butchering, animals become absent referents. Animals in name and body are made absent *as animals* for meat to exist. [...] Live animals are thus the absent referents in the concept of meat.’¹⁷

In her formulation of the process of reference – or lack thereof – that obtains between meat and animal, it is not clear what ‘referent’ is taken to mean, if by ‘referent’ we understand that which is necessarily under erasure and absent in the formal process of meaning-making. As it is, *all* referents are

¹⁷ Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat : A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p. 40.

absent in language and the productivity of the signifier (as when she argues that animalised language can be used to oppress or describe the oppression of humans) in no way describes the special structure of disappearance to which she believes animals are exposed. When she argues that ‘within the symbolic order the fragmented referent no longer recalls itself but something else’,¹⁸ it is not clear whether she means ‘the symbolic order’ to be read in its full Lacanian overtones. If so, one can easily point out that there are no referents in the Symbolic, only signifiers, and they never recall themselves but always display a structure of substitution. In fact, it is not clear at all how a *referent* can be made to refer, if it is taken to mean that which is *referred to* by means of language.

An even longer deconstruction of Adams’s argument could be attempted by proceeding to untangle the linguistic terms she employs almost interchangeably. The signifier ‘meat’, for example, refers obviously to the signified ‘meat’ and the referent to which we usually refer when we talk about ‘meat’. The fact that dead animals are required in order to produce said meat reveals nothing special about the nature of the sign ‘meat’, since a myriad of material and logical relations haunt all signs and allow them to mean in a variety of ways and contexts, foregrounding and foreclosing different components in their syntagmatic chain.

Actually, for the most part, her elaboration of the ‘absent referent’ could be more accurately read as the effects of an ‘absent signified’ which, while still working according to the same logic, would result in extremely less serious

¹⁸ Adams, pp. 45-6.

consequences. After all, an absent animal referent is a much more daunting notion than an absent animal signified. One could hastily conclude that her critique of the workings of the absent referent are in fact an attack on the catachrestic function of language: while she criticises the language that transforms ‘animal flesh’ into ‘meat’ and ‘cows’ into ‘beef’, it’s not at all clear how much more present animals *as referents* would be if meat were called by *animal signifiers*. Animals would still be dead and invisible in the meat made from their bodies and the only difference between calling meat ‘beef’ or ‘cow’ is the threat of catachresis in the former case and the illusory effect of proper naming in the latter. Catachresis is, after all, a possibility intrinsic to naming and it accounts for what Adams sometimes labels ‘metaphoric uses’ of language. She juxtaposes metaphor to referent when discussing proper and improper references to animals, arguing that metaphoric language erases animal referents, even if they sometimes have the power to overpower the workings of metaphor. I discuss such power in the third chapter, although in different terms from Adams’s.

Interestingly, as I point out in the next chapter during my discussion of *Totem and Taboo*, it could be argued that the signifier ‘animal’ itself or even a signifier for a specific animal – ‘cow’, for example – similarly make absent the animal referent which they supposedly refer to. The crucial concept that carries out much of Adams’s argumentative work is the material singularity of the piece of meat. The piece of meat thus seems to be much more real in the structure of reference than the singular animal that had to die in order to be turned into meat – that is precisely the tragedy described by the concept of the

absent referent. But it is very likely that this is not a result of the signifying system of meat-eating or the signification of the signifier 'meat': for even if we make present (to mind) the *animal* which the signifier 'meat' makes absent, neither the signifier 'animal' nor its concept actually refer to the singular, specific animal that was turned into meat. Both 'animal' and 'cow' as signifiers signify generalities. That there is not a reference to singular, material animals is thus less a structure of meat-eating and more a result of the functioning of the dynamics of species, which I discuss in more detail further on.

Nevertheless, the supposed realness of such animal life (foreclosed in the structure of the absent referent) is often interpreted as a challenge to human understanding, a challenge which philosopher Cora Diamond names a 'difficulty'.¹⁹ For her, difficulties come in two shapes: the difficulty of philosophy and the difficulty of reality, and, for Wolfe, Diamond argues that to conflate the two is to misunderstand and ignore the 'impingement' of reality as it 'befalls' us as something 'unmasterable'.²⁰ According to Diamond, the difficulty of reality, which cannot be 'overcome by ever more ingenious or accomplished propositional arguments'²¹ that could philosophically account for it, reveals the 'unspeakability of the limits of our own thinking in confronting [...] reality'.²² Such difficulty would emerge in 'experiences in which

¹⁹ Cora Diamond, 'The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy', *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, 1 (2003), 1-26 (p. 2).

²⁰ Wolfe, *Posthumanism*, p. 71.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 69.

we take something in reality to be resistant to our thinking it, or possibly to be painful in its inexplicability'.²³

Diamond starts her argument by analysing a Ted Hughes poem in which the speaker feels unable to describe and explain a picture of some young men who went on to die shortly after being photographed. She suggests that the puzzlement triggered by the smiling image of a dead person is akin to a child's who may not understand how a dead relative may be present in an image. For Diamond,

the point of view from which [the child] sees a problem [of the photographic presence of a dead person] is not yet in the [language-game]; while that from which the horrible contradiction impresses itself on [Ted Hughes's] poet-speaker is that of someone who can no longer speak within the game.²⁴

It is this collapse of the language-game captured by Hughes that Diamond calls the difficulty of reality. It is significant that Diamond's other privileged example of such a challenging encounter with difficult reality is Elizabeth Costello from Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals*. Costello is challenged by an unmasterable reality that leaves her broken to the extent that she presents herself as a wounded animal, haunted and weakened by the brutal reality of what we do to animals.²⁵ Diamond shows that, insofar as the 'question' of animal rights is controversial and complex, Coetzee's intervention in the debate – in the shape of Costello's arguments – is often taken as an attempt to account for this complexity. However, she argues that this interpretation misses the fact that *The Lives of Animals* is not about the

²³ Diamond, p. 2.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 4.

difficulty of philosophy – the trickiness of offering good quality arguments in the animal rights debate – but about the difficulty of the reality of what is done to animals' lives and what it is like for one to be oneself a living animal who has to live with that knowledge.²⁶ The fact that Costello foregrounds her wounded state and barely attempts to engage in solid philosophical argumentation is, for Diamond, evidence that Coetzee's text is grappling with this difficulty of reality. Diamond underscores that the commentary included in the published edition of *The Lives of Animals* all read Costello as a character as a sort of philosophical tool:

For this kind of reading, the wounded woman, the woman with the haunted mind and the raw nerves, has no significance except as a device for putting forward (in an imaginatively stirring way) ideas about the resolution of a range of ethical issues, ideas which can then be abstracted and examined. For none of the commentators does the title of the story have any particular significance in relation to the wounded animal that the story has as its central character. [...] In the life of the animal [Costello] is, argument does not have the weight we may take it to have in the life of the kind of animal we think of ourselves as being. She sees our reliance on argumentation as a way we may make unavailable to ourselves our own sense of what it is to be a living animal.²⁷

Diamond stresses that her article, among other things, is mainly about *exposure*.²⁸ To the extent that our thinking and language is exposed to mortality and woundedness, the difficulty of reality impinges upon argumentation, giving rise to the difficulty of philosophy, which attempts to deflect the first difficulty. At this point it is crucial to identify that Diamond's difficulty of reality appears to be commanded by the same rhetoric of animal matter. Reality impinges on

²⁶ Ibid., p. 5-6.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 5, 8

²⁸ Ibid., p. 21.

and by means of the materiality of (animal) bodies. Her deployment of Coetzee's Costello and his politics of the body is especially relevant due to the fact that Diamond will be the starting point for Cary Wolfe to formulate the relationship between embodiment and language in his wider project of posthumanism. Since Wolfe is one of the leading figures in Posthumanist Animal Studies, his (heavily Derridean) reading of the nexus between language and the body becomes crucial to the project of zoogrammatology I am developing here. His sophisticated critique of Diamond emerges from a close engagement with Derridean philosophy, to which I shall attempt to do justice further on.

To return to Diamond, she indeed glosses the difficulty of reality in the key of animal embodiment, equating the realness of reality with the hard materiality of animal(istic) bodies:

The awareness we each have of being a living body, being "alive to the world," carries with it exposure to the bodily sense of vulnerability to death, sheer animal vulnerability, the vulnerability we share with them. This vulnerability is capable of panicking us. To be able to acknowledge it at all, let alone as shared, is wounding; but acknowledging it as shared with other animals, in the presence of what we do to them, is capable not only of panicking one but also of isolating one, as Elizabeth Costello is isolated.²⁹

Diamond's reality is co-extensive with animality in a two-fold sense: it emerges both from the animal nature of our bodies, and from the unspeakability of what we do to animals (or to their bodies, presumably). Once again, that which supposedly marks the limit to human conceptuality (her

²⁹ Ibid., p. 22.

‘difficulty of philosophy’) – and has the burden of securing an outside to it – is the materiality of the (animal) body.

Wolfe will counter Derrida to Diamond, however, to the extent that Derrida stresses, as Richard Beardsworth puts it, that ‘the experience of finitude is one of radical passivity’. In other words, ‘no relation to death can appear as such’.³⁰ Wolfe is making the Derridean point that finitude itself (as mortality) is a form of finitude and passivity, so that there is a limit to one’s capacity for recognising one’s own mortality. Wolfe does not refuse the finitude of mortality, but sets it beside a *second finitude* (which is related to the impossibility of grasping one’s own death), defined as the exposure ‘to a certain estranging operation of language’.³¹ For him, living beings are exposed to a double finitude (to call it by the title of the section in question in his chapter):

The first type [of finitude] (physical vulnerability, embodiment, and eventually mortality) is paradoxically made unavailable, *inappropriate*, to us by the very thing that makes it available—namely, a second type of “passivity” or “not being able,” which is the finitude we experience in our subjection to a radically ahuman technicity or mechanicity of language. [...] “We” are always radically other, already in- or ahuman in our very being—not just in the evolutionary, biological, and zoological fact of our physical vulnerability and mortality, our mammalian existence but also in our subjection to and constitution in the materiality and technicity of a language that is always on the scene before we are, as precondition of our subjectivity. [...] This passivity and subjection are shared by humans and nonhumans the moment they begin to interact and communicate by means of any semiotic system.³²

Wolfe’s insistence on this technic, linguistic finitude stems from his attempt to inscribe ‘the question of the animal’ in the larger scope of posthumanism. This move seems to necessitate a move similar to my own

³⁰ Richard Beardsworth, quoted in Wolfe, *Posthumanism*, pp. 83-4.

³¹ Wolfe, *Posthumanism*, p. 84.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 88-9.

which consists in taking the discussion on animality away from the facile immediatism of philosophies of the body and inserting it in a radically posthumanist paradigm, in which 'language' cannot be thought to stop where the body, materiality, and the animal begin. And *contra* Diamond's literary capitalisation on embodied finitude, Wolfe defends that 'the relationship between the human and the nonhuman animals is [...] a wound, if you will, that can never be healed and is only further excavated and deepened by the very iterative technologies (thinking, writing, speech) that we use to try and suture it.'³³

Wolfe's emphasis on the Derridean finitude engendered by the technicity of language seems in fact to suggest that his two finitudes cannot be kept as separate conditions. Put differently, he insinuates that one finitude is a regional account of the general law of the other, so that embodied vulnerability is only a consequence of one's exposure to language:

Human and [...] nonhuman animal may be, in a phenomenological or ontological sense, more or less equally subjected to *the exteriority and materiality of the trace* in a way that only "the living" can be; that is what it means to be "mortal," to be "fellow creatures," to be *subjected*.³⁴

In other words, it is not that Diamond is wrong to insist on a difficulty of reality that challenges language, thinking, and philosophical argumentation. Rather, is it simply not clear that this difficulty is constituted solely or primarily in material terms. Reading her thesis by means of Wolfe's ultimate collapse of

³³ Ibid., p. 91.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 95, first emphasis mine. Wolfe is not denying the specificity of being-in-the-world of each animal (human or nonhuman). He is aware of the various degrees to which the trace encroaches upon different materialisations of the living and how such specific materialisations (that is, different beings) of the life/death relationship are indeed materialised differently.

his own two finitudes leads us to conclude the embodied difficulty of reality is the same – not as the difficulty of philosophy – but as a textual difficulty of reality. Ultimately, this difficulty refers to the experience of the collapse of the material/ideal divide.

In her famous contribution to Animal Studies, *When Species Meet*, Donna Haraway employs similar bodily figures to Diamond's in order to tackle what she believes are excessively abstract interpretations of animality. The embodiment she is arguing for emerges under the words 'worldly' and 'mud': 'I think we learn to be worldly from grappling with, rather than generalising from, the ordinary. I am a creature of the mud, not the sky.'³⁵ Accordingly, her project will defend the importance for being worldly of touching, skin, the flesh, and the singular: 'Whom and what do we touch when we touch this dog? How does this touch make us more worldly [...]?'³⁶ She opposes, however, such experience of embodiment and of being-in-the-world to projects which attempt to engage animals in a general, abstract, or 'sublime' fashion, thereby setting up a material/ideal opposition.

Her first target is Derrida, especially in his late text 'The Animal That Therefore I Am (More To Follow)', in which he narrates the abyssal encounter triggered by his cat's gazing at his naked body one morning in the bathroom. As a reference to another of Derrida's 'animal lectures' – 'And Say the Animal Responded?' – Haraway titles her encounter with him 'And Say the *Philosopher*

³⁵ Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p. 3.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

Responded?'. Her annoyance with him is related to the fact that even though he, unlike other philosophers he criticises, considered the possibility of his cat's responding to him and returning his gaze, Derrida completely overlooked the possibility that *he* might gaze back at his cat and respond to her, engaging her in communication. She recognises his attempt (in both mentioned lectures) of undoing the distinction between reaction and response, in which the latter would be present in humans alone, leaving both machines and animals to be only able to react. To Haraway, however, that was not enough:

Derrida knew he was in the presence of *someone*, not of a machine reacting, [...] but he was sidetracked by his *textual* canon of Western philosophy and literature and by his own linked worries about being naked in front of his cat. [...] [He] 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. [...] [Although] Derrida gave us the provocation of a *historically located* look [instead of a *primal scene* of Man confronting Animal], [...] the naked man's shame quickly became a figure for the shame of philosophy before *all* of the animals.³⁷

Her critique relies mostly on the fact that one material, singular cat presented herself to Derrida, but he was unable to return that singular, material look – he was only able to *theorise* about animals *in general*, along philosophical, literary, *textual* lines. He did not grapple with the ordinary, the singular, or the mud. She levels a similar argument to her next target, Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming-animal.³⁸ In *A Thousand Plateaus*, they criticise Freud for his understanding of the symbolism of wolves in the dream recounted by the Wolf-Man, Freud's famous patient, as well as his attempt at

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 19, 20, 23, emphases added.

³⁸ I shall return to Deleuze and Guattari in the third chapter, in which the concept of becoming-animal is further clarified, analysed, and discussed.

neutralising the pack of wolves (for them, a symbol of rhizomatic multiplicity) into one Oedipal wolf or father. As with Derrida, Haraway points out that they are too interested in an abstract, non-localisable concept of becoming-animal to the detriment of one-on-one relationships with animals (especially with pets):

Mundane, prosaic, living wolves have no truck with that kind of wolf pack. [...] Here I find little but the two writers' scorn for all that is mundane and ordinary and the profound absence of curiosity about or respect for and with actual animals, even as innumerable references to diverse animals are invoked to figure the authors' anti-Oedipal and anticapitalist project. [...] This is a philosophy of the sublime, not the earthly, not the mud.³⁹

She seems especially offended by their controversial statements disregarding pets and the people who like them. She sees in their argument a system controlled by the dichotomy between the wild and the domestic, which seeps into the distinction wolf/dog and man/woman. In her own text, on the other hand, a similar structuring dichotomy reigns – that between the mud and the sky, the worldly and the sublime. As it is, her thought comes across as a hollow materialism that attempts to simply invert the hierarchy between spiritual and corporeal, without actually grappling with the structuring laws that engender it. A closer engagement with Derrida might have revealed the reason for his suspicions concerning the invocation of material singularities and their power to transgress metaphysics and 'the sublime':

If I have not very often used the word "matter," it is not [...] because of some idealist or spiritualist kind of reservation. It is that in the logic of the phase of overturning [as when Haraway privileges the mud over the sublime,] this concept has been too often reinvested with those of thing, reality, presence in general, sensible presence, for example, substantial

³⁹ Haraway, pp. 27, 28.

plenitude, content, referent, etc. *Realism or sensualism—“empiricism”—are modifications of logocentrism.* [...] It is not only *idealism* in the narrow sense that falls back upon a transcendental signified. It can always come to reassure a *metaphysical materialism*. It then becomes an ultimate referent, [...] or it becomes an “objective reality” absolutely “anterior” to any work of the mark.⁴⁰

And contrary to Haraway’s construal of him as a theoretical, abstract thinker inattentive to material singularities, Derrida values materialism (when certain precautions against the desire for metaphysical reassurance are taken) precisely for its rebuttal of a common misunderstanding of deconstruction:

In a very *determined* field [...], it seems to me that the materialist insistence can function as a means of having the necessary generalization of the concept of text [...] not wind up [...] as the definition of a new self-interiority, a new “idealism”, if you will, of the text.⁴¹

For Claire Colebrook, materialism slips back into the problematic metaphysics it attempted to surpass when it writes matter out of the differential play of language:

Any materialism that aimed to derive systems of difference from some grounding matter would be one more foundational metaphysic, especially if matter possessed a logic that would determine difference in advance. [...] Derrida is not [...] a textualist; he does not endorse a narrowly linguistic idealism. In fact it was precisely his expansion of the concept of trace and materiality beyond language in its narrow sense that now allows for a thoroughly *naturalised deconstruction*.⁴²

⁴⁰ Jacques Derrida, ‘Positions: Interview with Jean-Loius Houdebine and Guy Scarpetta’, in *Positions*, trans. by Alan Bass (London: The Athlone Press, 1987), pp. 37-96 (pp. 64-5), my emphases. The full extent of Derrida’s critique of empiricism, the transcendental signified, and sensible presence should be clearer throughout the thesis, regarding his reading of Husserl and Saussure.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 66, emphasis on the original.

⁴² Claire Colebrook, ‘Matter without Bodies’, *Derrida Today*, 4 (2011), 1-20. (p. 3).

Derrida's reworking of the very concept of language by means of the trace is what makes possible a naturalised deconstruction.⁴³ This should not, however, mean that the differential working of the text is finally grounded on natural matter, but rather that one must 'consider textual worlds *materially* and to consider materiality *textually*'⁴⁴ and ultimately that

textuality is *not* the nature of nature; it is not another way of saying that nature is complex. To posit textuality as first is to erase nature; it is to do away with a substance that is complex, differentiating or multiple. In fact, to approach materiality would be possible only with a radical destruction of figures and senses of nature.⁴⁵

Finally, she puts Derrida's thinking of the entanglement of 'abstract' concept and its instantiations thus:

Derrida's approach to concepts [such as that of 'the animal' which Haraway believes is too theoretical] is primarily critical and entails two gestures. A concept must have some factual material support, and this marks its inscriptive or textual materiality. At the same time, a concept is only a concept if it is repeatable beyond any of its actual instances. Concepts therefore have the force of an essential impossibility, for their meaning or repeatability gestures to an ideality that exceeds any context, any actual material instance; and yet concepts – because of their materiality – are marked, scarred, deflected and contaminated by their singular conditions of emergence.⁴⁶

Vicky Kirby makes a similar point to Colebrook's by demonstrating how a careful reading of the projection of deconstruction can dismantle the oppositions between the 'two cultures' (sciences versus humanities). She argues:

If the question of the referent and its systemic entanglements arise just as powerfully through the grammatological "textile" as the quantum

⁴³ A 'naturalised deconstruction' is how Colebrook names readings of Derrida's trace that argue that it must be understood as something that precedes the anthropological advent of language and writing – hence, natural.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 18.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 6.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 15.

mechanical problematic such that the difference between the workings of form/ideation and the intricacies of substance/matter appear compromised, “both” already present in/as the other, then *we cannot assume that modes of being are somehow separate from modes of knowing*. It is possible that all those claims made by cultural analysts about the materiality of language and the constitutive efficacy of representations could be taken more seriously than even their authors envisaged, and enfolded into the question of science and objectivity more generally?⁴⁷

Crucially, she frames this discussion as a question of the tension between Derrida and Lacan regarding animality. The ‘Subversion of the Subject’ brought about by psychoanalysis and the discovery of the unconscious, Kirby glosses Derrida as saying, does not go far enough by not acknowledging that human identity has to be even more alien than psychoanalysts such as Lacan are willing to accept. Instrumental to this argument is the Derridean argument posed by Kirby that language is not essentially ‘only’ a mediating technology that promotes forms of ‘knowing’, but is actually an ‘ontologising energy’ and, as such, cannot be possessed by either humans or animals.⁴⁸ Up to a point, Lacan does accept that language is indeed an Other energy, but the Lacanian fracturing of human subjectivity by this Otherness occurs safely within ‘an enclosure’, from which the animal is so removed that it cannot even be granted the status of Other.⁴⁹ But, according to Lacan’s own thought, ‘if the difference between sender, receiver, and message implodes, [...] [if] I am spoken through -- then it is no longer clear why human

⁴⁷ Vicki Kirby, ‘Original Science: Nature Deconstructing Itself’, *Derrida Today*, 3 (2010), 201-220 (p. 205, my emphasis).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

expression is any different to animal reaction as Lacan understands it, or even to the reaction of the machine'.⁵⁰ What this entails for Kirby is that there is

no simple division between subject and object nor mediation or one thing by another; no hermeneutic enclosure or culture or ideation over and against a more primordial system of physical matter. Importantly, the resulting "animation" is not ideation plus substance, but a profound radicalisation of these terms as well as the very meaning of Life.⁵¹

As for Deleuze and Guattari, I shall attempt to gauge the productiveness of their becoming-animal in chapter three, but for now one could point out to the problematic and facile distinction Haraway sets up between the general or conceptual on the one hand, and the singular and material on the other.

Beyond the enmeshing of one in the other, the aporetic character of the relationship between general law and singular instance is never taken up by Haraway, even though it is precisely one of the main motifs in her book. Her title, for instance, foregrounds the encountering of different *species*, and even a historically located, singular instance of an encounter between two individuals of distinct species must still make recourse to the general law of what a species is so that 'members' of two species can meet.

David Brooks presents a similarly resistant reading to Derrida, but is otherwise more attentive to the complexity of the latter's strategies. Focusing on the wordplay present in *je suis* ('I am' and 'I follow'), Brooks entertains that for Derrida the human's relationship to following (and thus, being) is similar to its relationship to the trace: 'there is, for humans, no being without text, [...] in a

⁵⁰ Ibid. I discuss this reading of Lacan by Derrida in more detail in my third chapter.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 211.

sense to *be* is to be text, that there is, for us, no being that is beyond or outside the text'.⁵² Thus, Derrida's presumed indifference towards the cat as a real cat would be a product of the fact that 'the human, because text is always preceded by text--because in this way there is no end to writing--is a creature divided, doubled, always itself but that self always a self that follow, that shadows, that is produced by prior writing'. That necessity of following means, for Brooks, that the human is 'a being *within* being, held somehow apart from a greater being' and that this distance is brought about by the very language that separates us -- or that we use to separate us -- from animals. 'We are what we are because of the *animot*'.⁵³ In that way, Brooks reads Derrida against the grain, but without the misreadings brought about by Haraway. He speculates that Derrida's references to *Through the Looking Glass*, and *What Alice Found There* mean that his cat is a mirror-like Sphinx, always destined to reveal nothing but 'Man'. He muses whether this amounts to an admission that 'one should be able to pass *through* that mirror, [...] that the texted/textual world/prison *is* like a dream, from which there might, just, somehow, *be* a waking'.⁵⁴ Finally, Brooks comes to an admittedly abrupt conclusion with the suspicion that 'Derrida has realized that, behind the mirror-cat, which he, and a long tradition behind him, has so loaded that he cannot see past her, there is another cat, another *being*, loaded with herself. [...] An *abyss*, in short, which threatens to swallow him'.⁵⁵

⁵² David Brooks, 'The Loaded Cat', in *Seeing Animals After Derrida*, ed. by Sarah Bezan and James Tink (Lanham: Lexington, 2018), pp. 21-35 (p. 27).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

Actually, the kind of enmeshing of textuality and materiality that Derrida defends is not alien to Haraway's thought. She, after all, coined the term *naturecultures* and her 'A Cyborg Manifesto' defended the interpenetration of nature, culture, information, language, etc.⁵⁶ However, it is undeniable that Haraway does wield the distinction between material and ideal as a tool to confront Derrida and Deleuze and Guattari for their supposed failure to respond to singular animals.

The question broached by Haraway seems precisely to be: to what extent can the singularity of a member of a species exceed the general logic of speciation as long as it is referred to by its species? And is not that precisely the issue that Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari are approaching? Derrida, after all, coined the term *animot*⁵⁷ in order to convey such aporia: the concept of 'the animal' is always already plural and implies a multitude, so much so that even the singular 'the animal' still refers to a generality. Traditionally this multitude has been portrayed as the irreducible interchangeability of animals, so that each individual has no worth since its (still living) species is expected to stand behind it and outlive it. This logic is one of the underlying causes of the classical moral irrelevance of animals. Deleuze and Guattari are, in fact, working through and revaluing the fact that animals always imply multitudes in order to

⁵⁶ Donna J. Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century', in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 149-182.

⁵⁷ *Animot* is a portmanteau of the plural noun *animaux* ('animals') and the noun *mot* ('word'), stressing the linguistic violence in the very concept of the word animal that always generalises them.

show how and why they seduce humans, as lines of flight away from Oepidal configurations.

The complex structure that organises instantiations of a generality (as repetitions of a model which, nevertheless, must still be different in order to be taken as separated entities) is what Derrida gathered under the name *iterability*. A fuller account of iterability shall be given during my reading of *Totem and Taboo*, where the tension between general ideality and specific materiality is demonstrated to be inseparable from the distinction between an individual animal and its species, to the point that Haraway cannot but encounter the problem of iterability when calling for animal specificity. However, the complicity between the law of iterability and animality can also be read in Derrida's deconstruction of the concept of the sign in Husserl (but also in Saussure). To the extent that iterability produces localised, iterable units – just as a species contains specific, 'interchangeable' individuals – and to the extent that iterable units are figured as the materialisation or corporification of conceptual potentialities, Derrida's critique of linguistics lays bare the co-implication of the concepts of body and sign.

Husserl and the bodies of linguistics

For Husserl's theory of signs, only expression (*Ausdruck*) can convey the essence of language, since it alone contains meaning (*Bedeutung*). The other kind of signs, endowed with signification but devoid of meaning, practices only

indication (*Anzeichen*).⁵⁸ True language – that is, expression – cannot be reduced, however, to communication, for in it, the irreducibly spiritual character of Husserlian meaning has to reckon with a certain *embodiment* of language when it encounters the phenomenon of indication.⁵⁹ What distinguishes expression and indication and justifies the subordination of the latter lies precisely in their relationship to a certain *body*. Derrida will uncover precisely the hesitation regarding whose and which body is at stake in the definition of the sign and in the privilege given to expression.

For Husserl, that which is expressed must be transcendental both in terms of content and form.⁶⁰ Derrida concludes, therefore, that in Husserl no remark about any empirical fact has a right to be called expression – otherwise it would be merely an indicative sign. Only transcendental idealities that reveal the essence lurking behind empirical reality are truly *expressed*.⁶¹ And because such idealities have to be presented to consciousness in such a way as to

⁵⁸ 'Every sign is a sign for something, but not every sign has "meaning", a "sense" that the sign "expresses". [...] Signs in the sense of indications (notes, marks, etc.) *do not express* anything. [...] From indicative signs we distinguish *meaningful* signs, i.e., *expressions*.' (Edmund Husserl, 'Expression and Meaning', trans. by J N Findlay, in *The Essential Husserl: Basic Writings in Transcendental Phenomenology*, ed. by Donn Welton [Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999], pp. 26-51 [pp. 26, 28])

⁵⁹ 'Each instance or part of *speech* [...] shall count as an expression, whether or not such speech is actually uttered. [...] [In fact,] one sees at once that all expressions in *communicative* speech function as *indications*. They serve the hearer as signs of the "thoughts" of the speaker. [...] Expressions as used in communication [...] depend essentially on the fact that they operate indicatively. But expressions also play a great part in uncommunicative, interior mental life. [...] Expressions continue to have meanings as they had before, and the same meanings as in dialogue. A word only ceases to be a word when our interest stops at its sensory contour, when it becomes a mere sound-pattern. [...] If we reflect on the relation of expression to meaning, [...] the word comes before us as intrinsically indifferent, whereas the sense seems the thing aimed at by the verbal sign. [...] The expression is more than a merely sounded word.' (Ibid., pp. 28, 29, 30, 31)

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 33, 48.

⁶¹ Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena: And Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, ed. by John Wild, trans. by David B Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 34.

preserve their transcendental, Derrida demonstrates that Husserl requires that they are given to the living present of a consciousness. The consequences are thus two-fold: two bodies – or two registers of *the* body – are bracketed off by Husserl. Husserl excludes both the body of the phenomenal sign, which would risk the expression of pure idealities, and the ‘real’ body that ‘houses’ the consciousness in question, whose embodiment introduces a perilous detour via the world that endangers absolute self-proximity and the living present. What is clear in Derrida’s reading of Husserl is the difficulty of determining which of the two types of bodies endangers Husserl’s thesis at each moment, and finally what precisely distinguishes them:

What is excluded [from expression] is, for example, facial expressions, gestures, the whole of the body, and the mundane register, in a word, the whole of the visible and spatial as such. As such: that is, insofar as they are not worked over by *Geist* [spirit, mind], by the will, by the *Geistigkeit* [spirituality] which, in the word just as in the human body, transforms the *Körper* into *Leib* (into flesh). The opposition between body and soul is not only at the center of this doctrine of signification, it is confirmed by it; and, as has always been at bottom the case in philosophy, it depends upon an interpretation of language.⁶²

Husserl evidences the common root of the human body (as mark of its animal origin) and what one may term ‘the body of linguistics’ in his attempt to secure a purely transcendental, ideal language. In his effort to reduce contingency and materiality, he reveals the extent to which the (animalised) human body and the body of the phenomenal sign constitute each other. According to Derrida’s reading, the mundane (or the ‘worldly’, to return to Haraway’s term) and the bodily represent the disobedience to the authority of

⁶² Ibid., p. 35. Interpolations are mine.

spirituality, insofar as the latter has not yet neutralised them into *Leib* – they are mere *Körper*.⁶³ Derrida argues that the mechanism which spiritualises a *Körper* into a *Leib* is the same both ‘in the word’ and ‘in the human body’: insofar as materiality is supervised and inhabited by the transcendental intention, its status as ‘mere’ matter is overcome. The *same* movement of spiritualisation *both* de-animalises the human body *and* makes possible the privilege of one substance of expression (the voice, or silent internal monologue) over others.⁶⁴ Just as Nancy argues that the classical philosophy of the body cannot think it except as a vehicle or obstacle to sense, Husserl (and here he represents an age-old tradition) considers all bodies to be always in a relationship with spirituality.⁶⁵

⁶³ The two words for ‘body’ in German could be translated as ‘the merely material body’ (*Körper*) and ‘lived flesh’ (*Leib*). This productive distinction – crucial for Husserl, Heidegger, and others – will be more fully discussed in the next chapter when read alongside *Totem and Taboo*. Since Husserl, in *The Origin of Geometry*, admits that writing is a *Leib* and not a *Körper*, we should be alert to the system organising the concepts of life and non-life with regard to the meaning-giving spirituality of intention (before consulting *The Origin of Geometry*, one would rightly guess that Husserl should consider writing – as spatial, material language, unsupervised by a present consciousness – to display the mere materiality of a *Körper*). A certain living corporeality of writing should be considered alongside Freud’s account of animal totemism as a form of writing.

⁶⁴ Derrida analyses a similar gesture in Saussure, when the latter stresses that the signifier face of the linguistic sign is not in fact the sound spoken or heard, but the mental impression produced by the sound (Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Fortieth Anniversary Edition, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak [Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 2016], p. 57-8). For Derrida, Saussure is attempting to desubstantialise speech, even the spoken signifier, so that speech can be purely ideal. The written signifier alone would be, according to the Saussurean system, actually material. Employing the same terminology, we could say that Saussure wishes the *spoken* signifier to be a *Leib*, so that *Körper* can describe only a *written* signifier. It is safe to assume that the human being – as a rational, *speaking* animal – would also be characterised as having *Leib*, while the animal (just as material as writing) would have only a *Körper*. Just as in Husserl, the privilege of one substance of expression over another is an attempt of constituting the human body as essentially different from an animal’s, essentially de-animalising the body of the human.

⁶⁵ Whether they are in fact inhabited by a spirit (as in living flesh, *Leib*), or not (as in a corpse, *Körper*).

Furthermore, by rejecting the definition of expression as communication, Husserl reveals his reliance on the subordination of the body and his conflation between a 'real' body and the body of the sign:

It is supposed [by Husserl] that in communication, [...] a rigorous distinction can be drawn between [...] the ideal and the real. It is supposed that effectiveness comes like an empirical and exterior cloak to expression, like a body to a soul. And these are indeed the notions Husserl uses, even when he stresses the unity of body and soul in intentional *animation*. This unity does not impair the essential distinction, for it always remains a unity of composition.⁶⁶

[In communication], sensible phenomena (audible, visible, etc.) are *animated* through the sense-giving acts of a subject, whose intention is to be simultaneously understood by another subject. But the "*animation*" cannot be pure and complete, for it must traverse, and to some degree lose itself in, the opaqueness of a *body*. [...] Everything in my speech which is destined to manifest an experience to another must pass by the mediation of its *physical* side; this irreducible mediation involves every expression in an indicative operation. [...] Here we find the core of indication: indication takes place whenever the sense-giving act, the *animating* intention, the living *spirituality* of the meaning-intention, is not fully present.⁶⁷

Derrida's reading of Husserlian bodies is best glimpsed in his use of the word 'animation'. A body is always that which is animated by a spirit (and the etymologies linking this metaphysical linguistics, animals, and souls should not be overlooked),⁶⁸ but in such a way that this animation is never completely successful, so that spiritualisation actually becomes the spirit's losing itself in

⁶⁶ Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, p. 56. Emphases added.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 38. Emphases added.

⁶⁸ According to the OED, 'animal' comes ultimately from Latin *anima* ('animal, n.', in *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, 2016 [accessed 16 February 2017]), which meant 'air, a current of air, a breeze, wind (mostly poetical), [...] The vital principle, the breath of life [...]' (hence *anima* denotes the *animal principle of life*, in distinction from *animus*, the spiritual, reasoning, willing principle) ('*ānīma*', in *A Latin Dictionary*, ed. by Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0059:entry=anima>> [accessed 14 February 2017]). *Animus*, thus, means, 'in a general sense, the rational soul in man (in opp. to the body, *corpus*, and to the physical life, *anima*), [...] the mind as thinking, feeling, willing, the intellect, the sensibility, and the will' ('*ānīmus*', *A Latin Dictionary*).

the wor(l)d. Such inherited metaphysical concepts of the body and of animality should limit the very possibility of our thinking the singular, localised body of an animal, as Haraway asks us to do, apart from a reference to spirituality. Put differently, a materialistic account of embodiment does not shake away the fact that embodiment is a *process of corporification undertaken by a spirit*.

Not only that, but Husserl's traditional account of the relationship between ideal spirituality and empirical, contingent bodies should illuminate Haraway's criticism of Derrida (but also of Deleuze and Guattari). To the extent that we can identify *Husserl's* traditional idealism as Haraway's real target, and to the extent that Derrida actively *deconstructs* the former, we may conclude that Haraway and Derrida actually share their criticism of idealism,⁶⁹ so that Haraway's dissatisfaction with Derrida's supposedly abstract thinking of animals is due to her misinterpretation of the project of deconstruction.

Derrida's critique of Husserl relies mostly on a close exploration of the mechanism of repetition. Insofar as Husserl is concerned with idealities, Derrida concludes that such idealism is in fact necessitated by repeatability: only when an expression can emerge as *the same*, repeating itself, infinitely, do we have an ideality. Ideal repetition is, however, caught up in the empirical, sensible character of each instance, so that the possibility of indefinite repetition is in fact the possibility of indefinite alteration, or irreducible impurity and contingency. In sum, idealities can only come to be in their dependence on the material instances that 'figure' them. Derrida's emphasis on

⁶⁹ To be precise, Derrida mounts a challenge to idealism without refuting it outright: he deconstructs the ideal/material divide.

the materiality of singularities emerges in his critique of Husserl so that his writing reads like Haraway's criticism of himself:

The relation with the presence of the present as the ultimate form of being and of ideality is the move by which I transgress empirical existence, factuality, contingency, worldliness, etc.—first of all, *my own* empirical existence, factuality, contingency, worldliness, etc. [...] The relationship with *my death* (my disappearance in general) thus lurks in this determination of being as presence, ideality, the absolute possibility of repetition. The possibility of the sign is this relationship with death. The determination and elimination of the sign in metaphysics is the dissimulation of this relationship with death.⁷⁰

Husserl's idealism is, for Derrida, a strategy to *deflect* a real worldliness or mortality which is ineluctably inscribed in the very thing that attempts to secure transcendental: idealism's absolute possibility of repetition.⁷¹ Derrida's project of establishing the nonderivative character of signs should underline his dedication to thinking outside of any pure idealism. As it is, Derrida's thinking of animals (or specifically his cat) in *The Animal That Therefore I Am* escapes Haraway's reservations for two reasons: it does not fail to engage with the discourse that links animals to the logic of species, and it implies that ideal concepts are themselves made possible by their inscription in the worldly, the contingent, the non-ideal. To use Haraway's terms, the 'sublime sky' is always already caught up in 'the mud'. Similarly, even if all bodies are always waiting receptacles for a spirit, spirituality itself is in

⁷⁰ Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, pp. 53-4.

⁷¹ That ideal entities must be repeatable and that such repetitions incur alterations is what Derrida calls the law of iterability: "Iterability" does not signify simply [...] repeatability of the same, but rather alterability of this same idealized in the singularity of the event. [...] There is no idealization without (identificatory) iterability; but for the same reason, for reasons of (altering) iterability, there is no idealization that keeps itself pure, safe from all contamination. The concept of iterability is this singular concept that render possible the silhouette of ideality. [...] But it is also the concept that, *at the same time*, with the same stroke marks the limit of idealization.' (Jacques Derrida, 'Afterword', in *Limited Inc* [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988], pp. 111-60 [p. 119])

constant need of actualisation by means of embodiment or animation. The animalised structure of this logic – in which animals are precisely the paradigm of animation – should keep us alert to the part played in it by the concept of animality. This shall be further discussed in regard to Derridean iterability and the tension between animal species and individual animal in *Totem and Taboo*. A closer look at the trace in *Of Grammatology* should guide one to think of the animal in relation to iterability. Since the animal is analogous with the signifier, and if the signifier can be deconstructed to give rise to the trace, it follows that the animal can be similarly deconstructed.

The trace

The trace is presented as a deconstruction of the sign as the unity of a signifier and a signified; as it is, Derrida's revision of the linguistic sign threatens to undo the correspondences I have drawn out between the linguistic signifier and the body of the animal. However, he replaces the Saussurean sign with the *trace*, which makes it possible for him to redescribe language as an a-human dimension that precedes the distinction between humanity and animality.⁷² If,

⁷² Derrida coined the term *trace*, according to Laurent Milesi, 'as a more appropriate, more generalisable substitute for the sign since it can include its animal and technological nature' (Laurent Milesi, 'Sponge Inc', in *The Animal Question in Deconstruction*, ed. by Lynn Turner [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013], pp. 70-88 (p. 70). In his ambitious work *Technics and Time*, Bernard Stiegler explicates Derrida's intervention in the field of linguistics, which Stiegler underscores as influenced by Leroi-Gourhan's work on palaeontology and anthropology: 'Leroi-Gourhan's anthropology can be thought from within an essentially non-anthropocentric concept that does not take for granted the usual divides between animality and humanity. Derrida bases his own thought of *différance* as a general history of life, that is, as a general history of the *grammē*, on the concept of program insofar as it can be found on both sides of such divides. Since the *grammē* is older than the specifically human written forms, and because the letter is nothing without it, the conceptual unity that *différance* contests the opposition animal/human and, in the same move, the opposition nature/culture.' (Bernard

as discussed above, the animal body cannot be thought apart from the signifier, and if the signifier should be critiqued as part of a larger project of grammatology, it should be possible to consider the very concept of animal being (and, consequently, of 'the body') as indissociable from a very specific legacy of metaphysical concepts, therefore opening a space for the deconstructive work of zoogrammatology.

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida is trying to chase the consequences of both the thesis of arbitrariness and that of differential value in Saussure's theory of the linguistic sign. More essential to the functioning of writing than its definition as a signifier of a signifier, its unit – the *graphie* – is dependent on the structure Derrida calls the instituted trace, which would be at the base of signification in general. Such a primordial structure is exactly what Saussure saw in writing that made it so useful as a metaphor to explain the differential character of linguistic value.⁷³ In a dense and famous passage, Derrida seems to 'define' such a trace:

One cannot think the instituted trace without thinking the retention of difference within a structure of reference where difference appears *as such*. [...] The absence of an *other* here-now, of another transcendental present, of an *other* origin of the world appearing as such [*comme telle*], presenting itself as irreducible absence within the presence of the trace, that is not a metaphysical formula substituted for a scientific concept of writing. This formula [...] describes the structure implied by the "arbitrariness of the sign".⁷⁴

Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, trans. by Richard Beardsworth and George Collins [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998], p. 137)

⁷³ The fact that the variability of a phoneme does not threaten its difference-based identity, for example, is linked to the fact that one may draw a letter in slightly different ways without changing it to a different letter, as long as one draws it *differently* enough from the others (Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, trans. by Wade Baskin [London: Peter Owen, 1961], pp. 119-20).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 50-1, my interpolation.

His formula for a definition of the trace (as a more primordial attribute of writing) – which he substitutes for Saussure’s supposedly scientific definition of writing as technical representation – albeit sounding ‘metaphysical’, is nothing but the conclusion of the thesis of arbitrariness. If the sign is arbitrary, that means its value cannot depend on the materiality of its sensible signifier (which is believed to be ‘accidental’) or on the (unmotivated) link between signifier and signified. Due to that, its functioning is dependent solely on the differences among itself and other signs. That difference, however, must appear *as such*, as difference itself, as the absence of other signs – it can never rely in fact on any *trait* of any one sign, either present or absent (as a modification of presence).⁷⁵ In other words, *absence* must *present* itself *as* absence. That, in a nutshell, is all that is counter-intuitive and ‘nonsensical’ about deconstruction, since absence should not be able, by definition, to be present. The presentation of absence – or the relationship with absolute otherness – is another name for the structure of reference Derrida situates in place of traditional linguistic signification; or at least one of the names, since

⁷⁵ That is the reason why the Derridean trace should not be confused with the metaphysical concept of the trace, according to which it would consist of the mark left in the present by something which is here-and-now absent. Such a mark would still be present and would not constitute the presentation of absence ‘as such’. That is why the trace is always the trace of a trace. Geoffrey Bennington clarifies that ‘these traces [...] [are] nothing other than the traces of the *absence* of the other “element”, which is moreover not absent in the sense of “present elsewhere,” but itself made up of traces. Every trace is the trace of a trace. No element is anywhere present (nor simply absent), there are only traces. These traces are not, as the word might suggest, traces of a presence or the passage of a presence. [...] In every “element” all that is “present” is the other, “absent” element, which must, for language to be possible, present this alterity *as* alterity. This “presentation” of absence “as such” does not make it a presence, and at the same stroke overtakes the opposition presence/absence. [...] The trace *n’a arrive qu’à s’effacer* [...], arrives only by effacing itself, manages only to efface itself. “Trace” attempts to name this entwinement of the-other-in-the-same which is the condition of the same itself.’ (Bennington, ‘Derridabase’, pp. 75-6).

trace, arche-writing, *différance*, grammē, and text are part of the chain of words Derrida employs to describe such structure of difference. His understanding of difference exceeds Saussure's differential value, though, insofar as Derrida is concerned not with the *constituted* differences that obtain between elements of the linguistics system (and that are localisable by comparing the sensible traits of each element), but that which *constitutes* difference and makes them 'appear' within the trace's structure of non-presence:

Without a trace retaining the other as other in the same, no difference would do its work and no meaning would appear. It is not the question of a constituted difference here, but rather, before all determination of the content, of the pure movement which produces difference. *The (pure) trace is différance*. It does not depend on any sensible plenitude, audible or visible, phonic or graphic. It is, on the contrary, its condition. [...] Its possibility is by rights anterior to all that one calls sign (signified/signifier, content/expression, etc.), concept or operation, motor or sensory. This difference is therefore not more sensible than intelligible and it permits the articulation of signs among themselves within the same abstract order—of a phonic or graphic text for example—or between two orders of expression. It permits the articulation of speech and writing—in the colloquial sense—as it founds the metaphysical opposition between the sensible and the intelligible, then between signifier and signified, expression and content, etc.⁷⁶

Such a reworking of the 'essence' of 'language' – as the movement of *différance* – should illuminate a) the strategy according to which 'language' (now understood as the play of the trace) can cross the text/world boundary; b) the claim that there is no outside-text; and c) that 'language' should not be thought as strictly human. Accordingly, most scholarly work on animality and/or technics influenced by Derrida tends to confirm this more general understanding of language. Bernard Stiegler defends that *différance* is 'nothing

⁷⁶ Derrida, *Grammatology*, pp. 67-8.

else than the history of life'⁷⁷ and that 'the *grammē* structures all levels of the living and beyond, the pursuit of life by means other than life',⁷⁸ since it is not anthropological, and neither is arche-writing; the latter principally 'means that what is alive cannot be sufficient unto itself'.⁷⁹ Wolfe points out that Derrida revolutionises the concept of the signifier 'in favour of the articulation of writing as fundamentally a structured dynamics of the trace', whose communicative functioning 'extends beyond the human to nonhuman animals and indeed exceeds [...] the boundary between the living and the mechanical or the technical'. Ultimately, for Wolfe,

[the human] is fundamentally a prosthetic creature that has coevolved with various forms of technicity and materiality, forms that are radically "not-human" and yet have nevertheless made the human what it is. (For Derrida, of course, this includes the most fundamental prostheticity of all: language in the broadest sense.)⁸⁰

If the trace in fact surpasses that which is traditionally linguistic, at this point one might ask why it is still so tied up with writing in Derrida, to the point that he proposes *arche-writing* as another name for it. To what extent can writing in the strict sense still be relevant for something which works across species lines, and even the life/death barrier? To be sure, only writing in the *vulgar* sense would remain strictly human, since *arche-writing* is not anthropological:

Leroi-Gourhan [...] describes the unity of man and the human adventure [...] as a stage or an articulation in the history of life—of what I we here

⁷⁷ Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, p. 136.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁷⁹ Bernard Stiegler, 'Derrida and Technology: Fidelity at the Limits of Deconstruction and the Prosthesis of Faith', in *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities: A Critical Reader*, ed. by Tom Cohen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 238-70 (pp. 250, 253-4).

⁸⁰ Wolfe, *Posthumanism*, p. xxv.

call *différance*—as the history of the *grammè*. Instead of having recourse to the concepts that habitually serve to distinguish man from other living beings (instinct and intelligence, absence or presence of speech, of society, of economy, etc. etc.), the notion of *program* is invoked [by Leroi-Gourhan].⁸¹

This notion of program is made possible by the history of the trace, as ‘the emergence that makes the *grammè* appear *as such* (that is according to a new structure of nonpresence)’. The emergence of the *grammè* is the ground for the emergence of systems of writing in the *narrow* sense, ‘since “genetic inscription” and the “short programmatic chains” regulating the behavior of the amoeba or the annelid up to the passage beyond alphabetic writing to the orders of the logos and of a certain *homo sapiens*’.⁸² The trace – arche-writing – is therefore logically anterior to commonplace writing and cannot be confused with the human invention. As Wolfe and Stiegler have argued, it is the articulation of the living on the dead:

If the trace, [...] which must be thought before the opposition of nature and culture, animality and humanity, etc., belongs to the very movement of signification, then signification is a priori written, whether inscribed or not, in one form or another, in a “sensible” and “spatial” element that is called “exterior.” Arche-writing, at first the possibility of the spoken word, then of the “*graphie*” in the narrow sense, [...] this trace is the opening of the first exteriority in general, the enigmatic relationship of the living to its other and of an inside to an outside: spacing. The outside, “spatial” and “objective” exteriority [...] would not appear without the *grammè*, without *différance* as temporalization, without the nonpresence of the other inscribed within the sense of the present, without the relationship with death as the concrete structure of the living present. [...] The presence-absence of the trace [...] carries in itself the problems of the letter and the spirit, of body and soul.⁸³

⁸¹ Derrida, *Grammatology*, p. 91.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Derrida, *Grammatology*, pp. 76-7.

The question seems to be, thus, why arche-writing, if it precedes what one normally would understand by writing, still carries that name. In what sense is arche-writing still a writing at all? Derrida stresses that arche-writing still 'essentially communicates with the vulgar concept of writing' and the latter could not have emerged if not by a work of repression and dissimulation of arche-writing.⁸⁴ Arche-writing is therefore still barely legible in the meaning of vulgar writing, so that writing's philosophical elusiveness is symptomatic of the extra-metaphysical, grammatological character of *arche-writing*. The legibility of arche-writing lies precisely at the sites where writing is at stake, and that is why Derrida was able to wrench the non-metaphysical concept of arche-writing from within the texts of Saussure, Husserl, or Rousseau.

Geoffrey Bennington puts it thus:

This decision to retain the word 'writing', and to court the confusion of its 'new' sense ('archi-writing' [sic], a structure logically prior to the standard conceptual distinction of speech and writing) [...] is justified by the thought that something of this 'new' sense is legible in the traditional discussions [...] and the place of that legibility is systematically where writing (in its current or 'vulgar' sense) is at issue. Something about writing in the usual sense shows up something of the structure of archi-writing, even if only symptomatically, signalling an effort of repression.⁸⁵

Derrida's reworking of language by means of the attention to its most irreducible possibilities and conditions (the trace, *différance*, iterability, arche-writing, etc.) opens the possibility for a shift in the thinking of the animal body and its materiality as always already enmeshed in textuality. However, if on the one hand Derrida's concept of the trace allows us to more fully comprehend

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 61.

⁸⁵ Geoffrey Bennington, 'Saussure and Derrida', in *The Cambridge Companion to Saussure*, ed. by Carol Sanders (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 186-204 (p. 195).

the limitations of our thinking of the body, as well as the nature of mortality, on the other hand, we still need a thinking of the animal (and its body) that accounts for its literary power and philosophical elusiveness. After all, despite the fact that, as I have argued, animality-as-material-embodiment may be a result of the dissimulation of trace, and even though language as arche-writing is not strictly human, we must concede that the animal still appears to challenge and radically impact on language. What is needed is a history of the materialisation of animal bodies so as to understand the extent of their inscription within the logic of materialism. I turn to a reading of Sigmund Freud's *Totem and Taboo* as a way of providing a genealogy of the materialisation of both animal and linguistic bodies so as to map the extent to which they mirror each other. Not only that, I shall try to show that Freud's 'history' of this embodiment also explains how it could give rise to a concept of the animal that both obeys and transgresses such genealogy, opening the path for a thinking of the trace – or, in Freud's case, the totem – as the animal's way out of the submission to the signifier. I shall try to show that Freud's totem points to the possibility that animals in traditional discourse (literature, philosophy, science, etc.), just like writing in the vulgar sense with respect to arche-writing, permit a quasi-transcendental concept of animality to emerge, one which would precede the classical concept of 'the animal' – an arche-animality. Freud's text will be shown to be a theoretical resource for formulating arche-animality, but its analysis will also furnish an example of a paleonymic textual reading that uncovers the arche-animal from/under the repression of vulgar animality.

Chapter 2: Totem and Taboo

Introduction

Dominic Pettman opens his *Look at the Bunny: Totem, Taboo, Technology* by mentioning Claude Lévi-Strauss's famous indictment against totemism as a conceptual category: 'it has been over half a century since the doyen of structuralist anthropology, Claude Lévi-Strauss delivered his influential funeral oration for the notion of the totem.'¹ According to Pettman, Lévi-Strauss believed that totemism was 'little more than an illusion: a trick of the light, produced by the disciplinary desire for origin myths of holistic social interaction'.² In short, 'totemism' had been 'asked to do too much work' as a concept. Pettman, however, believes there is some sort of survival or persistence of the totem as a concept so as to dedicate to it an entire book.

However, Lévi-Strauss, too, acknowledged at least *some* useful aspects of totemism as a concept. Wishing to dissociate it from the idea of the 'guardian animal spirit', he insisted that totemism cannot plot the whole of relations between humanity and the natural world and that, in fact, it only mapped relations between differences.³ In other words, there is a much more *structural* system of relationships in totemism between humans and animals than a *mythopoetic* one. He did not *reduce* totemism to a structural category, however – he eliminated it altogether: probably because the structural organisation of

¹ Dominic Pettman, *Look at the Bunny: Totem, Taboo, Technology* (Alresford: Zero Books, 2013), Kindle location 43.

² *Ibid.*, 141.

³ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism*, trans. by Rodney Needham (London: Merlin Press, 1991), pp. 86-9.

relations and differences that totemism came to signify under his pen was already carried out by the whole of his structural anthropology. Pettman seems to foreground such issue of structurality when he frames totemism as a technique of virtualisation:

It is the *virtual* aspect of the totem which interests us in the present context: the way in which any actual existing crocodile is but a manifest avatar of “crocodileness” for those who live, think, and act within totemic protocols. A specific crocodile, sunning himself on a river bank, is sacred to the extent that he invokes the archetypal species with which the tribe is affiliated. (Just as the signifier is different from the referent – the former representing the abstract, collective meaning – the individualized reptile embodies something which cannot be accessed directly, but only circled.)⁴

I suggest that Freud’s 1913 book *Totem and Taboo: Resemblances Between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics* can, in fact, be seen as a virtual reading of totemism, at least due to, if nothing else, its psychoanalytic conclusions applicable to the minds of present individuals. Insofar as it narrates the emergence of a certain human psyche while also accounting for its functioning, Freud’s gesture is two-pronged. On the one hand, he produces a history of (the) virtualisation (of the unconscious), to the extent that the primal crime he speaks of is purported to mark the origin of human psychosociality. On the other hand, though, he also suggests a virtualisation of history, since the historical reality of the crime is at issue from the start, but in a way that its ‘virtual’ taking-place is still demanded by the psychic structures supposed to emerge from it, even if its ‘historical’ taking-place can be rejected.

⁴ Pettman, 178.

Freud argued that both totemism and taboos emerged alongside each other, both sparked by Oedipal structures.⁵ Totemism was, for Freud, the shape of human social organisation before religion, and it would evolve (or perhaps one should say simply ‘change’) throughout time into various forms of beliefs, such as animism and polytheism, all the way to monotheism (pp. 90, 116). Taboos would still be at work in present-day societies, although they would function more similarly to ‘original’ systems of taboos in the self-prohibiting laws produced by the minds of neurotics (pp. 100-104). If, according to Lévi-Strauss, Freud does concede ‘that the act of parricide was [not] a historical event’, then Lévi-Strauss in his turn would concede that ‘[the primal crime] could be viewed as the simple expression of a recurrent virtuality, a generic and non-temporal model of psychological attitudes entailed by repetitive phenomena or institutions such as totemism and tabus’.⁶ However, it remains elusive how the *state of affairs*, in this case, Oedipal psychic structures – if they depend on some form of performance of this crime – can come to produce their *origin*. In the uncanny temporality of Freud’s attempted explication of the shift from nature to culture, cause and effect would seem to change places.

Derrida, too, seems to be caught up in a strange temporality when he attempts to account for the way in which Saussure’s arbitrary sign can take shape. If the arbitrary sign, in which ‘[the signifier] has no “natural attachment”

⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*, trans. by James Strachey (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 153. All further references to *Totem and Taboo* are from this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

⁶ Lévi-Strauss, p. 69.

to the signified within reality',⁷ differs from a non-arbitrary *symbol* in that the latter would in fact resemble what it represents, that would mean that arbitrariness represents the shift from a 'natural' resemblance between symbols and things to a 'cultural' or 'institutional' relationship between signifiers and signifieds or referents. Unlike the symbol, which operates by means of the seemingly obvious similarity between itself and its referent, the arbitrary sign requires a *system* of relations and differences in which it functions. No arbitrary sign could do its work on its own, since it depends on other differences in the system. The system itself, in its turn, cannot exist without arbitrariness, since arbitrary relations constitute its very systematicity. A synchronic system is usually believed to owe its existence to a diachronic phenomenon, which, over time, gave rise to it. In other words, the system of arbitrary signs would have been constituted by the emergence of arbitrariness. Arbitrariness, however, cannot simply *emerge*, since it depends on a system already at work in order to function. The fact that we encounter the same problem both in Freud and in Derrida points to the fact that both structures – totemism and language – are related and can illuminate each other.

⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Fortieth Anniversary Edition, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 2016), p. 50.

Totem, taboo, and the primal crime

Freud considered *Totem and Taboo*, especially the last of the four chapters (on totemism in childhood), as one of his best works.⁸ His controversial statements regarding the origin of society and morality encountered strong opposition from diverse fields of knowledge, from sociology to molecular biology. In fact, he refused to comment further on the biological impossibilities of his theory, and only in *Moses and Monotheism*, his last book, did he return to the topic, only to insist on his previous beliefs.⁹ According to Robert Paul, a list of anthropologists who have written (mostly negatively) on *Totem and Taboo* 'reads like a roll call of the immortals: Rivers, Marret, Boas, Westermarck, Schmidt, Goldenweiser, Kroeber, Radin, Malinowski, Fortes, Lévi-Strauss—not even to mention the obligatory back-of-the-hand rejection in every text and history of the discipline'.¹⁰ Even more illustrious scholars could be added if one were to include those who were sympathetic to some aspects of his theories, and an entire book was edited to mark its impact: Werner Muensterberger's edited collection *Man and His Culture: Psychoanalytic Anthropology after 'Totem and Taboo'*.¹¹

Freud indeed frames his project as an attempt to offer psychoanalytic contributions to then unanswered questions in the field of anthropology.

Impressed by the similarities he could see between the mental life of those

⁸ Torberg Foss, 'Freud 100 years ago. Totem and Taboo (1912–1913)', *The Scandinavian Psychoanalytic Review*, 36 (2013), 1–4 (p. 1). The chapters were first published as separate essays in the journal *Imago* from 1912 to 1913.

⁹ Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, trans. by Katherine Jones (London: Hogarth Press, 1939), p. 94.

¹⁰ Robert A. Paul, 'Did the Primal Crime Take Place?', *Ethos*, 4 (1976), 311–52 (p. 312).

¹¹ London: Rapp & Whiting, 1969.

deemed 'neurotic' and contemporary (to Freud) 'primitive' peoples as described by ethnographic reports, he suggests the possibility of drawing conclusions about the psyche of early humans – or even about the becoming-human of this psyche – by means of psychoanalytic findings and methods. One of the most common traits of such so-called primitive people as studied by Freud was the absence of an organised religion, the place of which was taken by totemism. Freud defines a 'totem' thus:

It is as a rule an animal (whether edible and harmless or dangerous and feared) and more rarely a plant or a natural phenomenon (such as rain or water),¹² which stands in a peculiar relation to the whole clan. In the first place, the totem is the common ancestor of the clan; at the same time it is their guardian spirit and helper, which sends them oracles and, if dangerous to others, recognizes and spares its own children. Conversely, the clansmen are under the sacred obligation (subject to automatic sanctions) not to kill or destroy their totem and to avoid eating its flesh (or deriving benefit from it in other ways). The totemic character is inherent, not in some individual animal or entity, but in all the individuals of a given class. [...] In almost every place where we find totems, we also find a law against *persons of the same totem having sexual relations with one another and consequently against their marrying*. This, then, is 'exogamy', an institution related to totemism.¹³ (pp. 3-5)

In the first essay or section, 'The Horror of Incest', Freud stresses the unusualness of the totemic type of exogamy, since members of a clan were

¹² Freud concedes in more than one place, however, that the totem is first and foremost an animal species. That is, if totemic systems *can* be encountered that operate around a non-animal totem, they are nevertheless a later transformation of (animal) totemism as it emerged: 'The taboos on animals, which consist essentially of prohibitions against killing and eating them, constitute the nucleus of *totemism*.' (p. 27). The last word in the passage, in the original German edition, is printed in spaced typed, which is Freud's typographical mark for emphasis. Strachey's translation does not follow that practice, but instead of adopting another typographical technique, simply remarks in footnotes that the given passage in German was in spaced type. The quoted sentence, however, does not do so: it brings the word 'totemism' with initial capital *and* italicized, running the risk of leading the reader into taking the word to be a title, possibly a shorthand for Frazer's often cited *Totemism and Exogamy*, especially since the initial capital in the word, unremarkable in German due to its capitalized nouns, does not occur in other instances of the word 'totemism' in the book.

¹³ Such relation is reflected in the title of Frazer's *Totemism and Exogamy*.

forbidden to marry not only their blood relations ('relatives' in the present-day, Western sense) but any member of the same clan – that is, any person who shared their totem. Also, the taboo against intra-clan marriage or intercourse is extended to a system of taboo restrictions covering almost all everyday dealings with fellow clan members. Freud finishes by highlighting the relevance of the discovery of infantile sexuality by psychoanalysis to understanding clan taboos in totemic societies. Since psychoanalysis revealed that primary erotic investment in childhood is essentially incestuous, Freud suggests that totemic societies – unlike modern ones – 'still' believe, even in adult life, in the dangers of incestuous attachment or attraction, a psychic element shared by neurotics, so that clan life had to be deeply ruled by taboos to ward off any possibility of incest.¹⁴ The difference between the totemic horror of incest (directed towards one's entire clan) and the contemporary incest avoidance – as well as the totemic belief in an animal ancestor – leads Freud to pose his overarching question:

How did prehistoric men come to adopt totems? How, that is, did they come to make the fact of their being descended from one animal or another the basis of their social obligations and [...] of their sexual restrictions? There are numerous theories on the subject [...] but no agreement. It is my intention to devote a special study before long to the problem of totemism, in which I shall attempt to solve it by the help of a psychoanalytic line of approach. (p. 4)

¹⁴ For Freud, these mechanisms operated all unconsciously, of course. Even infantile (or infantilized) incestuous sexuality – in children or in adult neurotics – remains unconscious. Healthy adult individuals will have – unconsciously – substituted other, exogamous objects of desire for family members. Members of totemic societies, therefore, maintained their unconscious desire for incest into adult life, so that their conscious horror of it produced the systems of taboos to thwart the fulfilling of these unconscious desires.

And as he adds in brackets, the 'special study' he mentions refers to the last and fourth chapter, 'The Return of Totemism in Childhood'. Before putting forward his overarching thesis and extracting full weight from his psychoanalytic premises, he discusses in more detail in the antecedent chapters taboo systems (chapter 2) and animism (chapter 3). They essentially do the work of laying the foundations for the bringing together of psychoanalytic and anthropological findings, especially by tracing parallels between the life of 'savages' and neurotics. Due to his belief that ontogenesis recapitulates phylogenesis, Freud maintained that human psychosexual development was bound to reflect earlier, ancient psychic procedures in the human mind. So much so that, in neurosis, hysteria or paranoia, one could read reflections and/or distortions of civilisational processes and institutions insofar as these are products of early human mental life (p. 85). In his chapter on animism and the omnipotence of thought, Freud draws on ethnographic accounts of early religious systems (such as animism) in his attempt to account for the origin of the power of mental unconscious processes. Since psychoanalysis knows that it is the apparent omnipotence of mere thoughts in the unconscious that propels the subject into virtually any psychic arrangement (Oedipal complexes and their resolutions, neuroses and psychoses, and even 'normal', sublimated mental life), Freud endeavours to locate in the complex systems of thought of early humans the phylogenetic explanation for such omnipotence. The concepts of magic, sorcery, and the soul are all traced back by Freud to the early human belief that internal mental life both corresponds to the external world and is able to influence its working. The

perceived relevance of mere thoughts to the understanding and mastering of reality is responsible both for the system of beliefs of early humans (magic, animism, taboos etc.) and for the operation of the psychic apparatus (in defence mechanisms, for instance).¹⁵

In the last chapter, finally, Freud offers to elucidate why totemism and exogamy seem to necessitate each other. After quoting definitions of totemism by Wundt, Frazer, and Reinach, he summarises his view thus:

If we seek to penetrate to the original nature of totemism, without regard to subsequent accretions or attenuations, we find that its essential characteristics are these: *Originally, all totems were animals, and were regarded as the ancestors of the different clans. Totems were inherited only through the female line. There was a prohibition against killing the totem (or—which, under primitive conditions, is the same thing—against eating it). Members of a totem clan were forbidden to practice sexual intercourse with one another.* (p. 124, emphases in the original)

In order to advance his psychoanalytic explanation, Freud discusses various theories regarding the origin of totemism in order to circle aspects which support his view – and also to point to a gap in the available accounts that could be filled by psychoanalytical research. Similarly, I shall focus on Freud's arguments that most seem to suggest a grammatological reading of the emergence of totemism, as well as on the unanswered problems which offer a space for zoogrammatological approach.

He divides such theories into nominalist, sociological, and psychological. He seems most interested, as I am, in the first series, insofar as they account

¹⁵ Freud includes a brief discussion of the psychic origin of the belief in a 'double nature' of objects – put simply, the dualism between body and soul – which he attributes to the opposition between perception and memory. One feels a more refined theoretical framework than the one provided by Freud would be necessary to approach the relation between body-perception and soul-memory.

both for early human's relationship with totemic animals, and for the parallels with exogamy. Citing Lang, Freud highlights that 'the need felt by clans to distinguish themselves from one another by the use of names' arose as an explanation for totemic systems centuries ago, only to resurface in Keane, in the late nineteenth century, who 'regards totems as "heraldic badges" by means of which individuals, families and clans sought to distinguish themselves from one another' (p. 128). And most crucial for understanding the co-implication of animality and language (for Derrida, always already scriptural) is Freud's quotation of Julius Pikler and Bódog Somló's 1900 *Der Ursprung des Totemismus*:

Mankind required both for communities and for individuals a permanent name which could be fixed in writing. . . . Thus totemism did not arise from the religious needs of men but from their practical, everyday needs. The core of totemism, nomenclature, is a result of the *primitive technique of writing*. In its nature a totem is like an *easily drawn pictograph*. But once savages bore the name of an animal, they went on to form the idea of kinship with it. (Pikler and Somló, quoted in Freud, p. 128, emphases are mine)

That totemism might have emerged as a form of proto-writing (one may even say *arche-writing*) should illuminate Freud's entire psychoanalytic thesis in *Totem and Taboo*. Or, conversely and even more important, one might stress the fact that, in this reading, writing is co-implicated with animality. Equally crucial for both Freud's project and mine is his defence of Lang's indifference to the origin of clan animal names. For Freud,

it is only necessary to assume that [clans] awoke one day to the consciousness that they bore such names and could give no account of how this had come about. *The origin of the names had been forgotten*. They would then attempt to arrive at an explanation by speculating on the subject; and, in view of their belief in the importance of names, they were bound to reach all the ideas contained in the totemic system. [...]

The fact of a primitive man bearing the same name as an animal must lead him to assume the existence of a mysterious and significant bond between himself and that particular species of animal. What other similarity could it be than one of blood relationship? Once the similarity of names had led to this conclusion, the blood taboo would immediately involve all the totemic ordinances, including exogamy. (p. 130, emphasis in the original)

What remains to be elucidated, according to Freud, is the mechanism by which such a notion of an animal forefather would give rise to the complex and deep-seated mental predispositions that shaped taboo systems and exogamy. The fact is that an instrumental and practical technique of nomenclature does not match the emotionally and psychically constituted totemic systems. He quickly disregards the suggestion of a natural aversion to incest, based on the fact that psychoanalysis reveals that the first erotic desires in childhood are themselves incestuous.¹⁶ Based on Darwin's suggestion that early hominids would have lived according to the social organisation of higher apes (in small, patriarchal groups headed by an alpha male), Freud can glimpse the phylogenetic origin of exogamy in the monopoly of female members in the hands of a senior male. What seems to be puzzling now, however, is whether totemism emerged from such alpha male-imposed exogamy or vice-versa. Thus, Freud identifies the space wherein he can insert his psychoanalytic contribution.

As he puts it, 'into this obscurity one single ray of light is thrown by psychoanalytic observation' (p. 147). Primarily, this amounts to the childhood

¹⁶ Also, a 'natural taboo' against incest would mean that the totemism-exogamy complex is, in a certain sense, *natural* and not, as widely regarded, a system of *cultural* and social organisation. One would also have to locate when and where in the animal kingdom, therefore, such a natural aversion of incest emerged.

phenomenon of *animal phobia*, in which a child suffers a sudden shift in his (all examples given by Freud are of boys) relationship with animals and begins to fear one particular species, many times one in which he showed great interest. According to Freud, animal phobia is the earliest form of psycho-neurotic disorders in children. Psychoanalysis reveals that such ambivalent feelings towards the animal are in fact displaced feelings for the father, towards whom the child feels intense rivalry – a rivalry which is then repressed and re-worked in the form of this animal displacement. Freud underscores

two features in [animal phobia] which offer valuable points of agreement with totemism: the [child's] complete identification with his totem animal and his ambivalent emotional attitude to it. These observations justify us, in my opinion, in substituting the father for the totem animal in the formula for totemism (in the case of males). (p. 152)

From this he concludes that by reading the totem animal in totemic societies as literally their (fore)father, the two core taboos of totemism – not killing the totem and not having sex with members of the same totem clan – ‘coincide in their content with the two crimes of Œdipus, who killed his father and married his mother, as well as with the two primal wishes of children’. This in turn allows Freud to advance that ‘the totemic system [...] was a product of the conditions involved in the Œdipus complex’ (p. 153).

In order to pursue that line of reasoning, Freud introduces the discussion on Robertson Smith's theory of the totem meal, which the latter believed formed an integral part of totemic systems. Although this meal was rare in the accounts of existing totemic societies, Freud argues that one can read all rituals of sacrifice as derivations of it. Since sacrificial offerings are strictly edible or drinkable, he concludes that the oldest form of sacrificial rite

was the sacrifice of animals, 'older than the use of fire or the knowledge of agriculture' (p. 155). In such sacrifices, all clan members and the god were believed to be eating together, sitting at the same table, as it were, from which an 'ethical force of the public sacrificial meal' was derived, which 'rested upon very ancient ideas of the significance of eating and drinking together.' In other words, 'what was *directly* expressed by the sacrificial meal was only the fact that the god and his worshippers were "commensals"' (p. 156). And having learned from Freud that the totem animal was a surrogate of the father – and that gods were related to certain sacred animals and were many times animals themselves – we can understand that 'the sacrificial animal was treated as a member of the tribe; the sacrificing community, the god and the sacrificial animal were of the same blood and members of one clan' (p. 158).

The totemic belief that clan members maintain a kinship with their totem clan – which Freud insists should be taken literally and in terms of lineage – 'implies a participation in a common substance. [...] [Kinship] can be acquired and strengthened by food which a man eats [...] and with which his body is renewed. If a man shared a meal with his god he was expressing a conviction that they were of one substance,' since they were consuming the same (animal) stuff. The totem meal, therefore, secures the co-substantiality of humans and gods, by the means of their ingestion of the (same) flesh of the (same) totemic animal. One may say, then, that such sort of kinship implies that clan members view themselves as siblings of individual totemic animals, all of them descended from the animal-god. In short, 'it was [...] by the killing and

consuming of [...] the ancient totem animal, the primitive god himself, [...] that the clansmen renewed and assured their likeness to the god' (p. 160).

Reminding us of the conclusions he drew from animal phobia cases (that the totem animal is a stand-in for the father), Freud can explain the uncanny aspects of totem meal festivals, in which mourning and bewailing is in order, only to be concluded with rejoicing and festivities. 'The ambivalent emotional attitude, which to this day characterizes the father-complex in our children and which often persists in adult life' (p. 164) explains the need for ritualistic regret after having slayed the totem-father but also the eruption of the festival itself, which commemorates the victory over paternal authority. By articulating his psychoanalytic reading of the totem meal and festival with the Darwinian social organisation of early hominids, Freud is able to give the account of a single origin for both totemism and exogamy which explains their deep-seated taboos and their perseverance into later stages of civilisational development:

One day the brothers who had been driven out [by the tyrannical alpha male] came together, killed and devoured their father and so made an end of the patriarchal horde. United, they had the courage to do and succeeded in doing what would have been impossible for them individually. [...] Cannibal savages as they were, it goes without saying that they devoured their victim as well as killing him. The violent primal father had doubtless been the feared and envied model of each one of the company of brothers: and in the act of devouring him they accomplished their identification with him, and each one of them acquired a portion of his strength. The totem meal, which is perhaps mankind's earliest festival, would thus be a repetition and a commemoration of this memorable and criminal deed, which was the beginning of so many things—of social organization, of moral restrictions and of religion. (pp. 164-5)

The theory of the 'primal crime' – or rather, as Freud sometimes puts it, the 'primal deed', since no properly criminal acts were possible before the

brothers founded morality in their fraternity – is his daring scenario for explaining the origin of civilisation, many of its developments, as well as both totemism and exogamy. It neatly ties together many of the anthropological, sociological, psychological, and religious strands of the most troubling questions in early twentieth-century thought. Most instrumental for us, however, is the role the totem animal will play in organising society as it emerges after the primal deed.

The murder could be said to have had the undesired effect of raising the slain father into the realm of myth. The formidable authority he exercised began to be remembered with fondness and awe, certainly because the *presence*, in life, of such a feared and respected senior male had the power of organising their desires, identifications, and reality. Fear, hatred, awe, and respect easily mingled with guilt and remorse, so that the father's main imperative – no access to the womenfolk in the horde for anyone else – came to be seen as in need of returning, in order to honour the father's memory, so to speak. This guilt, of course, had very practical applications, since the remorseless pursuit of the original plan of overthrowing the father could only lead to infighting among the brothers, or simply the institution of a new alpha male who would likewise inspire mutiny.¹⁷ In fact, a series of successful mutinies in which a new tyrant emerged or after which the fraternal alliance

¹⁷ Freud cites J J Atkinson's description of patricide(s) which did not result in a fraternal society, since Atkinson 'supposed that, after the father had been disposed of, the horde would be disintegrated by a bitter struggle between the victorious sons. Thus any new organization of society would be precluded: there would be an "every-recurring violent succession to the solitary paternal tyrant, by sons whose parricidal hands were so soon again clenched in fratricidal strife"' (p. 165).

was wiped out most certainly had occurred before the institution of fraternity and exogamy could arise out of guilt. *All* the brothers had, therefore, to give up access to the womenfolk – and institute exogamy – so that no *one* brother would become the tyrant in his turn, or so the brotherly alliance did not perish. After killing the father due to their wish to not obey him, they were forced precisely to do so in order to preserve the alliance: ‘What had up to then been prevented by [the father’s] actual existence was thenceforward prohibited by the sons themselves, in accordance with the psychological procedure so familiar to us in psycho-analyses under the name of “deferred obedience” [*nachträglichen Gehorsams*]’ (p. 166). The uncanny temporality ingrained in such a ‘deferred action’ (*Nachträglichkeit*) will be key in understanding the functioning of the primal deed in Freud, as well as for the bridging of him and Derrida that will allow us to grasp the linguistic nature of the totem and the totemic nature of language.

After the crime, the totemic animal plays the central role in organising both the respect for the dead father and the new fraternal, exogamous society newly instituted. The totem animal becomes a surrogate for the murdered father, a ‘symbol’ of the clan’s descent from him, so that

they could attempt, in their relation to this surrogate father, to allay their burning sense of guilt, to bring about a kind of reconciliation with their father. The totemic system was, as it were, a covenant with their father, in which he promised them everything that a childish imagination may expect from a father—protection, care and indulgence. (p. 168)

The clan, in their turn, instituted the taboo against killing and eating the totem, so as to promise never again to repeat the murderous deed. Totemic systems, therefore, emerged from ‘filial guilt’ so as to try and appease the

father by obeying him retroactively (*nachträglich*). According to Freud, all religions descend from totemic systems and are all 'attempts at solving the same problem' (ibid.).

An important aspect, which seems to contradict filial guilt, is the ritual festival of the totem meal, in which the taboo against killing the totem animal was indeed broken and thus the primal deed was re-enacted. For Freud, this contradiction is itself one of the strongest arguments of his theory, since it accounts both for the ambivalence in parental complexes (in the clan, in animal phobia, in the Oedipus complex, etc.) and for the mechanism by means of which the clan could renew the covenant with the father. This renewal is instrumental, primarily, for the continuation of totemism and fraternity as generations pass.

This mechanism rested precisely at the heart of the controversies surrounding *Totem and Taboo*. Freud's critics, as I discuss below, did not accept that one historical event could have produced a mark in a whole civilisation and that any mechanism could properly explain the persistent memory of such a remote crime. Especially because no one in recorded history could actually remember an actual, specific crime of that sort, Freud maintained that the memory of it certainly had to work in the unconscious. By means of festivals, fairy tales, and myths – all full of psychosexual material – an account of the crime and its meaning could be bequeathed to subsequent generations. Continuous re-emergence of the sacrifice of a god – such as the crucifixion of Jesus – would attest to this Freudian thesis. For him,

the less [the crime] itself was recollected, the more numerous must have been the substitutes to which it gave rise. [...] No generation is able to conceal any of its more important mental processes from its successor. For psycho-analysis has shown us that everyone possesses in his unconscious mental activity an apparatus which enables him to [...] undo the distortions which other people have imposed on the expression of their feelings. (pp. 180, 184)

Freud in fact advances conflicting theories, so as to cover more ground: he concedes that the neuroses, from which he drew insights applicable to totemism and taboos, deal in fact with *psychical* realities and *imagined* transgressions. Neurotics have not, therefore, committed terrible deeds which must be expiated by series of taboos – the latter actually protect the subject from mere unconscious fantasies which the ego sees as transgressive. Freud supposes, then, that the primal crime could have been just as effective as a phantasy, even if it never took place. He even suggests that it might not matter whether the crime was fact or not. Other than that, another concession he is willing to make is to entertain that the primal deed may have repeatedly occurred in countless hordes, over hundreds of years.

Critics did not seem to accept his allowances, for they generally accused him of having breached the basic principles of evolutionary biology, as Robert Paul describes:

By assuming that a traumatic event, such as the proposed primal crime, could become part of the phylogenetic inheritance of subsequent humans, Freud seemed to have been making the “Lamarckian” error of assuming that a mental impression experienced by individuals—an “acquired characteristic”—could be assimilated into the genotype. That would violate the so-called “central dogma” of neo-Darwinism, according to which the arrow of causation can only run from the genome to the phenotype, never the reverse.¹⁸

¹⁸ Robert A. Paul, 'Yes, the Primal Crime Did Take Place: A further Defense of Freud's Totem and Taboo', *Ethos*, 38 (2010), 230-49 (p. 232).

Paul contends that Freud never advances any Lamarckian views in *Totem and Taboo*, but almost all early readers thought it adequate to address the issue. In his reappraisal of the book, Derek Freeman attempts to rid the Freudian thesis of its 'scientifically untenable elements' so as to maintain its core. In other words, despite Freeman's sympathies towards Freud, he discusses at length the possibility of the primal crime's functioning without any Lamarckian mechanisms of inheritance. The sheer variety of competing theories put forth by the end of *Totem and Taboo* may confuse the reader as to which one Freud is actually defending, although Freeman believes the book does postulate the 'inheritance of psychical dispositions'.¹⁹ However, he supports the phantasy thesis sketched out by Freud himself.²⁰

In his first foray into the primal crime theory, Alfred Kroeber did not give weight to the similarities between neuroses (especially animal phobia in children) and the mental life of 'savages', writing that 'the fact that a child sometimes displaces its father-hatred upon an animal—we are not told in what percentage of cases—is no proof that the sons did so'.²¹ Meyer Fortes criticised what he saw as the 'fantastic reconstruction of the supposed prehistory of the Oedipus complex',²² and as recently as 2006, Charles Hanly wrote in *American Imago*, on the state of psychoanalytic theory, that 'psychoanalysis has

¹⁹ Derek Freeman, 'Totem and Taboo: A Reappraisal', in *Man and His Culture: Psychoanalytic Anthropology after 'Totem and Taboo'*, ed. by Werner Muensterberger (London: Rapp & Whiting, 1969), pp. 53-80 (p. 63).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

²¹ A. L. Kroeber, 'Totem and Taboo: An Ethnologic Psychoanalysis', *American Anthropologist*, 22 (1920), 48-55 (p. 50)

²² Meyer Fortes, 'Totem and Taboo', *Proceedings of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1966 (1966), 5-22 (p. 17).

abandoned Freud's hypothesis of an archaic heritage because it implied the inheritance of acquired characteristics, which, biochemistry has shown, cannot occur'.²³ Both Fortes and Kroeber, however, concede that one may believe what Freud takes to be an act (or a series of repetitions thereof) as some sort of timeless *structure*:

We may [...] properly disregard any seeming claim, or half-claim, to historic authenticity of the suggested actual happening, as being beside the real point, and consider whether Freud's theory contains any possibility of being a generic, timeless explanation of the psychology that underlies certain recurrent historic phenomena or institutions like totemism and taboo.²⁴

[The totemic animal is] a symbolic representation of paternity perpetuated in the lineage, conscientious identification with which is crystallised in the taboo. At the same time there is no denying that these taboos stand for unquestioning submission to ancestral, that is, magnified paternal, authority which, as the ancestral cult shows is very ambivalently regarded.²⁵

In other words, they were ready to accept the reality of a *synchronic* relational *structure* among subjects, fathers, and animals, but not a *diachronic* account of its *genesis* or *origin*. At most, they seem to imply that the system itself gave rise to what is seemingly its very origin, so that the system is, in fact, the origin of the origin. One can still read in that a *certain* diachronic or genetic thinking, but still lacking an account of the genesis of the system itself, or a transcendental opening of the structure to what is not it.

²³ Charles Hanly, quoted in Paul, 'The Primal Crime Did Take Place', p. 236.

²⁴ A. L. Kroeber, 'Totem and Taboo in Retrospect', *American Journal of Sociology*, 45 (1939), 446-51 (p. 447).

²⁵ Fortes, 'Totem and Taboo', p. 18.

Totemic Writing and the Materiality of/through Language

The bridge between the temporality of the origin of totemism and that of *différance* will allow us to read *Totem and Taboo* more readily in Derridean terms, providing a stronger foothold for an account of the co-implication of animality and language. Before that gesture, however, it seems crucial to highlight the role of the totem animal's bodily materiality within the totemic writing/language that emerges in the aftermath of the primal deed. Such discussion, too, can illuminate the Freud-Derrida connection, since the difference between the materiality of language (or of the signifier) and the materiality of bodies, according to Butler, 'requires first that we offer an account of how it is that bodies materialize, that is, how they come to assume the *morphe*, the shape by which their material discreteness is marked'. And in her Lacanian reading, Butler stresses that this morphology depends on 'language, understood as rules of differentiation based on idealized kinship relations'.²⁶

Freud's *Totem and Taboo* is precisely the account of the origin of kinship relations and the materiality of language. If totemism is a writing technique emerging alongside the origin of society, the materiality of language cannot escape its relation to a certain materiality of the animal body. However, both Freud and Lévi-Strauss insist that the clan totem is never one specific animal, but always an animal species. Insofar as a species never appears *as such*, but always only synecdochally by the means of its tokens, a totemic animal can only

²⁶ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 69.

be grasped in the phenomenal, materially embodied specific animal. A species is always a category, a potentiality of actualisation to which direct access is barred. Only an individual animal can be encountered in its phenomenality, so that this *material appearing*, each encounter with or *citation* of the totemic animal, will produce the notion of a species. This is, of course, crucial, for the father ought not to be substituted for a material, killable being which could die or be killed just as he once was. That would destroy the very function of totemism as a way of referencing the primal crime, repeating it indefinitely, and atoning for it at the same time. In order for the totemic animal to substitute for the murdered father, a substituting mechanism must be established in which each individual animal can substitute (represent) for its species. *That implies that each individual animal must be produced as material, contingent, corporeal, and mortal in order for them to function as instantiations of a timeless, immortal concept.*

It is significant, however, that, while it *is* mortal, the totem *must not* be killed. Since the totem is taken to be the clan's ancestor, it is supposed to protect and be protected by the clan. Killing or eating the totem is the taboo which institutes totemism as the naming and linguistic system which structures the sociality of the clan. On the one hand, this prohibition against the killing of animal's body recalls the guilt of having killed the primordial father; on the other hand, such prohibition works to *disavow* the animal's very materiality (as in its flesh and bones) so that it can be included in a linguistic system of substitutions – from the moment that an individual animal is underscored as being nothing but (*living*) *matter*, it risks losing its function within the symbolic system in which its materiality works in a radically

different way. That is, the material body of the individual totemic animal only appears as *animated* by the meaning of the totemic species.

This *animation* is precisely the meaning of the signifier in traditional accounts of linguistic function, and it is entirely mediated by the paradigm of animation which is the animal. The phenomenal appearing of signifiers (the breath, the ink, the hand) cannot mean if not animated by the *langue* system of differences and relations, a system which never reveals itself as such, but is only outlined as a certain reservoir of potential meanings. The system of course also needs the signifiers in order for it to function, since

relations, even the notion of *différance*, institute and require relations, terms, phenomenal signifiers. And yet what allows for a signifier to signify will never be its materiality alone. [...] The materiality of the signifier will signify only to the extent that it is impure, contaminated by the ideality of differentiating relations, the tacit structurings of a linguistic context that is illimitable in principle. Conversely, the signifier will work to the extent that it is also contaminated constitutively by the very materiality that the ideality of sense purports to overcome.²⁷

As such, the materiality of the body and the materiality of the signifier are notions which are in constant communication, but which can never be allowed to coincide.

It is highly significant, however, that the ritualistic sacrifice and eating of the totemic animal is prescribed in the totem meal in order to re-enact the murder and eating of the father. This rite is the only social situation in which the killing of the totem is allowed and it assures that the crime of killing the father is both atoned and never atoned, and never forgotten. Re-killing the father via the totem is a way of securing the workings of the symbolic system

²⁷ Ibid., p. 68.

so as the totem will continue to symbolise the father. The corporeal materiality of the animal is *allowed* to be recognized in the rite as that which enables its similarity to the father. If the totem could *never* be killed, it would not perform its substitution of the (killed) father correctly and would not permit the (permanently unsuccessful) atonement for the crime – sparing the killable totem is thus a way of undoing the murder of the father, and renouncing all of its killability would foreclose this possibility, as would choosing as a totem a non-mortal object. Therefore, the animal's corporeal materiality is both that which must be constantly disavowed for it to work as a *signifying* materiality, and that which must be repeatedly reproduced in order for it to represent for the murdered father's own slayed, ingested *mortal* body. In a certain sense, the very mortality of bodies is caught up in the process of linguistic substitution and representation set up by totemism.

Reading the materiality of the father's mortal body in Butlerian terms as that which totemic language attempts to grasp, we can conclude that the materiality of the body, the 'referent' of linguistic categories,

persists only as a kind of absence or loss, that which language does not capture, but instead, that which impels language repeatedly to attempt that capture, that circumscription—and to fail. This loss takes its place in language as an insistent call or demand that, while *in* language, is never fully of language.²⁸

For the phylogenetic view of *Totem and Taboo*, this lack or loss is read as the absence of the father after the murder. Despite the hatred and rivalry felt by the brothers, the material presence of the father in the horde gave meaning

²⁸ Ibid., p. 67.

to the group and structured their identity via their narcissistic identification with him. The tyrannical father's becoming semi-mythical totemic ancestor is the history of the constitution of the *imago*, as the image of parental maturity that structures the subject's psyche via identification.

This formulation reveals more starkly that the totemic signifying system both *institutes* the absence of the father while at the same time is constituted as a *response* to it, insofar as the material presence of the father cannot but fail to be captured via language. Therefore, language is, in a way, what estranges the clan from their forefather by the means of the very scriptural reference to him, while at the same time is set up as the only way of substituting for his loss. For Butler,

insofar as language might be understood to emerge from the materiality of bodily life, that is, as the reiteration and extension of material set of relations, language is a substitutive satisfaction, a primary act of displacement and condensation. [...] Those material sputterings [of language] are already psychically invested, deployed in the service of a fantasy of mastery and restoration. [Here, of the father].²⁹

Linda Belau explores the signifier's attempt at restoration while also accounting for the uncanny temporality mentioned above, in which it both institutes and responds to a lack:

The signifier marks the subject twice. It marks the subject as the primordial cut where the signifier carves the subject out of the body, and it also marks the subject in its failure to cover the void opened by that very cut.³⁰

In totemic, phylogenetic terms, one must understand 'the subject' as the (human) clan that separates itself both from the corporeality of animal totems

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 69-70.

³⁰ Linda Belau, 'Trauma and the Material Signifier', *Postmodern Culture*, 11 (2001), para. 5. <<http://pmc.iath.virginia.edu/text-only/issue.101/11.2belau.txt>> [accessed 30 oct 2014].

and from other clans. Belau continues by underscoring the ‘paradox [...] in the temporality of these marks’: the fact is that

the first mark, the primordial cutting up of the body, can only be produced by the signifier. However, this signifier doesn’t actually “exist” (or function) until the symbolic space opened up by the second marking—the failure of the signifier—can produce the functioning signifier. In the logic of this chiasmic metalepsis, the signifier appears at the impossible intersection of the chiasmus; its effect stands in as its cause. Freud calls this retroaction [*Nachträglichkeit*].³¹

Butler points out that Kristeva locates this substitutive process of language mainly at the site of the mouth, so that vocalisation (the materiality of sound) would function so as to vicariously replace the material contiguousness with the maternal body. For Butler,

Kristeva argues that the materiality of the spoken signifier, the vocalization of sound, is already a psychic effort to reinstall and recapture a lost maternal body; hence, these vocalizations are temporarily recaptured in sonorous poetry which works language for its most material possibilities. [...] The language that is the effect of this displacement [of material bodily relations onto linguistic relations] nevertheless carries the trace of that loss precisely in the phantasmatic aim of recovery that mobilizes vocalization itself. Here, then, it is the materiality of that (other) body which is phantasmatically reinvoked in the materiality of signifying sounds.³²

However, Butler’s privileging of the linguistic materiality of *sounds* and *vocalisation* is not present in Kristeva. The latter defines the what she calls the *semiotic* as

a preverbal functional state that governs the connections between the body (in the process of constituting itself as a body proper), objects, and the protagonists of family structure. But we shall distinguish this functioning from symbolic operations that depend on language as a sign system—whether the language [*langue*] is vocalized or *gestural* (as with

³¹ Ibid., my interpolation.

³² Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, pp. 69-70.

deaf-mutes). The *kinetic* functional stage of the semiotic precedes the establishment of the sign.³³

Kristeva systematically refers to the semiotic kinetic potential and is careful to repeatedly accommodate sign language within the symbolic realm, which, in opposition to the semiotic, is constituted, according to Butler, as an 'effort to reinstall and recapture a lost maternal body'. Kristeva seems to be suspicious, as am I, of privileging the oral cavity and the phenomenality of sound as the condensation of the matter of language, if only because it might betray a certain phonocentric view of language – a suspicion which apparently is not detected by Butler. Linguistic ability and function can exist perfectly well without phonation, be it in sign language or in the scriptural language of totemism.

Therefore, we can more readily understand totemic language's attempt to grasp at the materiality of paternal presence when Butler stresses that such materiality, *at the same time* as it is individualised into separable bodies, 'is displaced onto the materiality of linguistic relations'.³⁴ The loss of material proximity to the meaning-giving father is covered over by the corporification of discrete bodies (of totem animals) *simultaneously* with their application into a set of linguistic relations. And, for Butler, 'every effort to signify encodes and repeat this loss. Moreover, it is only on the condition of this primary loss of the referent, that signification—and the materialization of language—can take place.'³⁵ Kristeva's philosophy is organised around the bodily relations with the

³³ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. by Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 27, emphases added.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 70.

³⁵ Ibid.

maternal body and not the primeval father. Belau, too, points that the lack instituted by the signifier is constituted as the loss of what 'is always imagined [by psychoanalysis] as the symbiotic relationship between the child and the mother'.³⁶

In her discussion of *Totem and Taboo* in *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva stresses Freud's imbalanced focus on his two-pronged theory. Freud states that his theory of totemism is an attempt to explain the relationship between *murder* (of the primal father) and (the dread of) *incest*. However, Kristeva argues that Freud loses sight of incest (and the mother figure suggested by this incest) in his discussion, to the benefit of primal crime against the father, which receives most of the attention.³⁷ I gather that a Kristevan reading of *Totem and Taboo* would need to underscore the continuing reference to the maternal that obtains in the fascination with and aversion to the totemic animal's body. In her theory of abjection, a logic of prohibition erects barriers in order to found discreet areas (pure vs. impure, man vs. woman, inside vs. outside, etc.) so that what is beyond the barrier will be experienced as 'ab-ject'. She concedes that the prohibition of incest founds social order and the symbolic by means of establishing 'the discreteness of interchangeable units' (which, as Lévi-Strauss shows, are both signifiers and women).³⁸ However, she defends that this prohibition is especially effective because it is married to a subjective libidinal economy: thus, without establishing a relationship of cause and effect, she

³⁶ Belau, 'Trauma and the Material Signifier', para. 3.

³⁷ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 57.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

establishes that social order and subjective experience safeguard each other's effectiveness. The prohibition of incest soothes the threat of a return to primary narcissism (when desire is channelled towards an *internal* object in the form of one's own ego), which menaces the subject with the instability of the inside/outside border and, ultimately, subsumption into the maternal body.³⁹

Thus, if the murder of the primal father and the guilty social bond arising from it seek to deflect the threat of castration, the fear and dread of incest protects the subject against losing 'the totality of his [sic] living being', at stake under the threat of the 'archaic [mother-child] dyad' and the 'non-separation of subject/object', which could undermine the whole of the symbolic system.⁴⁰ In totemic terms, that means taking account of the taboo against killing/eating the totem animal not just as retrospective obedience to the father, but also as a way a token of the fear of incest and of the maternal body. Killing the totem animal not only kills the father again (undermining his renewed authority to ban intra-clan mating) but also – and crucially – upends the whole signifying system of the social order of the clan, throwing the subject(s) back into the pre-symbolic stage of indifferentiation between the inside (of the subject) and the outside (the maternal body).⁴¹ It is also fundamental that Kristeva argues that the prohibition of incest is *not sufficient* to completely stave it off. Abjection originates from the weakness of the prohibition that excludes that which is considered abject. The fact that abject objects are constantly capable of

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 58, 64.

⁴¹ 'An idyllic dual relationship (mother-child) [...], to the extent that the father prevents it, changes into an ulterior aversion to incest' (ibid., p. 59).

defiling and threatening the subject – as when the totemic animal continuously insists on its own mortal body – means that these objects have to be ab-jected.

The archaic indifferentiated relationship to the object, whose exclusion and separation constitutes the social order, is always threatening to return to undermine that very order. Thus:

An archaic relationship to the *object* interprets, as it were, the relationship to the *mother*. [...] The symbolic 'exclusionary prohibition' that, as a matter of fact, constitutes collective existence does not seem to have [...] sufficient strength to dam up the abject or demoniacal potential of the feminine. The latter, precisely on account of its power, does not succeed in differentiating itself as *other* but threatens one's *own and clean self*.⁴²

Iterability, lions, and dogs

Despite the common division of Imaginary and Symbolic realms in Lacan as respectively before and after the mirror stage, Butler reads in his second seminar that the integrity of the body can only be secured by means of *nomination*. And 'to have a name,' asserts Butler,

is to be positioned within the Symbolic, the idealized domain of kinship, a set of relationships structured through sanction and taboo which is governed by the law of the father and the prohibition against incest. [...] What constitutes the integral body is not a natural boundary or organic telos, but the law of kinship that works through the name.⁴³

Here, Butler's vocabulary seems to echo Freud's, with the striking difference that she glosses over the role of the totemic animal in establishing and securing that embodiment. If (clan) nomination is responsible for

⁴² Ibid., p. 64-5. For Kristeva, this is most acutely felt in those patriarchal societies in which female power is still strongly exercised (those with matrilineal filiation, for example, which is a classic feature of totemic societies).

⁴³ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 72.

materialising the body, and if the body is always taken to be the human's animal part, it is clear that the totem animal (as that which institutes the linguistic 'set of relationships') is constitutive of the materiality of the body and of nomination itself. Now we can more clearly read Butler's Derridean concepts in her discussion of the materiality of language as a path for understanding the co-implication of animal and language in *Totem and Taboo*:

It is the materiality of that (other) body [Kristeva's ontogenetic mother or Freud's phylogenetic father] which is phantasmatically reinvoked in the materiality of signifying sounds [or totems]. Indeed, what gives those sounds [or animal bodies] the power to signify is that phantasmatic structure. [...] In this sense, materiality is constituted in and through *iterability*.⁴⁴

Iterability is Derrida's name for the mechanism which articulates a code and an instance. It refers to an irreducible structure of repeatability, according to which a signifier *must* be repeatable forever and in any context in order for it be a signifier. That repeatability secures its ideal status, as well as the ideality of the system itself. Iterability emerged as an issue for Derrida especially in his early intervention in Husserl's thought, as a way of accounting for the ideality sought by phenomenology, and in the polemics with Austin and Searle, as Derrida's strategy for dispensing with the distinction between 'serious' and 'nonserious' uses of language. In his 1967 'Speech and Phenomena: Introduction to the Problem of Signs in Husserl's Phenomenology', Derrida stresses that, when using words, one must

from the outset operate (within) a structure of repetition. [...] A sign is never an event, if by event we mean an irreplaceable and irreversible empirical particular. A sign which would take place 'once' would not be a sign. [...] A signifier (in general) must be formally recognizable in spite of,

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 70.

and through, the diversity of empirical characteristics which may modify it. It must remain the *same*, and be able to be repeated as such, despite and across the deformations which the empirical event necessarily makes it undergo. A phoneme or grapheme is necessarily always to some extent different each time it is presented in an operation or a perception. But it can function as a sign, an in general as language, only if a formal identity enables it to be issued again and to be recognized. This identity is necessarily ideal.⁴⁵

If a signifier is to be recognised as *one* signifier, if its *identity* across all its uses and instances is to be assured, an ideal shape of it must exist. It does not, however, exist *somewhere*, or in another world as opposed to the material world where its signifying instances occur: this ideality is completely constituted by the repetition (and repeatability) of its elements, so that its non-worldliness is neither mundane nor spiritual. Butler's assertion that bodily materiality is conditioned by iterability now illuminates the dynamics between totem animal and totem species discussed above. Insofar as each individual animal can be recognized as belonging to a species, even though no two animals are identical, the ideality of the concept of species is produced. As it is, a species is never a phenomenal, empirical *thing*; one can never experience a species. It is produced solely by the repetition of specific individual animals, despite their material (bodily) differences. Conversely, animals can only be perceived as members of the same species due to the ideality that a species invokes.

It is crucial, however, that Derrida stresses that in Husserl there are different kinds of idealities or objectivities. As Derrida argues in detail in his

⁴⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena: And Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, ed. by John Wild, trans. by David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 50.

introduction to Husserl's *Origin of Geometry*, pure objectivity for the latter would only take place in geometry, since its truths can free themselves from any material substrate and contingency. As expounded above, though, language, too, is composed of idealities. Yet, Derrida highlights that this ideality is for Husserl of a lesser degree, due to its dependence on an actual language (*langue*). The discussion regarding the levels of ideality in words, concepts, and things is taken up by Husserl – and Derrida after him – entirely in animal terms, for reasons, I argue, that are essentially linked to the play of corporification and virtualisation in the animal/species dynamics. Husserl first attests language's similarity to geometry, since the former is 'thoroughly made up of ideal objectivities: for example, the word *Löwe* [lion] occurs only once in the German language; it is identical throughout its innumerable utterances by any given persons'.⁴⁶ Derrida then muses in a footnote that Husserl's point is not altogether original, up to its animal 'content' (which I am here calling a *structure*), which had already been employed by Hegel:

In the *Encyclopedia* [...], the lion already testifies to this neutralization as an exemplary martyr: 'Confronting the name—Lion—we no longer have any need either of an intuition or even an image, but the name (when we understand it) is its simple and imageless representation: in the name we think'. [...] Hegel also writes: 'The first act, by which Adam is made master of the animals, was to impose on them a name, i.e., he annihilated them in their existence (as existents)'.⁴⁷

After stating that, however, Derrida reminds us that in Husserlian thought the ideality of a word is limited. Despite the ideal signifier's freedom from any actual utterance, the word *Löwe*

⁴⁶ Edmund Husserl, quoted in Jacques Derrida, *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry, an Introduction*, trans. by John P. Leavey, Jr. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 67.

⁴⁷ Derrida, *Geometry*, p. 67.

remains interrelated, as a German word, to a real spatiotemporality; it remains interrelated in its very ideal Objectivity with the de facto existence of a given language and thus with the factual subjectivity of a certain speaking community. Its ideal Objectivity is then relative, and distinguishable only as an empirical fact from that of the French or English '*lion*'.⁴⁸

This first-order ideality is limited when compared to a second-order ideality of what Husserl terms 'intentional content' or 'the unity of expression's signification'. Here Derrida and Husserl are referring to the *concept* of a lion, which is not tied to any of the signifiers employed by specific languages to *mean* it: 'This ideal identity of sense [the concept] expressed by lion, *leo*, *Löwe*, and so forth, is then freed from all actual linguistic subjectivity.'⁴⁹

The Husserlian vocabulary of expression, intentional content, and object here mirrors Saussure's signifier, signified, and referent, respectively. When Derrida moves on to discuss Husserl's thoughts on the *object* in this chain of lions, however, we encounter the totemic dynamics of iterability that cannot furnish a firm ground for the argument. Derrida characterises the object-lion as an empirical contingency that in fact contaminates the whole chain of idealisation, without noting, however, that the animal – as paradigmatic example of iterability chosen by himself, Husserl, and Hegel – continues to produce idealities, since even a real lion is, in a way, a signifier:

But the '*object*' *itself* is neither the expression [signifier] nor the sense-content [signified]. *The flesh and blood lion*, intended through two strata of idealities, is a natural, and therefore contingent, reality; as the perception of the immediately present sensible thing grounds idealities under those circumstances, so the contingency of the lion is going to reverberate in the ideality of the expression and in that of its sense. The

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 70.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 71.

translatability of the word *lion*, then, will not be in principle absolute and universal. It will be empirically conditioned by the contingent encounter in a receptive intuition of something like the lion.⁵⁰

Derrida introduces the ‘flesh and blood lion’ in order to make the point that the ideality of the concept ‘lion’ is a *bound ideality*, since it depends on a supposedly empirical material thing. This, finally, is contrasted with true, third-order *free idealities*, like that of geometrical objects, which are themselves, unlike a lion – even at the level of the object – *ideal*. The ideality of the lion would be bound since it would be tied to empirical existents.

In her article ‘Love of the *Löwe*’, Marie-Dominique Garnier, too, discusses the lion in Derrida’s *Geometry* introduction, especially because of its status as ‘Derrida’s “first” animal-in-writing’.⁵¹ Garnier reads Derrida’s multilingual reference to the ‘*mot Löwe*’ in relation to ‘the limitrophic apparatus of the *animot*, the animal in relation to the word, to naming and appellation’ and to the status of both the ‘word’ itself and proper names.⁵² Garnier stresses the fact that Derrida supports Husserl’s contention that ‘the word *Löwe*’ occurs only once in the German language, since it is an ideal signifier. This ideality is, however, limited, since it is still tied to the factual reality and historicity of the German language itself. Garnier thus shows that the word *Löwe* registers as some kind of fleshy manifestation of the cross-linguistic ‘concept’ of ‘the lion’:

“Flesh” occupies a strange middle ground between the two “ends” of the “word *Löwe*”, between naming and animality, linking “*le lion en chair et en os*”, the “flesh and blood lion”, to, on the other hand, Husserl’s wrestling with language. [...] “Flesh” [...] operates as a two-headed animal: Husserl’s

⁵⁰ Ibid., second emphasis added.

⁵¹ Marie-Dominique Garnier, ‘Love of the *Löwe*’, in *The Animal Question in Deconstruction*, ed. by Lynn Turner (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), pp. 34–53 (p. 35).

⁵² Ibid.

always says that the linguistic or graphic body is a flesh, a proper body, or spiritual corporeality (*Geistige Leiblichkeit*).⁵³

However, Derrida resists the supposed ideality of the cross-linguistic, cross-cultural 'concept lion' by pointing out that this concept will depend on an empirical reference to 'the contingent encounter in a receptive intuition of something like the lion'. Garnier explores this turn of phrase by Derrida in detail, asking 'to what improbably species does Derrida's "something-like-the-lion" belong'? She reads this impreciseness as a token of the cross-linguistic aspect of the material, non-translated *Löwe*. Therefore, she connects the French *lion* to *lien* (a tie, a bond) and *lié* (tied, bound) and to the homophone *lions* (let us tie). For her, this lion is

an anexact animal, something-like-an-animal lying in wait at the outer/utter limits of nomination, on the periphery of naming, paradoxically ill-said, half-unsayable and yet hyper-written.⁵⁴ [...] [It] allow[s] reading to cross the barrier between the common and the proper.⁵⁵

On the other hand, I argue that Derrida's expression 'something like the lion' is an acknowledgement of the very limits of naming that Garnier discusses: the *name* of the one living thing which one can encounter (in order to activate the meaning of the concept 'lion') is not strictly speaking 'lion'. To answer Garnier's question, 'something like the lion' belongs, rather simply, to the species 'lion', since 'something like the lion' is thus worded so as to refer to one specific animal. This one animal cannot be called by a non-translated 'mot *Löwe*' but neither can it properly be referred to by the cross-linguistic 'concept

⁵³ Ibid., p. 38.

⁵⁴ This last adjective possibly referring to the distinctive diacritic of the word *Löwe*.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 43.

lion'. This concept can only make reference to the species *Panthera leo* and, as Garnier discussion shows, one specific animal could only be properly named by a proper name. In my reading, Derrida's 'something like the lion' refers less to a certain plurality of (linguistic) lions than to the totemic mechanism which locates a species in an in-between zone between ideal concept and material animal referent. Animal species displays the non-wordly materiality which refuses to be absorbed both by non-wordly conceptuality and material animality.

Therefore, there seem to be compelling reasons to hold that the *concept* of the species (which is indeed the sense of the word 'lion') is distinguishable from the *object* 'species' intended by it. And, since 'species' as an object is yet another ideality, the material object 'flesh and blood lion' gathered up by it is a *fortiori* also distinguishable from the concept of species, since a species is not in fact a flesh and blood material object. In his *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, Alexandre Kojève provides precedence in philosophical thought for a strict separation between a *species* of animal and the *concept* of that species by arguing that

the word 'Dog' reveals the *essence* of the dog, and without this word this essence would not be revealed to man; but the *essence* of the *dog* is what realizes the meaning of the word, the *dog* is what allows man to develop the word 'Dog' into a *judgment*, saying: 'the dog is an animal with four feet, covered with hair, etc.'⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures of the 'Phenomenology of Spirit'*, ed. by Allan Bloom, trans. by James H. Nichols, Jr. (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1980), p. 107. Unpacking his 'notation', we could say that 'Dog' (in quotes) is the essence or concept of the species, *dog* (in italic type) is the species, and the dog (in roman type) is an individual animal.

He qualifies this statement by stating that, for both Plato and Aristotle, 'there is a concept "dog" only because there is an *eternal* real dog, namely the *species* dog, which is always in the present.'⁵⁷ In totemic terms, one could say that a clan's name is separate from – albeit related to – the totemic species, which is, in its turn, embodied in totem animals. For Plato, the timelessness of the ideal species is represented by its eternal 'present-ness', whereas individual dogs can die and, therefore, remain in the past.

It could be argued, though, that any Platonic concept follows the same logic. 'Table' is never the name of any specific table, but it is neither the same as the *table-ness* to which all of them belong: the *real*, Platonic table, which is always in the present. Onto the apparent privilege of animal examples here some light is shed by Kojève when he advances Hegel's reworking of the Platonic triad of the word 'Dog' / the 'real' dog (Idea) / individual dog:

As long as the Meaning (or Essence, Concept, Logos, Idea, etc.) is embodied in an empirically existing entity, this Meaning or Essence, as well as the entity, *lives*. For example, as long as the Meaning (or Essence) 'dog' is embodied in a sensible entity, this Meaning (Essence) *lives*: it is the real dog, the living dog which runs, drinks, and eats. But when the Meaning (Essence) 'dog' passes into the word 'dog'—that is becomes *abstract* Concept which is *different* from the sensible reality that it reveals by its Meaning—the Meaning (Essence) *dies*: the word 'dog' does not run, drink, and eat; in it the Meaning (Essence) *ceases* to live—that is, it *dies*. And that is why the conceptual understanding of empirical reality is equivalent to a *murder*.⁵⁸

Here it seems clear that the *life* of the Essence (of the dog) is secured by its close relation with the flesh and blood dog. Rather than *falling* into the world of facticity and contingency by being embodied into instances, the Essence

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 141, 113. Kojève places Aristotle's deviation from Plato in this matter only on the issue of the relationship between Time and Eternity.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 140.

seems to *ascend* to a realm of *vitality* due to its participation in the living body of the dog. Linguistic conceptualisation, on the other hand, is framed here as the breaking of the Essence's life-giving connection to the mortal dog. As pointed out by Derrida, Hegel sees linguistic conceptualisation as murder insofar as it drains the Dog-essence of its life. The productive Hegelian distinction between living Essence and dead, deadly concept depends upon an animal example for its articulation – a discussion about tables and the Essence of tables would not generate the same conclusions. As it is, these animal examples are more essential to what they exemplify than the logic of a mere illustrative addendum might suggest. Kojève confirms it thus:

If the dog were not *mortal*—that is, essentially *finite* or limited with respect to its duration—one could not *detach* its Concept from it—that is, cause the Meaning (Essence) that is embodied in the *real* dog to pass into the *nonliving* word. [...] This *abstract* Concept is possible only if the dog is *essentially mortal*.⁵⁹

Kojève's Hegelian formulas – as well as his explication of Platonic metaphysics – underscores the necessity of the mortality or killability of the (animal) instance for the production of the immortal (totemic) species. This Hegelian law of iterability seems to openly acknowledge its origins in the play of animation figured by totemism, insofar as it paradoxically asserts that the Concept immortalises the life of the individual only to *repeatedly* kill it in linguistic murder. As Akira Lippit puts it, 'killed by the word, the animal enters a figurative empire (of signs) in which its death is repeated endlessly. In such transmigrations, however, death itself is circumvented.'⁶⁰ The similarities to

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 141.

⁶⁰ Akira Mizuta Lippit, *Electric Animal: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2000), p. 48.

the logic of totemism, in which the totem animal has to be perpetually spared only to be always liable to sacrifice, are striking, and they illuminate Derrida's close paraphrase of Husserl's degrees of idealities.

Recapitulating Derrida's Husserlian discussion, the 'flesh and blood lion' is intended through two strata of differing degrees of idealities – namely that of the concept 'lion', and that of the word *lion*. By reaching the bodily lion as the supposed end-point of a chain of references, Derrida means to expose a material contingency at the moment Husserl would like to posit the freest ideality. As we saw, Husserl's chain of idealisation should go along the following route, from more to less material: instance of the word *Löwe* – signifier *Löwe* – cross-linguistic concept of 'lion'. Derrida, however, reminds us that the concept should point to the flesh and blood lion, framing thus the whole sequence between two materialities, as it were.⁶¹ Kojève reminds us, though, that traditionally metaphysics has kept species and concept of the species apart. Therefore, the signified 'lion' does not refer to a flesh and blood lion, but only to its species, what Kojève would call its Essence.

Derrida speaks of a reverberation of material contingency into the whole of Husserl's sequence of idealities triggered by the flesh and blood lion. But here the 'exemplary martyr' seems to resist its use and points to *another* reverberation, since 'the lion' is *not* a 'contingent reality'. It cannot be limited to a time and a space, otherwise it would be what Derrida calls a signifier which would take place only once, that is, not a signifier. A 'lion' which would occur in

⁶¹ That these two materialities – that of the signifier and that of the animal – are one and the same was my main point in the previous chapter.

only one point in time and space would surely not be a lion – it would be an aberration, it would belong to no species, and wouldn't be recognizable as an animal. It would be, strictly speaking, a monster. For even if one sole individual of a species is known and encountered, its *animality* is assured only by the *possibility* of its belonging to a species. Since the issue here is precisely a variety of degrees of idealities, we ought to conclude that the ideality of totemic iterability is not as bound as Husserl or Derrida make it to be. The *object* of the expression 'lion' cannot be purely material, since 'lion' is the name of a species, not of an individual. One could think of a material object if one takes the next step and consider 'the lion' to be another realm of ideality (akin to the two other strata – expressions and concepts) which would intend a 'flesh and blood lion'. In other words, one would have to find a place for one other order of idealities. Or, on the other hand, one could carry out the analysis not with the word for the species 'lion', but with a word which would in fact intend a 'flesh and blood' lion. But there is no such word. There is no name for a specific animal, for an animal is always that which is *animated* by its own species, and any unique animal would not be an animal.⁶² The strange materiality of the 'flesh and blood lion', apparently caught up in a movement of both idealisation and materialisation, seems to have grasped the attention of philosophers attempting to think these mechanisms. Joshua Kates, when discussing the issue, calls attention to the fact that 'the words *Löwe* and "*lion*" [...] somehow

⁶² The only word that could refer to a specific flesh and blood lion would be a proper noun, as in the name of a pet. But the complexities of the question of the proper noun, as discussed not least by Derrida, are such that they do not resolve the issue at hand.

seem to be the standard examples'.⁶³ This seductive totemic iterability, however, seems to betray its theoreticians by short-circuiting and overflowing their argument by means of the very dynamics of animals/species, which could be said, conversely, to have furnished the arguments themselves.

John Berger refers to the interface between an animal and its species when discussing, like Freud, the impact of animals on the birth of human civilisation and culture.⁶⁴ Berger frames the issue of anthropogenesis as a question of the poetic use of animals. Animals' usefulness for metaphoricality is traced by him to their simultaneous similarity and dissimilarity from humans.⁶⁵ According to him, these contrasting characteristics gave rise to our concepts of body and soul.⁶⁶ Thus, Berger believes that

what distinguished man from animals was the human capacity for symbolic thought, the capacity which was inseparable from the development of language in which words were not mere signals, but signifiers of something other than themselves. Yet the first symbols were animals. What distinguished men from animals was born of their relationship with them.⁶⁷

⁶³ Joshua Kates, *Essential History: Jacques Derrida and the Development of Deconstruction* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005), p. 179.

⁶⁴ Arguably, Kojève does the same for the origin of words.

⁶⁵ This animal duality – or undecidability – is precisely the source of the difficulties discussed above regarding totemic species and the individual animal.

⁶⁶ This is particularly striking due to Husserl's insistence in thinking of language in terms of spiritual and corporeal aspects, which was discussed above to a certain extent. Derrida, in his turn, reads the Husserlian discussion on bodies and souls for its logic of the interface between transcendentalism and empiricism. It is precisely by inhabiting *and* overflowing Husserl's thought – by deconstructing it, in other words – that Derrida finds a way to criticise both sides of the distinction, while avoiding a complete break with either. This is precisely what Haraway seems to have missed in her critique and constituted the bulk of my argument in my discussion of her thought above. It is only by the means of this critique that Derrida is able to account for the origin *and* function of something like the sign, its becoming-arbitrary, and the implied shift from nature to culture. This will enable us to better grasp the temporality of Freud's account of the primal deed in *Totem and Taboo*.

⁶⁷ John Berger, 'Why Look at Animals?', in *Why Look at Animals?* (London: Penguin, 2009), pp. 12-37 (p. 18).

This relationship could be summarised by the fact that animals stood as an ‘*intercession* between man and his origin’, since ‘they were both like and unlike man’.⁶⁸ The similar/dissimilar lives of animals is then attributed by Berger to the difference between individual and species: ‘Animals came from over the horizon. They belonged *there* and *here*. Likewise they were mortal and immortal. An animal’s blood flowed like a human blood, but its species was undying and each lion was Lion, each ox was Ox.’⁶⁹ It is not difficult to ascribe the mortality of an individual to the body, and its immortal species to the soul, according to the linguistic logic of incarnation which is described both by Husserl and Derrida. Berger calls the individual/species distinction (tellingly marked, in his text, by a typographical difference between letter cases) the ‘first existential dualism’,⁷⁰ such as the one which precisely assigns humans an animal component (his or her body) and a spiritual one (the soul). Indeed, Berger attributes the great thinker of human existential dualism, Descartes, with inserting the dualism of human-animal relationships into his thought:

Descartes internalized, *within man*, the dualism implicit in the human relation to animals. In dividing absolutely body from soul, he bequeathed the body to the laws of physics and mechanics, and, since animals were soulless, the animal was reduced to the model of a machine.⁷¹

Berger’s framing of the question of the animal machine in Descartes reveals the role the animal plays in a wide-ranging logic of incarnation or, in other words, animation.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 15.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 16.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 21.

Derrida's Husserl, incarnation, and the two types of writing

As Derrida exposes it in the introduction to Husserl's *Origin of Geometry*, the latter surprises the reader by asserting, after introducing the concept of bound idealities and the limited objectivity of language, that the transcendental and ideality of truth itself depends on its animation of language. This language, surrounded by Husserl's talk of 'linguistic flesh' and 'linguistic incarnation', emerges as an (animal) body waiting for the inscription of the spirituality of meaning. To be sure, specific, *constituted* languages were bracketed off by Husserl as irrelevant to the constitution of truth,

but the Objectivity of this truth could *not* be constituted *without* the *pure possibility* of an inquiry into a pure language in general. [...] Then, it [the truth] would be *absolutely bound to the psychological life of a factual individual*, to that of a factual community, indeed to a particular moment of that life.⁷²

In other words, *specific* expressions can be considered mere vehicles of a previously thought, independent truth, but language *in general*, the mere *possibility* of language – which Husserl calls 'constitutive language' since it plays a role in the constitution of actual languages and of truth itself – is indispensable for truth to be communicated to other individuals (Husserl privileges mainly the hyper-ideal truths of geometry). Derrida highlights that this communication is not, however, a mere accident that may or may not happen to a pre-formed truth, since 'truth' is, for Husserl, precisely that which

⁷² Derrida, *Geometry*, p. 77, emphases in the original.

can transcend any spatiotemporality and rise above any contingency as

Objectivity. Derrida concludes that

whether geometry can be spoken about is not, then, the extrinsic and accidental possibility of a *fall into the* body of speech. [...] Speech is no longer simply the expression [...] of what, without it, would be *already* an object: [...] speech *constitutes* the object and is a concrete juridical condition of truth.⁷³

Derrida then argues that Husserl is even more surprising when he suggests that speech is still a limited form of attaining the objectivity of truth, since it limits the object of truth to truth's 'institutive community'. Truth must have, for him, a 'persisting factual existence' which permits it to remain even after the death of the inventors (of geometry, in this case). It will be up to *writing* to institute the truly transcendental status of truth, since it virtualises the latter beyond any specific community of consciousness and *constitutes* universal validity which is, in fact, truth itself.

Without the ultimate objectification that writing permits, all language would as yet remain captive of the de facto and actual intentionality of a speaking subject or community. [...] The originality of the field of writing is its ability to dispense with, *due to its sense*, every present reading in general.⁷⁴

The apparent independence of written marks from any context of inscription or reading is mirrored in the individual totem animal's 'unruliness' or 'waywardness', since it is literally a sign that can move in space. This contingent *spatiality* is, however, by its powers of *citation* (or iterability), the condition for the constitution of its species as an ideal and timeless object. Husserl's emphasis on the transcendental work of writing will have immense

⁷³ Ibid., first emphasis added.

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 87-8, emphasis in the original.

effects on any understanding of Derridean deconstruction, which proposes *at the same time* a more generalised (i.e. transcendental) functioning of ‘writing’ and an irreducible destruction of truth brought about by it. The possibility of a zoogrammatology, therefore, depends on Derrida’s re-inscription of Husserlian concerns and the Freudian discussion on the origin of totemic writing in *Totem and Taboo*.

As of his ‘Introduction’ to *Origin of Geometry*, Derrida still abided to Husserl’s constraints in his thinking of writing. It is still conceptualised for its transcendental aspects, rather than its work of dissemination and difference. Yet, Derrida calls attention to the fact that writing can only be considered *constituting* for Husserl if phenomenological, transcendental inquiry focuses on ‘nothing but writing’s pure relation to a consciousness which grounds it as such, and not its factuality which, left to itself, is totally without signification [*insignifiante*].’⁷⁵ This grounding of writing refers to its haunting by a ‘virtual intentionality’ which gives it meaning, somehow submitting it to the transcendentality of truth, despite writing’s status as constitutive of it. Without this haunting, Derrida tells us, in an almost poetical language,

then there is no more in the vacuity of [writing’s] *soul* than a chaotic literalness or the sensible opacity of a defunct designation, a designation deprived of its transcendental function. The silence of prehistoric arcana and buried civilisations, the entombment of lost intentions and guarded secrets, and the illegibility of the lapidary inscription disclose the transcendental sense of death as what unites these things to the absolute privilege of intentionality in the very instance of its essential juridical failure.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 88.

⁷⁶ Ibid., emphasis added.

Derrida's reference to the 'soul' of writing here parallels Husserl's designation of signs as essentially *flesh*, that is a *Leib*, a proper body, lived flesh, a 'spiritual corporeality (*geistige Leiblichkeit*)'.⁷⁷ Contrary to Rousseau, or Saussure, then, writing is no longer the bringer of death, mere aid and tool for speech and memory, endangering them in their unlawful dependence on it. Taken thus, writing is no longer a simple mnemonic device for a truth which 'would dispense with all writing-down'. On the contrary,

the possibility or necessity of being *incarnated* in a graphic sign is no longer simply extrinsic and factual in comparison to ideal Objectivity: it is the *sine qua non* condition of Objectivity's internal completion. [...] The *ability* of sense to be linguistically *embodied* is the only means by which sense becomes nonspatiotemporal.⁷⁸

That means that, in order to free the ideality of truth once and for all from all embodiment in worldly signs and to resolve the paradox mentioned above, Husserl will deploy a further phenomenological reduction or bracketing off in order to get to precisely that *incarnation* which is, in fact, the moment of truth's constitution. For it is indeed a paradox that truth should need to be embodied in spatiotemporal signs in order to escape spatiotemporality, so that Derrida points out that

the sign becomes the worldly and exposed residence of an unthought truth. [...] Since, in order to escape worldliness, sense *must first be able* to be set down in the world and be deposited in sensible spatiotemporality, it must put its pure intentional ideality [...] in danger.⁷⁹

Derrida then foregrounds Husserl's recourse to a theory of the sign in order to resolve this paradox, in that the latter isolates the meaning-giving

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 88-9, 90, first and last emphases added.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 92.

intentionality that transforms the sign (whether written or spoken) into a *Leib*, into a body which would appear to not fall back into the world, since it is inhabited by an intentional *Geist*. In other words, Husserl attempts to set up the sign as a *hybrid* – or one might say even ‘as a *human*’ – of bodily and spiritual components, so as to have it do its transcendental work. Yet, the danger posed by the bodily share still represents too great a threat to the desired transcendental of truth, so that Husserl reaches for a further dematerialisation and disembodiment, or, as it were, a raising of the soul towards Heaven. Therefore, the constitution of truth does *not* depend on sense incarnated in a sign, but on the very incarnation itself which articulates sense and sign.

Derrida raises the question of what would happen to truth if the written marks constituting it were destroyed. He frames the question by first stressing that writing is ‘not *merely* a constituted sensible body (*Körper*), but also a properly constituting body (*Leib*),’ and then asking: ‘if writing is *both* a factual event and the upsurging of sense, if it is both *Körper* and *Leib*, how would writing preserve its *Leiblichkeit* from corporeal disaster?’⁸⁰ As Derrida demonstrates it, Husserl’s new reduction aims at

isolat[ing] the intentional act which constitutes *Körper* as *Leib* and maintain this act in its *Leiblichkeit*, in its living truth-sense. Such an analysis no longer has any need of *Körper* as such. Only in the intentional dimension of properly animate body, of the *geistige Leiblichkeit*, more precisely, in the *Geistigkeit* of the *Leib* [...] is sense intrinsically threatened. Although in a word [*mot*], *Körper* and *Leib*, body and flesh, are

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 97.

in fact numerically one and the same existent, their sense are definitely heterogeneous, and nothing can come to the later through the former.⁸¹

It is precisely on Husserl's thesis on the sign, brought upon by himself in order to think the articulation between transcendental and empirical writing, that Derrida focuses in an attempt to overcome Husserlian phenomenology. That would result both in his book-length essay *Speech and Phenomena* and the more consistent thinking of both kinds of writing as *arche*-writing in *Of Grammatology*. Husserl's impasse, as well as Derrida's solution, should help illuminate the project of a zoogrammatology, with regard to all Derrida himself has called 'the animality of writing'.⁸² Joshua Kates argues that Derrida,

having begun from this divide that falls straight out of Husserl's own analysis and program—a divide between constituting and constituted language and writing [...] — seeks to find a way to bridge this gap, to bring these two views of writing together and to consider whether writing, globally conceived, has implications that ultimately run against the grain of Husserl's own program. [...] The reason Derrida contrives deconstruction, this unparalleled way of working, in 1966 or thereabouts is to capture the force of a writing and language which Derrida [...] glimpsed in 1962 [when writing the 'Introduction']—a writing and language genuinely constituting and constituted *at once*, truly simultaneously the condition of truth's appearance and its disappearance—a more comprehensive, global writing and language.⁸³

A non-worldly body and a third type of writing

In *Totem and Taboo*, the totemic clan represents the human and its human power of speech. As in Husserl, however, truth is not simply constituted in speech, since it has to be animated by meaning (i.e., the *Geist*). In Freud, that is

⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 97-8.

⁸² Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. by Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. by David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), p. 52.

⁸³ Kates, *Essential History*, pp. 68, 73.

indeed the murdered primal father, in whose evoked presence the clan exists as its own condition of possibility. And, as the system goes, the meaning deposited in the disavowed body of speech (sound, the clan) is thought to be embodied for the first time in the body of writing (ink, the totemic animal). As we saw, however, the body of the totemic animal is caught up in a paradoxical construction in which it is both completely material (life and blood) but also to a certain extent ideal insofar as it functions as a signifier. In fact, as stressed by Butler and Belau, the status-as-signifier of this body could not come to be without this material mortality, but, conversely, this bodily matter is in its turn constituted by the workings of the signifier. In the totem, therefore, one encounters *two* matters, as it were: the first one a vulgar matter, whereas the second is stuck in a middle ground between pure materiality and pure ideality. The uncanny materiality of the totem animal is strikingly similar to the materiality of semiotic processes as described by Kristeva. In Kristevan terms, one could argue that the materiality of the individual totemic animals contains a semiotic potential which is harnessed for the symbolic functioning of totemic nomination and social organisation.⁸⁴ This is analogous to the functioning of poetic language:

[A] phoneme, as distinctive element of meaning, belongs to language as symbolic. But this same phoneme is involved in rhythmic, intonational

⁸⁴ It is important to note, however, that within Kristeva's semiotic/symbolic dialectic there is no space for a 'vulgar', simple materiality. The materiality of the semiotic is always already psychically invested and characterised by the *distinctiveness* of rhythmic, kinetic repetitions and thus is already, precisely, *semiotic*. The symbolic sign attempts to ignore this semiosis and *retroactively* characterises it as a *signifier* – a category that can only have meaning within the symbolic function – thought to be *merely* material. Derrida's characterisation of the signifier as never simply material can be read as close to Kristeva's deconstruction of the symbolic function.

repetitions; it thereby tends towards autonomy from meaning so as to maintain itself in a semiotic disposition near the instinctual drives' body; it is a sonorous distinctiveness, which therefore is no longer either a phoneme or a part of the symbolic system. [...] It is poetic language that awakes our attention to this undecidable character of any so-called natural language. [...] Language as symbolic function constitutes itself at the cost of repressing instinctual drive and continuous relation to the mother.⁸⁵

It is precisely the perceived materiality of these semiotic sounds in their 'autonomy from meaning' which can be detected in and characterises poetic language for Kristeva. Thus, she will argue that poetic language in a way breaks the *taboo* that requires language to never recognise the semiotic, material source of its functioning:

If it is true that the prohibition of incest constitutes, at the same time, language as communicative code and women as exchange objects in order for a society to be established, *poetic language would be* for its questionable subject-in-process the *equivalent of incest*.⁸⁶

Within poetic language, the subject-in-process

simultaneously prevents the word from becoming mere sign and the mother from becoming an object like any other—forbidden. This passage into and through the forbidden [...] constitutes the sign and is correlative to the prohibition of incest. [This forbidden is] the social body's self-defense against the discourse of incest as destroyer and generator of any language and sociality.⁸⁷

If poetry as a cultural practice does not seem to threaten to destroy sociality, Kristeva's description of the semiotic's power to undo symbolic language resonates well with totemic taboos. Art, poetry, the festival is the exceptional site where social taboos are lifted, and in totemic societies this

⁸⁵ Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. by Leon S Roudiez, trans. by Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), pp. 135, 136.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 136.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

manifests as the totem meal in which the taboo against killing the totem animal can and should be collectively transgressed. The taboos surrounding the totem animal do not seek merely to buy its protection: sparing the totem actively signifies *not killing* the primal father – hence also *not challenging* his monopoly of the horde's females. In the post-crime sociality, that monopoly is translated precisely into the prohibition of incest which is secured by means of the totemic taboos.

Killing the totemic animal 'utters incest' because it recognises the animal as material and undoes the symbolic, linguistic system of totemic nomination which depends on its function as sign. Just as poetry dares to view words as material things, totemic murder dares to view the totem as just another animal. If the totemic animal fails to be a sign, clan nomination collapses and the lines separating licit and illicit marriages (or available and unavailable females) disappear, creating the possibility of incest. Likewise, totemic murder registers the killer's desire to kill the primal father *by himself* and thus claim the clan women for himself.⁸⁸ Breaking a totemic taboo thus registers as a sort of artistic challenge that plays freely with the rules of totemic language. This artistic expression is only accepted in the exceptional time of the totem meal festival when the *poetic* character of the totem's

⁸⁸ It should be clear, however, that killing the leader of the horde is not the same as the symbolic killing of the totemic animal within the clan. In the horde days, there was no sociality, no laws, and no prohibition of incest – the monopoly of females was secured by the primal father himself by means of brute force. Therefore, killing the totem animal is an aggression towards not only the father whose memory the brothers wish to serve but also to the clan itself as based on the agreement (or law) that no one male will claim the females (now his kinsfolk) for himself. That is why totemic murder is permitted during the meal festival since it is undertaken by the whole clan as one.

materiality is recognised, since this recognition serves to strengthen clan fraternity and sociality themselves.⁸⁹

This middle ground between two kinds of totemic materiality is precisely what Derrida attempts to get at by means of his generalised concept of writing, which would still do the transcendental work attributed to it by Husserl (making it ideal), but while still exposing truth to spatiality (thus, material). Derrida raises this point in *Speech and Phenomena* when discussing Husserl's phonocentrism. He wishes to frame the Husserlian privilege of the voice (the phenomenological voice, 'the voice that keeps silent', as Derrida puts it) as the step that was necessary in attaining an absolutely ideal object. Or, to be precise, Derrida identifies a teleology in Husserl marked by the determination of being as presence which will forcefully make sure that only the self-present voice is capable of securing the ideality of objects. Therefore, Derrida points out that, for Husserl, 'the ideality of the object [...] can only be expressed in an element whose phenomenality does not have worldly form. *The name of this element is the voice.*'⁹⁰ To be sure, the Saussurean distinction between the acoustic reality of sound and the phoneme holds here,⁹¹ so that the phenomenological voice refers to the phonic signifier, which, as we saw, while not completely ideal as the signified, is not simply material. Derrida,

⁸⁹ We could say that poetic language as a contemporary practice is not punished either because it is always already undertaken in exceptional, collective situations, or because it does not in fact transgress a social taboo anymore.

⁹⁰ Derrida, 'Speech and Phenomena', p. 76, emphasis in the original.

⁹¹ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, trans. by Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), p. 7.

however, makes a distinction between the ideality of the phoneme and the grapheme:

My words are 'alive' because they seem not to leave me: not to fall outside me, outside my breath, at a visible distance. [...] The objection will perhaps be raised that this interiority belongs to the phenomenological and ideal aspect of every signifier. The ideal form of a written signifier, for example, is *not in the world*, and the distinction between grapheme and the empirical body of the corresponding graphic sign separates an inside from an outside, phenomenological consciousness from the world. And yet every non-phonetic signifier involves a *spatial reference* in its very 'phenomenon,' in the phenomenological (nonworldly) sphere of experience in which it is given. The sense of being 'outside,' 'in the world,' is an essential component of its phenomenon. Apparently there is nothing like this in the phenomenon of speech.⁹²

It is crucial for Derrida, then, to call attention to the Husserlian attempt of bracketing off any 'body' from the production of transcendental idealities, insofar as this exclusion of the body from the constitution of truth is revealed as the very notion of the body. Therefore, the interiority of speech (which is also the certainty of timeless and non-contingent objectivity) is secured by means of the exclusion of the body. It is well known, however, that a simple overturning of this hierarchy – prioritizing the body which was foreclosed – does not challenge the hierarchical logic and can actually serve to entrench it even deeper, as we saw with Haraway. In fact, Derrida inaugurates to a certain point his deconstructive method by indeed respecting Husserl's phenomenological methodology of reduction (attaining, therefore, a claim of transcendentalism, thus avoiding the dangers of naïve materialism and empiricism) to its final consequences and finding there the borderline

⁹² Derrida, 'Speech and Phenomena', p. 76, emphases added.

oxymoronic *transcendental spatiality* which seems to break both from purely transcendental philosophy and from empiricism. Thus, he argues:

The 'apparent transcendence' of the voice thus results from the fact that the signified [...] is immediately present in the act of expression. This immediate presence results from the fact that the phenomenological 'body' of the signifier seems to fade away at the very moment it is produced; it seems already to belong to the element of ideality. It phenomenologically reduces itself, transforming the worldly opacity of its body into pure diaphaneity. This effacement of the sensible body and its exteriority is for consciousness the very form of the immediate presence of the signified.⁹³

As we saw, this apparent immediate presence of the signified to consciousness actually constitutes the interiority of said consciousness. The disavowed exteriority of the bodily aspect of the signifier is the meaning of the body itself, both in the animal and in the animal body of the human. In the experience of 'hearing-oneself-speak' which is invoked by the priority of speech, the physical world and the worldly aspect of the phoneme seem to be subject to a complete erasure. Speech is, thus, a pure 'phenomenon' in the Husserlian sense of the term. More importantly for Derrida, 'hearing oneself speak [*s'entendre parler*] is experienced as an absolutely pure auto-affection, occurring in a self-proximity that would in fact be the absolute reduction of space in general.'⁹⁴

On the apparent contradiction with the Husserl from *The Origin of Geometry*, where he asserts that writing in its external spatiality is constitutive of truth, Derrida points out that the *Origin* represents what is in fact the

⁹³ Ibid., p. 77.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 80.

culmination of a thought of language as 'a secondary stratum of experience', confirming thus 'the traditional phonologism of metaphysics'.⁹⁵ Ultimately, the writing Husserl privileges is still phonetic writing, which 'incarnate[s] an already prepared utterance'.⁹⁶ Therefore, 'to reactivate writing,' that is, to confirm the transcendentalism of the truth therein inscribed regardless of any one moment of inscription or reading, 'is always to reawaken [...] a word in the body of a letter, which as a symbol that may always remain empty, bears the threat of crisis itself,' that is, of forgetting of the truth. 'The moment of crisis is always the moment of signs', and since in Husserl one can bracket off any status-as-a-sign of the *phonic* sign, writing then comes to be the sign itself.⁹⁷ And in this discussion Derrida reaffirms the logic that essentially connects Husserlian thought to a thinking of bodies. Writing is only *apparently* privileged by Husserl, this writing is still only an artful aid to a speech always threatened by scriptural mis-inscription, because

what governs [in Husserl] is the absolute difference between body and soul. Writing is a body that expresses something only if we actually pronounce the verbal expression that animates it. [...] The word is a body that means something only if an actual intention animates it and makes it pass from the state of inert sonority (*Körper*) to that of an animated body (*Leib*).⁹⁸

Yet, in Husserl's purity of phenomenological reductions, which aims to get to the innermost self-presence of the subject, Derrida encounters an *irreducible, essential difference* which cannot be understood in accidental terms as the signifier since it *constitutes* the subject. In other words, this is a

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 81.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

difference which, unlike all other thematics of difference such as writing and the signifier, cannot be thoroughly considered to be empirical and contingent – it is a *constitutive* difference, ‘before’ any constituted difference such as writing, signs, space, etc. This difference lies in the auto-affection Husserl identifies as the basis for the hearing-oneself-speak which is characterised as the constitution of the subject, since, for Derrida, ‘auto-affection suppose[s] that a pure difference comes to divide self-presence.’⁹⁹ One may say that what is able to touch or affect *itself* is no longer one and is thus divided by a primordial difference: that means that even *respecting* all of Husserl’s theses and all of his transcendental guidelines means thematising this pure difference. As Derrida puts it,

it was necessary to pass through the transcendental reduction in order to grasp this difference in what is closest to it—which cannot mean grasping it in its identity, its purity, or its origin, for it has none. We come closest to it in the movement of *différance*. The movement of *différance* is not something that happens to a transcendental subject; it *produces* a subject.¹⁰⁰

And as Joshua Kates argues,

[*Différance*] is itself brought forward by means of the operation of the voice within phenomenological interiority and the unique auto-affection it implies. All of Derrida’s other ‘signature terms’ [...] are [...] versions of what is in effect a new, quasi- or ultra-transcendental *life* (life being, again, the notion to which the auto-affection that has come forward here corresponds).¹⁰¹

Derrida indeed became known for the quasi-transcendental aspects of his theses, especially when it comes to *Of Grammatology* and the introduction of arche-writing. In the Husserlian terms explored in *Speech and Phenomena*,

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 82.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., translation modified and emphases added.

¹⁰¹ Kates, p. 155.

writing understood in its literal, technological (or even material) sense cannot furnish any transcendental truths due to its contingency and empiricism. And ideal and transcendental for Husserl can only be the 'voice that keeps silent' when the subject hears himself speak, obliterating any need for actual signs. Thus, arche-writing would be the name for the 'transcendental difference' – if one may grant Derrida the privilege of this oxymoron – which would *transcendentally* make possible specific forms of difference (such as writing) but that, at the same time, would never aspire to the complete disembodiment and self-sameness of the transcendental subject as expounded by Husserl.

This Derridean reading of Husserl (obeying and disobeying his logic at the same time, that is, deconstructing him) allows us to see that Freud's totem, too, becomes a sort of trace or arche-writing. The totem is material and corporeal insofar as it is a substitute for the mortal, murdered father, but can never be reduced to its corporeality since, as we saw, it has to outlive its bodily incarnation. Totemism introduces, then, what Derrida calls an essential difference. The totem is nothing if not empirical (killable) but remains always already transcendental in that it outlives these specific, differential incarnations, and actually makes them possible. In other words, *the totem transcends any totemic animal, but this transcendental totemic species is still tied to the bodily reality of animality*. This body of the species is, thus, the *transcendental difference* which would skirt both disembodiment and contingency. As Berger argues, the animal origin of meaning and metaphor depends on the animal's simultaneous proximity to and distance from the human – the animal is equal to and other than the body. Berger's theory of animal metaphor seems to

account for the same deconstructive procedures that allowed Derrida to think a 'writing before the letter'. That would lead us to conclude that the totem allows for a thinking of an 'animality before the animal', or an arche-animality.

Nachträglichkeit

The parallels between Derrida's arche-writing and the arche-animality readable in *Totem and Taboo* come forward especially with regard to Derrida's explorations of the issues of *repetition* and *arbitrariness*. For him, arbitrariness forcefully evokes the notion of *institution* – so that he replaces 'the sign' by 'the instituted trace' – mainly because a relationship which is arbitrary cannot simply have been furnished *by nature* and must, therefore, have been invented, or instituted. Saussure himself, however, declares that the arbitrariness of the bond between signifier and signified cannot mean that a collective decision was once historically made with regard to which signifiers would correspond to which signifieds.¹⁰² All speakers, he insists, are born into language, and receive language like the law – that is, ready-made and with the full authority of that which recognises no debatable origin, since a definitive origin and history of the correspondence between meaning and sound could arguably be open for discussion: one could contest the grounds on which such and such bonds were instituted. That is not the case, according to Saussure, since signs are as much arbitrary as they are *unmotivated*, meaning that there can be no motivation behind the sound-meaning combinations, and, similarly, no reasons or grounds

¹⁰² Saussure, *Course*, p. 71, *passim*.

on which to dispute them. A *symbol* is that which, for Saussure, contains an actual resemblance between 'signifier' and 'signified', to the point that one cannot even apply the Saussurean terminology to it. It is clear that between the natural functioning of the symbol and the arbitrariness of the sign lies the difference between nature and culture, *physis* and *nomos*, a division that Derrida insists to be 'regulated precisely by *law*'.¹⁰³ In one 'linguistic' stroke, then, the 'formation of form' seems to witness the emergence of law as that which divides between nature and culture. This conclusion, which is also an apt description of the argument of *Totem and Taboo*, is further explored by Derrida with regard to the temporality of such emergence(s).

Similarly to Saussure's contention that one would not be able to identify the moment 'outside' or 'before' language when its elements were apparently decided upon, Derrida stresses that the 'becoming-unmotivated of the trace' cannot have occurred in a moment *prior* to any instituted trace. The shift to institution can only occur on a ground of institution itself. If, on the one hand, the instituted trace necessitates the difference between nature and culture as well as the passage from one to the other, its becoming-unmotivated, its institution, 'takes place, and does so repeatedly, *within* a world and meaning already under way, and even in some sense within a language already given'.¹⁰⁴ In a passage that will permit us to read critically those who could only accept Freud's primal crime as timeless, synchronic structure and not as a historical event, Derrida writes that

¹⁰³ Derrida, *Grammatology*, p. 48.

¹⁰⁴ Kates, p. 184.

[w]e are from the outset within the becoming-unmotivated of the symbol, [the shift from symbol to sign]. With regard to this becoming, the opposition of diachronic and synchronic is also derived. [...] The immotivation of the trace ought now to be understood as an operation and not as a state, as an active movement, a de-motivation, and not as a given structure.¹⁰⁵

The passage from nature to culture, the transformation of animals from natural symbols to arbitrary tokens of totemic clans, cannot have been a timeless structure with no origin. The being-instituted of the totem *ought* to be its *becoming*-instituted. Nevertheless, Derrida seems to suggest that neither can this passage be temporally localised in one primal crime. From the 'opening of the game', from the very 'origin' of language and culture – which, in this case, is no longer a simple origin – the symbol is always already becoming sign, the animal is becoming totem, and nature is becoming culture. This becoming, for Kates, 'turns out [...] to be an originary movement, [...] occurring within a world (a conventionalized nature) already there, a work going on in its midst, and thus never takes place for a first time, nor simply once and for all'.¹⁰⁶ Kates glosses this, which is one of the densest arguments in all of *Of Grammatology*, thus – and I quote him at length for the clarity and import of his conclusions:

[T]he instituted trace, [...] permitting signs to go to work as signs, thus proves to be the origin of this system (eventually including, in Derrida's eyes, even the signifieds and the things themselves); yet it is not itself a structure, not something there in its own right, but always a kind of *work within what it constitutes*. The trace thus everywhere *assumes* what one might call the 'vertical' functioning of all these *already constituted systems*—of signifiers, language, meaning, thought, things, world, and finally even transcendental subjectivity—even as its own movement is ultimately the operation *generative of them all*, and thus itself represents an instance of what Derrida elsewhere calls an *inscribed origin*. Its work is indeed that of a genesis of structure *within* structure: a movement, a

¹⁰⁵ Derrida, *Grammatology*, pp. 55, interpolation is mine.

¹⁰⁶ Kates, p. 185.

genesis—in fact, always referring back to a prior instance of its own occurrence, [...] coming after an earlier result of its own work, yet which, in so doing, follows on nothing at all, never itself takes place (having already given way to what it gives rise to as it is in the process of taking itself up again).¹⁰⁷

Derrida attests that the trace ‘produces itself as self-occultation’,¹⁰⁸ so that its emergence can never be determined and its work and movement are only ever products of itself, of its own prior iterations. The trace does not name a structure with no origins, which stretches back to the dawn of time itself, but neither does it control transcendently, from outside, a structure which would simply postdate it. This work of inscribed origin is, again, another aspect of Derrida’s attempt of shunning both the immanent empiricism of experience and embodiment, and a transcendent origin marking a radical difference between before and after.

The inscribed origin of arche-writing or the trace is what brings forth its uncanny temporality. Derrida writes of ‘an always-already-there that no reactivation of the origin could fully master and awake to presence’, and he argues that ‘this impossibility of reanimating absolutely the manifest evidence of an originary presence takes us back therefore to an absolute past’,¹⁰⁹ which Kates reads as ‘a prior instance with no mode of being other than simply being prior’.¹¹⁰ This ‘dead time’ of the absolute past, a temporality which allows Derrida to break once and for all with Husserl, is linked by him ultimately to the

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Derrida, *Grammatology*, p. 51.

¹⁰⁹ Derrida, *Grammatology*, pp. 71, 71-2.

¹¹⁰ Kates, p. 186.

time of Freud's *Nachträglichkeit*,¹¹¹ usually termed in English 'deferred action' or 'deferred effect' and in French *après-coup*. Kates describes the working of *Nachträglichkeit* thus:

[A]n 'absolute past' demands that an essentially foreign term, an 'X,' be thought to have taken hold, [...] between what are otherwise apparently *continuous, successive* nows: stipulated as 'now-s' 'A,' 'B,' and 'C,' themselves successive moments of past, present, and future. Though nowhere present within the line of time itself, [...] a 'moment' of 'time,' an 'X,' must nevertheless be thought to have already been at work within temporalization (among the nevertheless continuous sequence of now's A, B, and C), according to Derrida. This 'X' makes itself known only as 'always already there,' as always already past, as always already come and gone, through *an essentially delayed contribution* to what is present.¹¹²

One would call the effect of this X deferred or delayed since it would never have been experienced as a present, not even in 'the first time round'. It would not have figured in the experiencing of the sequence of present moments, and would only *retroactively* – *nachträglich*, in German – be identified as contributing to the present just as much as A, B, or C, which are past moments which were indeed once 'present' for consciousness. This dead time of the absolute past cannot, therefore, ever be reactivated and recaptured as it 'really' was in its 'own' time, since it does not have one. No amount of re-living of the past can encounter it, and no matter how far back one returns,¹¹³ one

¹¹¹ While the noun *Nachträglichkeit* and the adverb and adjective *nachträglich* are part of Freud's recurring vocabulary, they do not seem to ever emerge as a full-fledged concept in his writings, so much so that some translators miss it as a discreet notion and translate it in a variety of ways even within the same text. Laplanche attributes Lacan as the one who 'discovered' this Freudian word as a concept, having identified its important contribution to Freud's essay on the Wolfman, to which I will return on the next chapter (Jacqueline Hamrit, 'Nachträglichkeit', *PSYART: A Hyperlink Journal for the Psychological Study of the Arts*, (2009) <<http://www.psyartjournal.com/article/show/hamrit-nachtrglichkeit>>.

¹¹² Kates, pp. 189-90.

¹¹³ In my discussion of Lispector's *The Apple in the Dark* in Chapter 3, I shall focus precisely on such a return to the origins as one of the novel's main themes.

would always already be encountering its effects only, without ever finding *it* during this backwards journey.¹¹⁴

Derrida signals *Nachträglichkeit* as Freud's true discovery and its impact is all the more felt due to the scope of the latter's treatment of it: not only limited to the psyche of the individual, its functioning 'is at work over large historical intervals',¹¹⁵ as can be seen both in *Moses and Monotheism* and in *Totem and Taboo*. Besides relating *Nachträglichkeit* to supplementarity in 'Freud and the Scene of Writing', Derrida ties his own thought to Freud's also in 'Différance', where he defends the article's namesake as something which exceeds the dichotomy of presence and absence, as a radical alterity 'to which Freud gives the metaphysical name of the unconscious'. Like the unconscious, the trace and *différance* cannot be made present by a re-activation of something that has only now become past, since 'the structure of delay (*Nachträglichkeit*) in effect forbids that one make of temporalization (temporization) a simple dialectical complication of the living present'.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ In 'Freud and the Scene of Writing', gathered in *Writing and Difference*, Derrida discusses *Nachträglichkeit* in Freud's thought in more depth. Regarding the existence of a conscious *text*, which could be considered as a sort of translation of unconscious contents, Derrida argues that the pre-conscious text does not simply pre-exist said translation. The truth which would be lodged in the unconscious would be stuck in a 'dead time', an absolute past which was never experienced as present (Jacques Derrida, 'Freud and the Scene of Writing', in *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978], pp. 196-231 [p. 211]).

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

¹¹⁶ Jacques Derrida, 'Différance', in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 1-28 (pp. 20-1).

Arche-animality and the inscribed origin of the primal crime

The thought of a writing before writing as we know it, which would encompass both writing and speech, functioning on the grounds of itself as an inscribed origin, and according to the logic of Freudian *Nachträglichkeit*, opens the possibility of reading in *Totem and Taboo* a more complex account of the primal crime, all the while opening a space for arche-animality. 'Before' the distinction between human and animal as the metaphysical distinction between spirit and body, there must be a sort of *pure* species difference, which makes the differentiation between human and animal possible. No concept of the human as bearer of a soul and/or capable of language seems possible without the animalistic notion of animation. Similarly, the metaphysical, vulgar concept of the animal also reveals to be a modification of this pure difference.

As stated previously, Leonard Lawlor identifies paleonymy as the 'second phase' of deconstruction, after the initial overturning of a metaphysical dichotomy. The second phase 'reinscribes the previously inferior term as the "origin" or "resource" of the hierarchy itself', so that this term 'becomes what Derrida calls an "old name" or a "paleonym"'.¹¹⁷ He proceeds to explain some Derridean examples, starting from *Dissemination*'s pharmakon as it 'refers to the resource called the *logos*, language, but language prior to the division between living voice and dead writing'. It is 'the "indissociability" of the signifier and signified concept'.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Leonard Lawlor, *This Is Not Sufficient : An Essay on Animality and Human Nature in Derrida* (New York ; Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 30.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

The pharmakon then refers to language prior to the decision to separate and make determinate the signified concept or form from the sensible body of language; it refers to language prior to the decision to value the form more than the matter. The pharmakon is therefore prior to the decision that instituted Platonism or metaphysics. [...] The pharmakon is *not* a medium [...] in which prior pure elements come to be mixed; it is not a mixture that is second; it is also not the simplicity of a *coincidentia oppositorum*. [...] Being prior to all oppositions and purifying separations, the pharmakon is an 'element-medium', which means that the *milieu* is itself the prior element.¹¹⁹

Thus, to adopt Freud's term, the *totem* is a paleonym which refers to the prior indistinction between human and animal, clan and totemic species – it is the *medium/milieu* through which the difference between clans and animals can be thought, but which must itself be thought as the 'prior element'. The spatiality which *essentially* accrues to the totemic body – this paleonymic body of the totem before the animal (neither spiritualised like a human's, nor simply material like an animal's) – is what makes possible the relationship with the father as the relation to alterity and death. As the Husserlian writing explored by Derrida, the embodiment of the animal communicates essentially with the *nonwordly materiality* of the totem. The paleonymic difference between human and animal (and between body and soul, etc.) *must* be an animal for all the essential reasons that has the animal signify most formidably species difference in general. Not only that, as we saw, but also the continuing chain of animation, corporification and disembodiment – the 'moment when' the human becomes technical or 'when' he ascends to Heaven – are still modifications of this primordial totemic difference.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 30-1.

It seems clear now after revising the inscribed origin of arche-writing that what I called the 'virtual taking-place' of the primal crime has to be read according to the logic of *Nachträglichkeit*. As I argued, Oedipal psychic structures seem to require an originary moment of *institution* (which Freud furnishes in the shape of the crime), but this deed is virtualised to the extent that it is revealed to be an *inscribed* origin. The murder of the primal father cannot but keep repeating, cannot but occur only on the grounds of a prior instance of 'another' primal crime. Even if one accepts that 'primal crimes' occurred countless times over hundreds of years, there can be no *first* primal crime since each one depended, to a certain extent, on a prior instance of the crime in order to function – there are only always already repetitions of the crime. The primal crime *itself*, as primal, is not locatable since it is, as 'Now X', impossible to be experienced as presence and can only retroactively be determined to have occurred in an inaccessible past, despite its contribution to the present. In other words, critics of Freud who insisted in the atemporal structurality of the Oedipus complex as capable of explaining its own origin seem to miss the fact that the complex itself can be seen as another instance of the primal crime in a long chain of iterations which emerge out of one another.

I believe this discussion of the history of materialisation in Freud and Derrida should reinscribe the literary focus on animals based solely on their embodiment, once we understand that this body is just as metaphysical a construct as the transcendental concept of a disembodied soul. Traditional humanism and animal materialism are two sides of the same process and actually depend on each other for their articulation. As Derrida has shown, it is

ineffective to simply rely on materialism to solve the philosophical problems of metaphysics. Vulgar, commonsensical, metaphysical animal embodiment ought to be signalled as the modification of a prior, more generalised difference which metaphysics represses. This repression is, unfortunately, what texts most readily practice in their reliance on the articulation of sense and substance ('ideas' and 'words') to produce meaning. Textuality, thus, becomes an important, privileged site on which to challenge the repression of arche-animality and the vulgar concept of matter inherited both by the signifier and animals.

The simple overturning of the body/mind dichotomy in literary analysis of 'animal texts' is not new and would in fact correspond simply to Derrida's 'first phase' of deconstruction. Moreover, this shift in privilege has a long history for metaphysics itself, which knows it as sin, idolatry, or aberration. Derrida calls attention to the fact that sin has been defined by Malebranche and Kant 'as the inversion of the natural relationship between the soul and the body'. And this 'problem of soul and body' is attributed by Derrida to be 'derived from the problem of writing',¹²⁰ which should explain the logic according to which Saussure attacked writing as a form of 'tyranny'. It is for him the threat of idolatry, the 'perverse cult of the letter-image'.¹²¹ It is, in other words, the scandalous sin of worshipping the proxy instead of the origin, God the Father. Writing, in Saussure, now easily morphs into a golden calf, or a totemic effigy being worshiped *in the place of* the Father, following Freud's

¹²⁰ Derrida, *Grammatology*, p. 37.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

psychoanalytic history of religion according to which totemism gives rise eventually to monotheism in a 'return of the repressed' – the return of the murdered primal father, whose forgiveness has now been bought. Therefore, shifting from a monotheistic-inspired disembodied account of meaning to a simple affirmation of sin and idolatry does not seem to escape the perverse logic of disembodiment itself.

In other words, arche-animality ought not to be confused with animality. Regarding this confusion with respect to arche-writing and vulgar writing, we saw that Bennington defends that

something of this 'new' sense is legible in the traditional discussions (and to that extent the sense is not exactly new at all [...]), and the place of that legibility is systematically where writing (in its current or 'vulgar' sense) is at issue.¹²²

This legibility explains the procedure according to which Derrida is able to advance arche-writing by a reading of Husserl's thought on signs and vulgar writing. The Derridean paleonym – arche-writing – while presenting itself as a 'new' word, a neologism, is argued to be 'older' than vulgar writing and its opposition to speech. Similarly, Freud's *Totem and Taboo* allows for an older animality – which I name here by the paleonym arche-animality – to precede both vulgar embodied animality and the sublimated, spiritualised human body. It is, therefore, precisely on those textual sites where (vulgar) animality is most at stake that the legibility of arche-animality is sharpest, and *Totem and Taboo* is an example. Freud's Derridean totem must be responsible, as an 'old word',

¹²² Geoffrey Bennington, 'Saussure and Derrida', in *The Cambridge Companion to Saussure*, ed. by Carol Sanders (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 186-204 (p. 195).

for the production of any new words, to the extent that this arche-animality will be at work in any textual procedure, although its legibility is more productive there where animality is being relied on in order to produce meaning. This reliance is that which unleashes arche-animality, making it thus readable. *Totem and Taboo*, even while writing the animal in all its vulgarity in its entire discussion of totemism, produces a breach through which the paleonym of arche-animality is legible. This mechanism described by Bennington and discussed here, which *Totem and Taboo* is subject to, but also an initiator of, will be the ultimate object in the readings I undertake in the following chapters. Therefore, more than an analysis of literary representations of animality, this project aims to account for the (arche-)animality of texts as it is revealed by their textualisation of the animal.

Chapter 3: Black Swan

Introduction: memories of a ballet goer

Deleuze and Guattari open their chapter '1730: Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible...' in *A Thousand Plateaus* with an account of a film titled *Willard* (1971, Daniel Mann, but also remade in 2003 by Glenn Morgan). For them, 'it is all there', in this film about a man's becoming-rat:

there is a becoming-animal not content to proceed by resemblance, [...]; the proliferation of rats, the pack, [...] undermines the great molar powers of family, career, and conjugality; there is a sinister choice since there is a 'favorite' in the pack with which a kind of contract of alliance, a hideous pact, is made; [...] there is a circulation of impersonal affects, an alternate current that disrupts signifying projects as well as subjective feelings, and constitutes a nonhuman sexuality; and there is an irresistible deterritorialization that forestalls attempts at professional, conjugal, or Oedipal reterritorialization.¹

'I recall the fine' libretto of Tchaikovsky's ballet *Swan Lake* (*Лебединое озеро* [*Lebedinoye ozero*], 1875-6), and 'I will recount the story in broad outline', placing in quotes phrases removed from Deleuze and Guattari's account of *Willard*. It is the story of a prince in the midst of festivities commemorating his coming-of-age, alongside his subjects and court. However, the party is interrupted by 'his authoritarian mother', the Queen, who insists that now he must marry and that a ball will be held the next day where he will have to choose a bride. 'Dreadful Oedipal atmosphere'. The Prince then goes on a hunt, presumably to enjoy his last moments of boyhood, and follows a flock of swans to a lake. When the swans are revealed to be maidens, the prince stops his

¹ Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, '1730: Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible...', in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism & Schizophrenia* (London and New York: Continuum, 1987), pp. 233-209 (p. 233). Henceforth referred to as 'Becoming-Animal'.

friends from shooting them; 'he spares one (or two or several)'. 'He likes the principal [swan] he saved', the queen of the swans, who reveals she is Princess Odette and that under the spell of a sorcerer they are imprisoned in the form of swans during the day. Only the true love of a man can break the spell, but if and only if he has never vowed to marry any other woman. The Prince then offers to save her by pledging her his love. During the ball the next day, the Prince is indeed presented to a number of maidens he mostly ignores, but the Prince 'experiences a pause in his destiny, in his *becoming-[swan]*': a new guest arrives with his daughter in tow. Although she is introduced as Odile, she looks exactly like Odette, which leads the Prince to believe she managed to attend the ball, in her human form. He 'tries with all his might to remain among humans. He even responds to the advances of a young woman in the [ball] who bears a strong "resemblance" to a [swan]—but it is only a resemblance'. The Prince seems, effectively, 'all set to be conjugalized, reoedipalized' in believing he can marry a human Odette. He swears eternal love to the evil copy Odile, only to realise he was deceived and that Odile's father was in fact the sorcerer. '[Odette] suddenly reappears', in swan form, through the window of the palace, 'throwing [the Prince] a long, hard [look]'. He runs to the lake to meet Odette, 'where a pack of countless [swans] is waiting for him', and explain, but the enchantment means that now she will remain in swan form forever. She prefers

to kill herself instead. For his regret, the Prince, too, commits suicide. His sacrifice is the sorcerer's downfall and he dies as well.²

I propose that Deleuze and Guattari find in *Willard* a paradigmatic structure of narrative and themes that was already present in *Swan Lake*, and fairy-tales before that:³ texts that present the lure of animal becomings which are more than merely a symbol of escape from restrictive human societies. The lines of flight, to use their term, engendered by these becomings-animal are not – at least not mainly – constructed on the basis of negation of human sociality. In the ballet, the Prince's sexuality (curtailed in its free expression by the parental indictment to procreate and contribute to the Oedipal structure) is rerouted towards dancing with swans beside the mysterious lake he encounters in the woods. As is clear in Matthew Bourne's 1995 new choreography to the ballet (which ultimately rewrites its libretto),⁴ the Prince's search for psychosexual liberation from Oedipalised territories engenders a flight that could be termed *queer*, to the extent that we might stretch the word to mean a borderline non-human sexuality.⁵

² All quotations describing *Swan Lake* are from Deleuze and Guattari, 'Becoming-Animal', p. 233. Plot summary adapted from Cyril William Beaumont, *The Ballet Called 'Swan Lake'* (Binsted: Dance Books, 2012), pp. 19-26.

³ Beaumont, *Swan Lake*, pp. 19-26.

⁴ In this version, the protagonist is clearly the Prince and all the swans are portrayed by male dancers.

⁵ Judith/Jack Halberstam produces a new understanding of *queer* in *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. There the focus is not such much on queer as a sexual concept, but as a different way of relating to temporalities: 'Queer uses of time and space develop, at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction. They also develop according to other logics of location, movement, and identification. If we try to think about queerness as an outcome of strange temporalities, imaginative life schedules, and eccentric economic practices, we detach queerness from sexual identity and come closer to understanding Foucault's comment [...] that "homosexuality threatens people as a 'way of life' rather than as a way of having sex'" ([New York: New York University Press, 2005], p. 1).

Admittedly, most audiences since the nineteenth century have read the ballet as the story of a girl who is transformed into a swan. This can be attested from the very first performances in Russia by their emphasis on the ballerina who plays both Odette and Odile.⁶ Both in Moscow and in Saint Petersburg, *Swan Lake* never seemed to awaken a questioning regarding the status of this animal transformation, what it meant for Odette or for the audience. The twentieth century has seen a preoccupation, however, with the character of the Prince. The story starts, after all, with him, and not with Odette. She will only make her first appearance in Act Two. It could be argued that focus on the Prince could bring to the surface the animality of the text, insofar as he is haunted by it at the very moment he hunts it, only to have it transform into the bride he is so hesitant to take. This emphasis reads the ballet as the staging of a young sexuality's indecision between the abandon offered by becoming-swan and the acceptance of Oedipal laws.

The tension between these two different narrative centres of gravity – Odette or the Prince – goes to the heart of the nature of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming-animal. On the one hand, it is clear that in a literal sense it is Odette which turns into an animal. On the other hand, reading the Prince's attraction to the swans as the real becoming-animal aligns the ballet more closely with other texts about animal lines of flight, such as some fairy tales. However, I shall ignore this tension as a false one, and I argue that this unclear functioning of becoming-animal (beyond both transformation and

⁶ Beaumont, pp. 19-26.

attraction) is due precisely to the extent to which it challenges (human) 'signifying projects' *absolutely*.

In order to analyse this challenge to signification, this chapter will read Darren Aronofsky's 2010 film *Black Swan* as a reworking of *Swan Lake* which in fact exposes the becoming-animal of the ballet for its disruptive qualities. By putting the ballerina Nina Sayers centre stage, the film conflates the Prince and Odette in one character who is both transformed into a swan and attracted to its non-Oedipal possibilities. However, if a certain attention to the character psychology of Nina in this densely psychoanalytic film is warranted, I propose an analysis of this becoming-swan which reads it for its textual effects in the film. Or rather, for its extra-textual effects.

Continuing the discussion of my previous chapters, in this chapter I propose that the arche-animality that I have formulated somehow escapes signifying projects and practices in a way which is similar to Deleuze and Guattari's becoming-animal's lines of flight. This escape, unlike the overdetermined field of (animal) embodiment, is not constituted by that from which it escapes and does not, ultimately, mean anything. This is particularly important for any reading of *Black Swan* since, at first sight, its intertextual relationship to Tchaikovsky's ballet seems to be one of *metaphor*. It is safe to say that the audience is led to believe that the madness suffered by the protagonist is caused (or least informed) by the libretto of the ballet on which she is working, so that her becoming-swan is revealed as a suggestive balletic hyperbole of madness. More than that, however, it is clear that the plot of the ballet is particularly challenging for the character due to her own psychosexual

plot. In other words, it would appear that a personal, 'real-life' psychosexual conflict is replaced by the ballet metaphor, which is in its turn duplicated metaphorically by Nina's mad bodily transformations.

Contrary to that, I argue that the arche-animality 'present' in the film (which is, as I have discussed, repressed by its animal signifiers) – or its becomings-animal – disrupts the metaphorical relations between the textual strata. What this means is both that (arche)animality resists signification (as understood by metaphysics), so as to foreground what Derrida and Barthes have termed *signifiance*, and that the laws of Oedipal psychosexuality have not so strong a grasp on reality. Becoming-swan, or becoming-arche-animal, challenges the stable hierarchy between reality and representation/metaphor by unseating the interiority of psychosexual subjectivity from its privileged position with respect to, among others, *fiction*.⁷ Becoming-swan may be a line of flight suggested by the ballet for escaping psychosexual normativity, but equally, such normality is also, to a certain extent, conditioned by the fictional libretto. *Black Swan*, therefore, exposes a certain *operatics* or *histrionics* of the Oedipus Complex.⁸

Rather than doing its classical metaphorical work, animality in *Black Swan* points to a way out of the oversignification of the psyche. Psychoanalysis,

⁷ As we saw, Husserl establishes that interiority not only as the grounding of reality but also as the yardstick separating essence from material accident. Conversely, the essential difference of auto-affection that Derrida reveals to be the condition of that interiority introduces a level of fictionality to the whole structure – in the silent monologue, the integrity of psychical interiority is *a story one tells oneself*.

⁸ The latter should be read, of course, in light of the previous discussion of its emergence in *Totem and Taboo*, and also in Lacanian terms as the process through which the subject accedes to language.

as critiqued by Deleuze and Guattari, strives to map all phenomena into the Oedipal territory with which it is familiar. Becoming-animal is precisely the resistance to this territorialisation. As such, it mirrors arche-animality in its independence from the stifling dialectics of meaning and representation.

I start my discussion with a brief outline of the film's plot as evidenced by my analysis of one crucial scene, along with what could be called a standard Lacanian interpretation. After that, I delve more deeply into some of the thematic strands that organise the textuality of the film and set up its investment in arche-animality. I move on to discuss animal representation more specifically, which leads me into its role in psychoanalysis in general, and especially in Freud's case-study about the Wolf Man. I read Freud's account for its disruptive arche-animality, before connecting it both to Deleuze and Guattari's becoming-animal and the film's becoming-swan.

Mirrored swans

In a crucial scene in *Black Swan*, Nina and her mother Erica are both reflected in a three-part mirror while adjusting Nina's ballet slippers, but in a cross-



Fig. 1 Nina and her mother Erica reflected in the three-part mirror, whose central portion remains empty.

reflection: Nina is reflected next to her mother and Erica is reflected close to Nina.⁹ What is especially striking in this cross-identification reflection is the fact that the central mirror does not reflect anything. Something in the three-part structure suggested by the mirror is missing in this moment of mother-daughter mirroring (Fig. 1).¹⁰

The scene seems to inquire about the element suggested by such absence. The familial context would invite the image of a father, or another female element halfway between mother and daughter, a sort of intermediate state between girl and woman. The alignment of the central mirror with the frame, however, seems to suggest the appearance of the viewer's own reflection, or of the filmic apparatus (camera, director, etc.). The growing distance between mother and daughter that has been building up in the film prior to this scene might indicate the reason for such a gap between the two reflections, as well as the larger distance between Nina and the mirror.

Of the film's many scenes containing mirrors, this may be the one which most warrants a Lacanian reading, one which would argue that the connection between mother and daughter depicted in the film is a metaphor for Lacan's Imaginary order, which is precisely concluded by the Mirror Stage.¹¹ According to that, Nina is being smothered by her mother's Imaginary identification in which Nina is the phallic signifier which compensates for Erica's failed career.

⁹ It seems relevant, too, that Nina's reflection appears much closer to her mother than the latter's to herself.

¹⁰ *Black Swan*, dir. Darren Aronofsky (Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2010).

¹¹ The Imaginary order is either concluded by the mirror stage or is, at least, characterised primarily by it. Nevertheless, one must go through the mirror stage order to overcome the Imaginary.

Because of that, Nina seeks in the mirrors that surround her the possibility of constructing an ego of her own. But precisely because of her 'madness' (which would be a result of her mother's domination), mirrors do not offer her anything other than *doubles* – images which she does not recognize as herself. And the father figure, which by means of the Name of the Father would structure the 'healthy' girl's sexuality when she enters the Symbolic order, is only marginally present due to the mother's exaggerated influence. Erica does not admit that Nina break the child-like relationship with the mother and identify with the image of a woman, sexually available to a man-father. Because of that, Nina sees her own impulses which desire precisely that as another person: her understudy or alternate, the sensuous Lily.

The dual structure of a personality that does not identify with its own double is introduced primarily by Nina's professional dilemma as the soloist in *Swan Lake*, having to dance two completely different characters. To be cast as both Swans, Nina must capture the male attention of the company director, Thomas. In this quest, she identifies with the company's prima ballerina who is about to retire, Beth, who enjoys an enviable intimacy with him. Nina wishes to impress the director, to be able to "seduce" him and catch his attention like Beth.

Such rivalry for male attention is sharpened during the auditions for the soloist in Tchaikovsky's ballet. Nina easily expresses the sweetness and vulnerability of the White Swan, but she must also show skill with the sensual choreography for the Black Swan. Thomas tells her to 'show [him her] Black

Swan', but during the famous *fouettés* in Odile's Coda,¹² Nina is interrupted by Lily's bursting into the room and slamming the door, appropriately dressed all in black. Nina loses balances, and stumbles, and when she asks Thomas if she should try again, she must wait for several seconds for his negative answer while he admires Lily.

The psychoanalytical structuring of the film is thus clear: Nina wishes to be desired by Thomas, the father figure, and for that she identifies with Beth as her adult *imago*. However, the typical process of the mirror stage which would have her identify in her own body the image (even if a false one) of a coherent and mature being is problematic for Nina. Her domineering mother seems to preclude such identification, and thus Nina displaces this ego-ideal to her rival Lily. She is then visited by the 'phantasm of the broken down body' – the incoherent and fragmented body of early childhood which is mitigated by self-identification in the mirror stage – when her body apparently starts to dissolve.

That both scenes described above (the one with the three-part mirror, and that of the audition) feature mirrors prominently is understandable in a film about ballet. Dancers follow their own dancing in their mirrored reflections so as to assess their skill: that is the diegetic reason for the large

¹² The execution of thirty-two consecutive *fouettés en tournant* is a traditional ballet move now strongly associated with virtuosity and technical achievement. It was originated by Italian dancer Pierina Legnani in 1893 in Marius Petipa's choreography for Fitinhoff-Schell's *Cinderella*, in St. Petersburg. After that, it was famously included in Petipa's choreography of *Swan Lake*, being therefore consecrated as the pinnacle of balletic technique from then on. It possibly gained special traction from its inclusion in *Swan Lake* due to its apparent importance to the plot itself: in the libretto, it is the Black Swan Odile, in trying to seduce the prince, who executes the move, in a clear exhibitionist fashion. It is, moreover, unclear whether *dancing*, in this scene, can still be considered a 'mere' aspect of the genre, or whether the characters are indeed diegetically dancing. It could be argued, therefore, that the character Odile herself is performing an impressive ballet feat in a courtly ball, in a clear balletic breaking of the fourth wall.

mirrors which are present even in Nina's apartment, where she practises. Cinematically, on the other hand, mirrors both explore the nature of the screen itself (as well as other optic apparatuses, such as lenses), and visually represent characters' relationships to themselves. Thematically, *Black Swan* revels in the latter cinematic function (as well as the diegetic one), whereas an even stronger impact may be garnered by the former function, of mirrors as textual hinges between different realms of signification. All these functions seem to coalesce around the prominent Lacanian concept of the mirror stage, which is, not surprisingly as I hope to show, conceptually formulated in relation to animality.

Lacan states that the 'conception' of the mirror stage 'originated in a feature of *human* behaviour illuminated by a fact of *comparative* psychology',¹³ that is, a comparison of human and animal psychologies. A human child, he describes,

at an age when he is for a time, however short, outdone by the chimpanzee in instrumental intelligence, can nevertheless already recognize as such his own image in a mirror. [...] This act, far from exhausting itself, as in the case of the monkey, once the image has been mastered and found empty, immediately rebounds in the case of the child in a series of gestures in which he experiences in play the relation between the movements assumed in the image and the reflected environment.¹⁴

For *Black Swan*, Lacan's grounding of the mirror stage on species difference seems particularly crucial since it is, according to most accounts, a film about the horror of one's double when it takes an untameable animal form.

¹³ Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience', in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 1-6 (p. 1), my emphases.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

In other words, the horror seems to lie on the fact that the otherness of her double, besides clearly emanating from herself, reveals the otherness of animality. In the plot, doubling is triggered by Nina's professional requirement to both perform two characters,¹⁵ and to outperform her rival – and later understudy – Lily, who threatens to take both roles. It certainly does not help that most ballet dancers shown in the film look similar.¹⁶ The paradoxical working of the mirror stage – where one's reflected image is, to a certain extent, both self and other – is clearly reproduced in the plot of the film: Nina must identify with Odile in order to play her, but is constantly projecting the character onto Lily, who supposedly embodies it more easily.

Viewers are led to believe that the animal shape taken by this double is thoroughly informed by the libretto of the ballet. Because Nina's problem is tackling the Black Swan as a character (which, we learn, means locating within herself a freer sexuality than the one she is used to), she sees herself being threatened in her hallucinations by the large, black bird of *Swan Lake*, which

¹⁵ In the plot of *Swan Lake*, Odette and Odile – the White and the Black Swan – are clearly two different characters, who only look the same under the influence of magic. However, it is telling that Thomas, the ballet director in *Black Swan*, constantly frames them as two sides of the same woman, as when he talks about the White Swan's 'metamorphosis into her evil twin'. Patricia Belzil argues that Thomas 'insists on the metamorphosis as if the two *personae* inhabited the same body, whence the role's inherent schizophrenia' ('Noir Cygne de Perfection', *Jeu: Revue de théâtre*, 140 [2011], 129-134 [p. 132], my translation). It could be argued, of course, that the staging that Thomas is directing is already based on his psychoanalytic reading of the ballet, where the two characters are indeed supposed to represent two aspects of the same persona.

¹⁶ Accordingly, Barbara Nelson reads *Black Swan* alongside *Jane Eyre* for their wealth of interchangeable females. The similar body types and dress of ballerinas, as well as their quick disposal for the sake of new talent, strikes Nelson as a symptom of the same patriarchal structure that allows Rochester to 'recycle' women. That Nina is disposable and easily replaceable by another dancer certainly fuels her anxiety regarding her inefficiencies and Lily's prowess, and is cast in stark light by the fact that, ultimately, she took Beth's place just as she fears Lily might take hers. For Nelson, 'Nina replays and re-reads her former life, recognizing that she was always, already the Black Swan (from other's perspectives, such as Beth's, and innately)' ('Two Ways of Looking at a Blackbird: Darren Aronofsky's *Black Swan*', *Cinematographic Art & Documentation*, 5 (2012), 29-36 (p. 34)).

comes to stand both for the sensual Lily and for the her own stifled sexual persona. It certainly must have occurred to Nina that *having her place taken* by a seductive but otherwise identical woman is precisely the fate of Odette – that would be, indeed, the psychological, or even Oedipal, reading of the animal double in the film. I propose, however, that a more thorough perusal of the signifying practices undertaken by the film when exposing its plotlines can point to a different understanding of becoming-swan with regard to the suffocatingly multi-layered textuality around it. That is, one can read the animal in the text – the swan – as the product of repression of arche-animality.

Transcendanse

The premise outlined above regarding the dual role of Black and White Swan is introduced very early in the film and codified throughout, in a signifying saturation which recalls the over-determination of dreams (see Fig. 2, Fig. 3, and Fig. 4). In one of the first scenes, Nina informs her mother, a retired dancer, that the company director may feature her more prominently this season, to which her mother replies: 'Well, he certainly should. You've been there long enough.' The comment is clearly not well received by Nina, who detects the implication that she is getting old and that her position is threatened by younger dancers.



Fig. 2 The dancers in the collective warm-up display the black-and-white palette of the film.



Fig. 3 Thomas's office displays a monochromatic colour scheme.



Fig. 4 Thomas's apartment is similarly black and white.

In the underground on the way to the theatre, Nina is reflected in the darkened window of the train, whose arrival at a station, rushing by lights and other trains, is accompanied by the rustling sounds of flapping wings, which are also visually represented in her feathery scarf. While Nina admires her own reflection and contemplates whether her place will be taken by another, the film frames this mirroring and doubling movement in animal, bird terms, foreshadowing the Black Swan as the signifier for the usurping doppelgänger (Fig. 5).

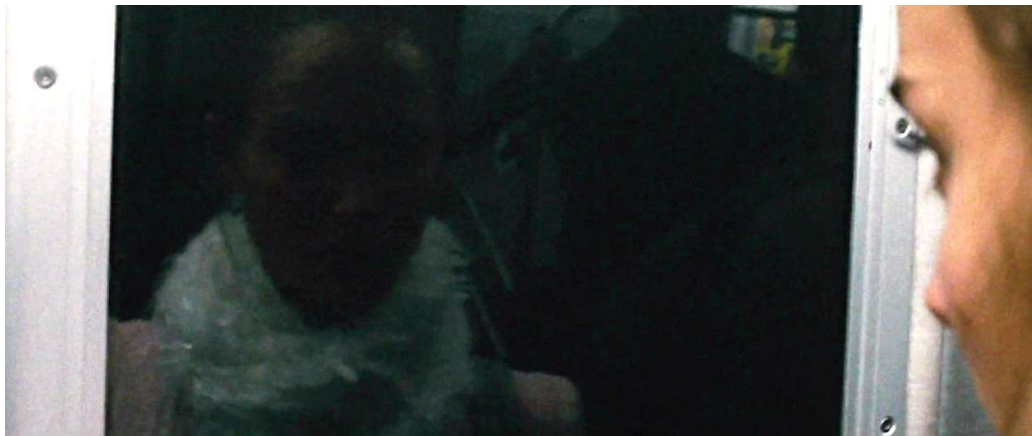


Fig. 5 Nina stares into her poor reflection in the darkened glass of the subway window.

If the glass of the train window functions as a somewhat successful reflector, the more effectively transparent glass of the door between two wagons offers what appears to be a truer mirroring. Through the door, she sees a girl in the next wagon who looks very much like her and is wearing her hair the same way, but is dressed in dark clothes. The girl indeed has *the same face*, since she is in fact being played by Natalie Portman (Fig. 6). While staring puzzlingly at her doppelgänger, who has quickly turned her face away, Nina notices that her own brushing of her hair behind her ear is

mirrored by the girl.¹⁷ Whereas the actual reflection seen in the window is a poor, blurry image, the reality beyond the glass door not only looks but also acts the same. Thus, this initial scene blurs the essential distinction between transparent glass and reflective mirror, exterior reality and self-referential interiority. This blurring has consequences both for the thematic concerns of the film – the double is both inside and outside oneself – but also to the functioning of its visual textuality.

Replacing and doubling continues to be explored in the next scenes: Nina stops to admire the two identical season promotion posters featuring the retiring prima ballerina Beth, obviously hoping to take her place, and in the female dancers' dressing room, the topic of conversation is precisely Beth's refusal to realise that she is past the age when she could attract audiences. The room is so crowded with mirrors, that the viewer can easily feel lost as to the number of girls in it and their position relative one another (Fig. 7).



Fig. 6 Point-of-view shot of Nina looking through the glass doors at her doppelgänger.

¹⁷ What is interesting and perhaps telling is that, to show us that they are both brushing their hair simultaneously, the film cuts from the doppelgänger's movement to Nina half-way through her own, who looks clearly taken aback by being copied by the stranger. In a way, it could be said that, due to the editing order, it is Nina who is mirroring the girl.



Fig. 7 In the dressing room, the dancers are surrounded by mirrors.

During their collective warm-up, the dancers are joined by Thomas, the company director, who summarises the plot of *Swan Lake*:

We all know the story. Virginal girl, pure and sweet, trapped in the body of a swan. She desires freedom, but only true love can break the spell. Her wish is nearly granted in the form of a prince. But before he can declare his love, her lustful twin, the Black Swan, tricks and seduces him. Devastated, the White Swan leaps off a cliff, killing herself, and in death finds freedom.

He then pronounces his challenge: 'Which of you can embody both swans? The white and the black.' And regarding the staleness of *Swan Lake* as a standard part of the repertoire, he argues that it has 'not [been done] like this. We strip it down, make it visceral and real.' This new production thus 'needs a new Swan Queen. A fresh face to present to the world.' In his presentation, Thomas reveals a great deal about his interpretation of the ballet. If the dancers act towards him as if he were a Prince figure, pining for his attention and approval, it is clear that he is also Rothbart (Fig. 8), willing to transform a girl into a seductive performer for a captivated audience (taken to mean the Prince and

the ball guests, the ballet audience, and the wider world both inside and outside the film).¹⁸



Fig. 8 Thomas's reflection is split between two mirrors; he is both Prince and Rothbart.

Thomas's version of *Swan Lake* is, as many others, the story of Odette, and not the Prince. But more than that, it is the story of Odette's *body*, as woman, as swan, and as image to be copied by Odile. The bodily prison of swan-being registers as a familiar Cartesian indictment against the human (animal) body itself as a cage for true humanity – spiritual reason and, in this case, love. Descartes's metaphysical belief that all bodies are animal bodies – and that all animals are machinic – is literalised in the ballet in the story of a human inside an animal body. Not even Odette's 'actual' human body – her woman form – escapes the logocentric contempt for embodiment, since this body is easily and fraudulently copied. Nothing essential adheres to a body, Thomas's ballet seems to tell us. This is even more strikingly clear in his interpretation of the climax, in which bodily death equals liberty. Therefore, it is safe to say that his

¹⁸ Later, one of his directions to Nina performing the Black Swan is to 'seduce us, not just the Prince, but the court, the audience, the entire world'.

version of *Swan Lake* is 'visceral' only to the extent that it enacts an aversion of and an escape from viscera, a disdain for the mortality of the animal bodies of humans, which will become even clearer in Thomas's assessment of Nina after she begs for the part.

The actual audition is interesting for a number of reasons, not least because the viewer can see Nina dance for the first time.¹⁹ She is dancing the White Swan part and the audience (which includes the viewer, Thomas, and other dancers) is supposed to be impressed by her performance, so that Thomas tells her that if he were only casting Odette, she would clearly be the right choice – but alas, subjectivity is not so simple, and Nina as the subject must struggle with her double. As is expected, the audition room is surrounded by mirrors, where we can constantly see Nina's reflections as the camera moves around her. Most interestingly, the camera does not show in the mirror: even though the cinematic point of view of the moving hand-held camera gets aligned with a mirror more than once, the camera fails to be captured by specularly (see Fig. 9 and Fig. 10).

¹⁹ Natalie Portman's ballet training before filming received considerable media coverage and may have been responsible for her Academy Award for Best Actress. However, it was probably known to most viewers that special effects and camera tricks were used to create the impression she could actually dance ballet, while she in fact used a dance double, Sarah Lane, in the most technically challenging scenes. Ironically for a film concerning the danger posed by understudies, a controversy originated regarding the extent to which Lane's work was not given full credit: an entire Wikipedia page is dedicated to this polemic (Wikipedia contributors, 'Black Swan dance double controversy', *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/> [accessed 6 June 2015]). The double Lane claims she was even asked by producers not to give interviews before the Oscars ceremony, presumably to preserve the fantasy that Portman had indeed danced all her scenes (Christopher John Farley and Sarah Lane, 'Natalie Portman's "Black Swan" Dance Double Says She Deserves More Credit', *The Wall Street Journal*, available at <http://blogs.wsj.com/speakeasy/2011/03/26/natalie-portman's-black-swan-dance-double-says-she-deserves-more-credit/> [accessed 6 June 2015]).



Fig. 9 The camera has been digitally erased so that it is not visible behind Thomas's reflection.



Fig. 10 The camera, clearly positioned near Portman's right arm, is not visible in the mirror.

Whereas in the three-part mirror scene I mentioned earlier the camera could have been concealed by a mere tilt of the mirror frame, during the audition it is clear that it has been digitally erased. Such refusal to allow the cinematic apparatus to be visually captured by reflective surfaces resonates with by now classic discussions in film theory regarding the place of the gaze in filmic discourse. Laura Mulvey, initially, but also others have argued that the seeing perspective of the camera is constituted (psychoanalytically) as a

masculine gaze that objectifies female bodies.²⁰ If we include the mirror stage in this psychoanalytic discussion, one may conclude that the masculine seeing apparatus refuses to undergo the series of resemblances, (mis)identifications, and visual (self-)seduction that constitutes 'normal' subjectivity. In other words, if Nina cannot be cast only as the White Swan – if she has to come to terms with the double in the mirror who is both her and not her – it seems that masculine identity (here clearly aligned with Thomas's) can forgo that in order to reach its home in the Symbolic, safe from haunting, visually-constituted embodiment. This gender-biased specularity is relevant both for *Black Swan's* filmic nature but also for its operatic background. Insofar as romantic ballet and opera were clearly intertwined, *Swan Lake* is 'about the death of women', as Catherine Clément argues in her book *Opera, or The Undoing of Women*. Opera, for her, and here one can see the import to male invisibility in *Black Swan*, is about the 'countless forms in which men want and want not to hear the woman's voice . . . to know and not know what she knows about men's desires'.²¹ In this light, Thomas's focus on Odette/Odile to the expense of the

²⁰ Cf. Laura Mulvey, 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema', *Screen* 16 (1975), 6–18. In a sense, this is the case even if they are the bodies of *males*. Dancers, especially, are affected by the objectification of bodies in performance. Pietro Banchi argues that discipline and practice aim at 'making the body of the dancer [*danzatrice*] an object put to use so as to embody [*incarnare*] without remainders or imperfections the object of the Other's desire (whence the primarily [*elettivamente*] feminine nature of the dancer [*di chi danza*], whether man or woman)' ('La Ferita del Desiderio' [The Wound of Desire], *Cineforum* 502 (2001), 32–34 (p. 33), my translation).

²¹ Catherine Clément, quoted in Cary Wolfe, 'When You Can't Believe Your Eyes (or Voice): *Dancer in the Dark*', in *What is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2010), pp. 169–202 (p. 174). The invisibility of males in *Black Swan* results in the film's failure to pass what has come to be termed the *Reverse Bechdel Test*. The Bechdel Test, introduced by and named after Alison Bechdel, rates films from 0 to 3 points on whether they fulfil the following criteria, each one worth one point: '[a] The movie has to have at least two women in it, [b] who talk to each other, [c] about something besides a man.' (*Bechdel Test Movie List*, available at <http://bechdeltest.com/> [accessed 6 June 2015]) The purpose of the test seems to be to highlight the fact that an alarming number of films cannot pass what are widely fulfilled criteria

Prince is articulated with the invisibility of the camera – and of the father figure in the three-part mirror. Men, Clément would say, want not to have their own sexuality narrated,²² or captured in the never-ending reflections of truth and image in the mirror stage.

As described above, Nina fails the Black Swan portion of the audition due to Lily's interruption (or to Nina's displacement onto Lily of her own limitations, triggered by the repression of her inner Black Swan²³), so she decides to try and convince Thomas to change his mind the next day. This scene is crucial not only because she does succeed in getting the part, but because during it Thomas expounds on his metaphysics of dance.²⁴ We learn that he has no criticisms of Nina's technique, but that he has never seen her 'lose herself' while dancing, and without such abandon she cannot dance the Black Swan. Nina claims that she 'just want[s] to be perfect', but for Thomas, 'perfection is not just about control. It's also about letting go. Surprise yourself so you can surprise the audience. Transcendence. Very few have it in them.'

in its Reverse form: as a rule, mainstream films seem to be made with the Reverse Bechdel Test in mind. It is, therefore, symptomatic of the male invisibility I am discussing that no two males are ever shown to converse in *Black Swan* about something other than the female dancers.

²² Matthew Bourne's version of *Swan Lake*, with a Prince protagonist and an all-male cast of swans, would seem to offer the precise opposite possibility: the thematisation of male sexuality. Its queer aesthetics, therefore, seems to stem from the very fact that masculinity is *not* made invisible – visibility thus both objectifies and eroticises.

²³ This is suggested by Nina's second failure to finish the 32 *fouettés* when practising in front of the mirror at home later. This time, she is interrupted by a searing pain in her toe, which turns out to be a bloody, broken toenail. Her own body and Lily are thus allied in frustrating her virtuoso move.

²⁴ Next to his office's window and reflecting the window light, Thomas has a framed poster of the Bournonville ballet *La Ventana* [The Window] (Fig. 11). In one of its most famous scenes, a 'señorita' dances with her own reflection while reminiscing about a man she met. From the window she hears the sounds of his serenading, and she dances to his music from the window ('La Ventana', *Bournonville.com*, available at <http://www.bournonville.com/bournonville31.html> [accessed 6 June 2015]). The poster, and the plot to which it refers, works to collapse a series of framing devices – mirror, window, picture frame – not unlike the blurring of opaque, reflective glass and transparent window produced in the train scene.

Thomas's theories of art and dance are, unsurprisingly, akin to his take on *Swan Lake*: bodily technique, for him, can only take the dancer so far.

Technique, and the body itself, is only a tool the dancer-artist uses in order to express an artistic vision. The Black Swan may be carnal and seductive, but Nina is, ironically, *too embodied* to play her, since Thomas believes she would need to sever her intimate connection to her own body in order, precisely, to transcend it. At this point, the rhetoric of animality seems confused and scattered along Thomas's discourse and mine. For Thomas in fact insists that Nina *touch herself* in order to unleash the sensuality she ought to portray. This is one of the first evidences of the fact that the supplementary work of arche-animality articulates so many textual elements in *Black Swan* that animal rhetoric seems to occupy many, diverging positions.



Fig. 11 Thomas's framed poster of the ballet *La Ventana* next to the window.

One of these positions is the aspect I discussed above regarding the metaphysical dualism of Thomas's libretto, in which animal bodies constitute nothing but cages for human souls. This is reworked by his exposition of his

beliefs about art – what I call his belief in *transcendanse*.²⁵ *Transcendanse* is precisely the ultimate instrumentalisation of (and contempt for) the dancing body so as to make it convey ideal artistic content. True virtuosic achievement transcends the body and lies outside it, even though it must initially stem from within, since some ('very few') 'have it *in* them'. Thus, the body contains that which will transcend it and in so doing make true art, all the while failing to be acknowledged as such an origin.²⁶

This dance neologism is closely related to another one, by Lacan, which will be especially relevant for reading Nina's becoming-swan. In 'Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious', he refers to what he calls the animal's *dancity* (*dansité, densité + danse*). While discussing the deception of Speech and of the signifier, Lacan concedes that animals are capable of some level of pretence, 'to be found in physical combat or sexual display' or hunting, and is 'deployed in imaginary capture, and is integrated into the play of approach and rejection that constituted the original dance, in which these two *vital* situations find their rhythm, and in accord with which the partners ordered their movements'.²⁷ This animal possibility of pretence, however, is still essentially different from that of a human subject, who is,

²⁵ Thomas Leroy is a French character – I believe that he would hear the word *danse* in the French word *transcendanse*.

²⁶ In his analysis of the film, Pietro Bianchi frames *Black Swan* as a discourse on the body as that which is the *object* of dance as an art form, instead of its subject. For him, 'dance thematises [...] the division that traverses any subject: if the body is the *object* of dance, who is its subject?' ('La Ferita', p. 32, my translation). To all purposes, the dance subject is outside it, the director or choreographer, 'an Other, [...] who would like to reduce the body to an objectified element of representation, played in this film by Vincent Cassell' (ibid., my translation).

²⁷ Lacan, cited in Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, ed. by Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. by David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press), p. 129.

according to Lacan, a subject of the signifier. That means that, while animals are *captured* in the density of the Imaginary's dance, human deception belongs to the Symbolic. This formulation is, of course, deeply interrelated to his conceptualisation of the mirror stage as an apparatus of Imaginary capture.

Derrida's critical reading of Lacan in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*²⁸ is useful for my analysis of *Black Swan* since Derrida is able to deconstruct the opposition between human and animal relations to the signifier and the mirror in Lacan so that the 'animality' of Nina's body can be understood to be located prior to the distinction between *transcendanse* and *dancity*. Derrida's interpretation is centred around the question of the opposition between *reaction* and *response*. However ambitious and innovative Lacan's thought proved to be regarding animality in comparison to the philosophical tradition, Derrida still detects an irreducible Cartesianism in Lacan's insistence that the animal can only react, and not respond. Mere reaction is, of course, all that Descartes thought an animal conceived along the lines of a programmable automaton was capable of. In this distinction we can see summarised the dilemma set up by *Black Swan*: in Thomas's view, Nina's technique is so perfect to the point of automatic predictability and is thus not able to respond to the artistic and emotional requirements of the role.

²⁸ The section 'And Say the Animal Responded?' in *The Animal Therefore I Am* (pp. 119-140) was repeated by Derrida as part of the lectures now comprising the published seminar *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume 1* (Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume 1*, ed. by Michel Lisse, Marie-Louise Mallet, and Ginette Michaud, trans. by Geoffrey Bennington [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009], pp. 111-135).

Derrida shows that Lacan's reaction/response and animal/human oppositions are based upon a theory of Otherness. He quotes Lacan:

The Other as previous site of the pure subject of the signifier holds the master position. [...] One can speak of a code only if it is already the code of the Other, [...] since it is from this code that the subject is constituted, which means that it is from the Other that the subject receives even the message that he emits.²⁹

Of course, for Lacan the very accession and relation to Otherness will depend on a certain response to the mirror stage. It is by means of the subject's self-recognition/mis-recognition in the mirror that he or she will be able to identify the Other, starting with the imago. If Derrida signals that Lacan goes beyond the traditional thinking on animals by granting animals access to the Imaginary (the mirror stage), he also criticises Lacan for denying them a way out. Thus:

the passage through the mirror forever immobilized the animal, according to Lacan, within the snare of the imaginary, thus depriving it of any access to the symbolic, that is to say, to the law and to whatever is held to be proper to the human.³⁰

This reaction/response, Imaginary/Symbolic distinction is thus mapped onto another one between *pretending* and *pretending to pretend*. The human subject, by breaking free of Imaginary capture in the specular image, accedes to the Symbolic and to the signifier, which grants him or her the ability to mislead the Other by telling the truth under the assumption the Other will take it as a lie.³¹ That underscores for Lacan the sovereignty of the signifier and symbolic meaning with respect to reality – or, to be precise, the difference

²⁹ Lacan, cited in Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, p. 120. Omissions are mine.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Likewise, one could, conversely, tell the truth by providing false information to an Other who one knows will expect a lie.

between truth and fact. By being subject of and subjected to the signifier, the human subject can utter either truth or un-truth independent of the factual content of his or her utterance. Here we could call this delicate deception game *transcendanse*, since it describes a human dance in which truth can transcend fact (and lie can transcend falsehood). The Imaginary, animalistic opposite of that is what Lacan calls *dancity*, in which the animal, for not having access to the signifier and to the Symbolic, can only simply deceive. Derrida explains that '*dancity* refers to the capacity to pretend by means of a dance or lure, by means of the choreography of the hunt or seduction, the parade that is practiced before lovemaking or as a movement of self-protection when making war'.³²

Crucially, the reason why the human breaks away from the Imaginary, as we say with Butler and Belau, refers to a certain human lack that the animal lacks. It is precisely because of this lack that the human will find so much solace in the mis-/self-recognition of his or her own image in the mirror, and thus construct the ego, obey the Symbolic order etc. Derrida points out that this logic follows 'the tried and true biblical and Promethean tradition', which 'relates the fixity of animal determinism [...] to a type of originary perfection of that animal'.³³ The human thus 'receive[s] speech and technics only inasmuch as he lacks something',³⁴ which Derrida identifies as central to Lacan's writing on the mirror stage as the 'fact of the real *specific prematurity of birth* in man'.³⁵

³² Ibid., p. 128.

³³ Ibid., p. 122.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Lacan, cited in Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, p. 122. Emphasis is Lacan's.

In *Black Swan*, Thomas upholds that the body of the (human) dancer, despite being her 'animal part', should deal with a circulation of signifiers, and with them make art. The reflection in a mirror of a properly human dancing body should provide the dancer with the identification necessary for recognition and confirmation, as well as displacement of the bodily morphé onto other fellow dancers. Conversely, the overly technical characterisation of Nina's dancing body frames her as simply projecting an image of artistic achievement. The film shows us an animalistic capture by the mirror in the way she is captivated before her own reflection in her attempt to transcend her limitations. Crucially, her reflected image, even before it morphs into hallucinations, presents the challenge of an Other rather than the confirmation of the self. And, of course, once her reflection begins to move of its own accord, the collapse of the mirror stage function is complete, and the self-recognition that should lead into an understanding of otherness gives way to a sense of threat from the self-as-other.

Under that light, it is especially important to consider the meaning of Nina's bodily transformations into the black swan. As Thomas or any of the other dancers could have told her, the job of the dancers in *Swan Lake* is not exactly to pretend that they are swans. The swan imagery is achieved by means of a Symbolic system, which seeks to erase and transcend the actual movements of the dancing body. In her psychosis, however, Nina seems to literalise the necessity of transcending bodily technique in order to reach the swan: from her body a swan literally emerges. This becoming-swan is precisely that which I argue to undermine the distinction between *transcendence* and

dancity, between a responsible artistic achievement and a reactive technical ability. If *transcendanse* views the (always human) body as a transparent signifier that can disappear to allow artistic meaning to show forth, *dancity* describes the (always animal) body that is opaque and dense: a pure image that can only reproduce itself mechanically (whether in the mirror or not).

Becoming-swan is the hidden paleonym of this dichotomy: it is the non-worldly materiality of the trace that is both material and immaterial and makes possible both *transcendanse* and *dancity*. Thus, the human body – rather than transcending or being equal to an animal – both means and is the *arche*-animal.

This is the conclusion that Derrida reaches in his reading of Lacan. The difference between reaction and response, and between pretence and deception (the possibility of pretending to pretend), cannot be sustained in its purity, since, especially in Lacan, ‘the unconscious is founded on a logic of repetition’, which inscribes iterability and mechanicity in the very functioning of the signifier. And because language – and Lacan admits that – is precisely that non-worldly materiality. Finally, if ‘it is from the Other that the subject receives even the message that he emits’, that means that the difference between reaction and response must be reconfigured, since even a human response would contain a trace of a mechanical, non-sovereign reaction.

Film critic A. O. Scott identifies a very similar tension in the film when he writes that ‘the subject of *Black Swan* [...] is the relationship, in art, between

technique and emotion'.³⁶ However, the status of *emotion* remains unclear: if opposed to the mechanicity of technique it can register as profoundly human; as opposed to humanist rationality, though, emotion promises an inhuman, carnal realm of possibilities. The latter formulation is explored in depth by Ariel Osterweis in her 'Disciplining *Black Swan*, Animalizing Ambition', in which she places technique firmly on the side of the human world, and emotion and *ecstasy* on the side of carnality and animality. Therefore, she argues:

Black Swan portrays artistic ambition through Nina's – and Odette/Odile's – erratic transformation from human to animal. [...] Aronofsky draws out the tension between technique's mechanical, disciplining function and the refined, animalistic characteristics of ecstasy. In doing so, he recognizes the idea that technique is often thought to provide formal tools with which an artist can express carnal emotion. [...] That Nina grows larger-than-life black feathered wings during the culminating *fouetté* turn sequence of *Swan Lake* [...] is significant, marking the point at which the pinnacle of her technical achievement coincides with raw animalistic attributes associated with the ecstatic. [...] Nina and her own "other" evoke the struggle of the artist to achieve balance between the human capability to master mechanical technique and the untamed animalistic emotion necessary to sustain ambition and evoke passion onstage.³⁷

Osterweis seems to second Thomas in her belief that an artistic truth must be extracted from within Nina's technically mobilised body,³⁸ and that becoming-swan is the signifier of its liberation. Interiority, however, functioned according to the opposite logic in Thomas's account of *Swan Lake*, since there it was the case of a human being liberated from within an animal. Also, both

³⁶ A. O. Scott, 'Natalie Portman Embraces Monster and Victim', *New York Times*, 30 December 2010 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/02/movies/awardsseason/02scot.html>> [accessed 21 May 2017].

³⁷ Ariel Osterweis, 'Disciplining *Black Swan*, Animalizing Ambition', in *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and the Popular Screen*, ed. by Melissa Blanco Borelli (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 68-82 (pp. 71, 74).

³⁸ She writes: 'Human body parts are mangled and removed, and what remains are wounds from which the animalistic emerges' (ibid., p. 73, my emphasis).

Thomas and Osterweis seem to overlook the logic according to which the animalistic and the mechanical share the same space as the non-human, as that which operates automatically, unstoppably and is instrumentalised by human intention. In short, they ignore both Descartes's conflation of animals and machines and the logic of supplementarity which grounds it: to human spiritual intentionality, both embodiment itself and machinery represent prosthetic supplements. The confusing status of some terms in the chain of supplements, such as *carnality*, *emotion*, and *ecstasy*, is explored in depth by Derrida in *Of Grammatology* with respect to Rousseau, but may be tracked in the Cartesian discussion at hand: both the mechanicity of technics and spontaneous ecstasy may figure either prior to or after humanity.³⁹ I believe Osterweis exposes this work of supplementarity when she refers to 'bodily technique', crucially when comparing it to techniques of the cinematic apparatus:⁴⁰ if technique may be bodily, if human's 'animal component' may be an instrument of technique, it is not clear how this same animal embodiment may give rise to carnality as the other of technics. This philosophical promiscuity, as it were, of the concept of animality in signifying practices (such as in *Black Swan*) is, I have argued, an effect of the repression of arche-animality, by means of which the vulgar

³⁹ Technicity may be seen as present in the automatic world of animal instinct, which the advent of humanity breaks by means of reason and intentionality, but may also be feared/adored as that which comes to supplement, via culture, a vulnerable human nature. On the other hand, carnality can be located in the immanence of animal-being, consequently interrupted by human rationality, or as a posterior remedy for corrupt, overly mechanised humanity, as Osterweis suggests is Nina's case.

⁴⁰ 'In terms of virtuosity, *Black Swan* creates a parallel between the cinematic apparatus (the full schematic technicity of cinema, including camerawork) and the dancer's bodily technique, an alternating concealment and exposure of the mechanical' (Osterweis, 'Disciplining *Black Swan*', p. 74).

concept of the animal is produced and textually scattered for diverse rhetorical uses.

Ci-ferae

In his *CIFERAE: A Bestiary in Five Fingers*, Tom Tyler writes extensively about some of these rhetorical treatments of animals in which the latter ‘are nonentitites, of no importance or worth in their own rights, designated to “fill a place”, [...] codes awaiting interpretation, [...] symbolic characters in animal form, hieroglyphs utilized by philosophy that a meaning might be conveyed’, in what amounts, in Tyler’s words, to a ‘textual abuse’.⁴¹ This is what he terms *ciphers*, which he traces etymologically to the Sanskrit for ‘empty’ and then, later, to the sixteenth century meaning ‘of a person or thing “who fills a place, but is of no importance of worth” in its own right. The real power residing elsewhere, the cipher remains “a nonentity, a ‘mere nothing’” – cipherous animals, thus, ‘do little more in the text than fill a place’.⁴² Tyler takes issue especially with the arbitrary fashion in which most animals are employed as ciphers, since almost any other animal or even thing could play the same role in the philosophical discussions he analyses. Therefore, he believes ‘we must cease to understand them as arbitrarily chosen placeholders, unwittingly serving some higher pedagogic purpose. We must *de*-cipher the ciphers, that is, stop treating them as ciphers altogether.’⁴³ This last sentence, especially, is

⁴¹ Tom Tyler, *CIFERAE: A Bestiary in Five Fingers* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2012), p. 29.

⁴² Ibid., p. 23.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 29.

crucial for the unusual sense of the verb ‘decipher’ – for Tyler, the work at hand is precisely not to decipher animals in the standard acceptation of the word, so that we would finally be in the presence of the signified concept these animals were deployed to mean, their signifying bodies now disposable. Rather, deciphering means countering the very logic of ciphering, and – primarily, I believe – underscoring the role that the metaphysical concept of animality plays in the very structure and process of ciphering.

Thus, in opposition to the animal cipher, Tyler also describes what he calls animal *indices*. An animal cipher, on the one hand,

is employed to *make a point*, and there is no obvious or necessary reason for choosing this particular animal. [...] An index, on the other hand, *points out* what is of interest, using a quality or behaviour peculiar to the animal, and is therefore intrinsic to the philosophical argument.⁴⁴

While Tyler does stress that both types of discursive use of animals are forms of textual abuse, he makes it clear that an animal index is, in a certain way, more attuned to that animal’s being, relying on its ‘significant attributes’.⁴⁵

In my view, however, employing an entire species as a placeholder for a signified concept still registers too close to the workings of the cipher, and does not challenge in any way the animalistic schema of the material substrate giving signifying support to ideal meanings. Despite this reservation, I believe Tyler’s text points in that direction when he stresses the importance of deciphering as the practice of refusing the desired transparency of signification.

He writes:

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 32, emphasis in the original.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 33.

Whenever we meet a cipher, there is every chance that all the careful work undertaken for their master has already begun to come undone. These animals are not content to remain mere ciphers and demand to be treated otherwise. [...] The overworked cipher finally *rats* on his or her employer. Animal indices [...] can disclose the direction we must take next.⁴⁶

One could say that Tyler is arguing for an impure, contaminated reading, in which the signifying body is not allowed to vanish so as to present the signified in its glorious presence. Tyler is exclusively writing about *animal* signifiers, but in truth one could talk about reading any signifier non-transparently, without for all that leaving the field of zoogrammatology. This is due to the fact that, as I have argued, signification as is traditionally conceptualised is bound up with animal concepts. In Cartesian terms, one could say that Tyler is arguing against the existential dualism in which the soul is unaffected by the body. De-ciphering Descartes would mean taking account of the fact that the soul is to some extent dependent on its material support, and this conclusion has clear animal connotations.

The issue for *Black Swan*, and for the overall project of zoogrammatology, is precisely the extent to which animal representation can break free of what one could call an Oedipal matrix. Whereas Tyler's language is not overtly psychoanalytic, the textual abuse suffered by animals – insofar as it is linguistic – can be read as an aspect of the Symbolic, and produced by the normative Oedipal structures that give rise to signification. Even if, or precisely because, Nina's madness points to a failure of Oedipal resolution, becoming-swan could be read, still Oedipally, as its failure. That Nina's bodily

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 29, 30, emphasis in the original.

transformation appears to disobey Thomas's paternal law of *transcendanse* in no way means that it functions *outside* of this law. As I have argued, naïve, triumphalist materialism does not offer a solution to the problems of dualistic metaphysics, precisely because the meaning of matter is constituted by this duality. In short, *dancity* may be the opposite of *transcendanse*, but only as the other pole of the same system.

The problem can be summed up by the fact that becoming-swan still means *something*. Even if it can be taken as the hyperbole of a dancer's embodiment and of the avoidance of dance's transcendence in relation to the body, it still carries meaning. In Tyler's words, we can say that Nina's body and the swan that sprouts from it have both been de-ciphered. However, de-ciphered animals should not, at first sight, be able to 'mean something', if by that we understand standing in place for something else. Tyler's description of de-cipherment, though, clearly does not refute all meaning. Therefore, de-ciphered animals should be understood, I argue, to simply *mean*.

This discussion goes to the heart of the role of animals in psychoanalysis, and of the extent to which they participate in the structure of the psyche and of signifying systems. For Tyler, Freud consistently turned animal ciphers into indices, so that in his work 'CIFERAE [...] unleash the FERAE within'.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 34

Wolf tales

Undoubtedly, Freud's richest exploration of the signifying power of animals is also one of his most famous works, *From the History of an Infantile Neurosis*, also known simply as *The Wolf Man*, finished in 1914 and first published in 1918.⁴⁸ This case-study of the analysis of his patient Sergei Pankejeff (Сергей Панкеев), dubbed 'the Wolf Man' (*der Wolfsmann*) for privacy reasons, offered Freud the opportunity to consolidate the importance for his psychoanalysis of childhood sexuality and the castration complex, which had come under attack from some of his detractors.

Most importantly for my discussion of *Black Swan* is the fact that *The Wolf Man* is a heavily intertextual essay, in which intertextuality constructs a chain in order to secure the place of a psychosexual event, namely the sighting by an infant Pankejeff of the 'primal scene' (*Urszene*) – his parents having intercourse. Four 'texts' stand out in this intertextual chain: the dream about wolves thanks to which Pankejeff got his moniker, the fairy-tale 'The Wolf and The Seven Little Goats', a children's book illustration depicting the wolf from this tale, and what Freud calls 'the wolf story'. The dream, narrated and illustrated (Fig. 12) by Pankejeff,⁴⁹ goes as follows:

I dreamt that it was night and that I was lying in bed. (My bed stood with its foot towards the window; in front of the window there was a row of old walnut trees. I know it was winter when I had the dream, and night-time.) Suddenly the window opened of its own accord, and I was

⁴⁸ Sigmund Freud, 'From the History of an Infantile Neurosis', trans. by Alix Strachey and James Strachey, in *An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works*, vol. 17 of the *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), pp. 7-122. Further references are given parenthetically in the text, and under the title *The Wolf Man*.

⁴⁹ Freud, in Whitney Davis, *Drawing the Dream of the Wolves: Homosexuality, Interpretation, and Freud's "Wolf Man"* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 35.

terrified to see that some white wolves were sitting on the big walnut tree in front of the window. There were six or seven of them. The wolves were quite white, and looked more like foxes or sheep-dogs, for they had big tails like foxes and they had their ears pricked like dogs when they pay attention to something. In great terror, evidently of being eaten up by the wolves, I screamed and woke up. (p. 29)

'The Wolf and The Seven Little Goats' is, unlike the 'wolf story', as we shall see, an actual fairy-tale, described by Freud thus:

the number seven occurs, and also the number six [of wolves on the tree], for the wolf only ate up six of the little goats, while the seventh hid itself in the clockcase. The white [of the dream wolves], too, comes into this story, for the wolf had his paw made white at the baker's. [...] The tree appears. The wolf lay down under a tree after his meal and snored. (p. 31)

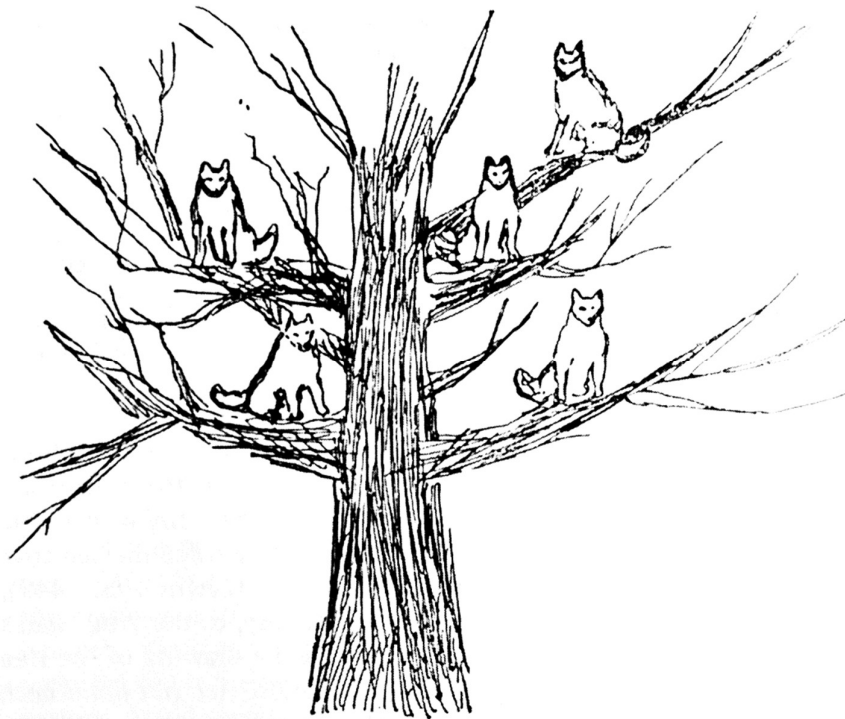


Fig. 12 Pankejeff's drawing of the tree and wolves from his dream.

An illustration from this story, in which the wolf is 'standing upright and striding along' (p. 16), 'one foot forward, with its claws stretched out and its ears pricked' (p. 39), was used by his sister to terrify him when we was little,

and this terror played its part in his phobia of wolves. Finally, Pankejeff was told the wolf story by his grandfather, and was imparted to Freud when the latter asked Pankejeff for a possible explanation for why the wolves in the dream would be on a tree. Freud narrates it as follows:

A tailor was sitting at work in his room, when the window opened and a wolf leapt in. The tailor hit after him with his yard—no (he corrected himself), caught him by his tail and pulled it off, so that the wolf ran away in terror. Some time later the tailor went into the forest, and suddenly saw a pack of wolves coming towards him; so he climbed up a tree to escape from them. At first the wolves were in perplexity; but the maimed one, which was among them and wanted to revenge himself on the tailor, proposed that they should climb one upon another till the last one could reach him. He himself—he was a vigorous old fellow—would be the base of the pyramid. The wolves did as he suggested, but the tailor had recognized the visitor whom he had punished, and suddenly called out as he had before: “Catch the grey one by his tail!” The tailless wolf, terrified by the recollection, ran away, and all the others tumbled down. (pp. 30-1)

Based on these texts and their interrelations, Freud was able to construct the primal scene wherein an eighteen-month-old Pankejeff witnessed his parents have sex *a tergo*, that is, from behind. This scene gave him visual evidence of what satisfaction from his father looked like, which supposedly he masochistically sought in the form of beatings by the means of his neurotic tantrums from around four years of age (the infantile neurosis from the title). The scene made possible for him to learn of the reality of castration by means of the position of the genitals, and produced in him the realisation that to be sexually satisfied by his father implied his own castration. It is precisely *this* unpleasant realisation, rejected by his narcissistic attachment to his own penis, that was transmitted or confirmed by the wolf dream, and the reason why it frightened him so.

Now Freud must explain in what way the dream about wolves relates to his parents' intercourse and to the reality of castration. He connects the parents' position, 'the man upright, and the woman bent down like an animal' (p. 39), to the fact that the wolf was standing in the terrifying illustration. From then on the wolf becomes for Pankejeff an 'anxiety-animal', but it is not clear why all instances of wolf fear did not trigger his castration-denying breakdown, or how exactly anxiety translates into castration complex in the dream. In short, it's not clear why the terrifying dream was formed by his unconscious with wolves when they were not always articulated with *castration* anxiety. Admittedly the dream may have merely laid bare to (pre-)consciousness that all instances of wolf anxiety were, in fact, cases of castration anxiety. But if that is all, it is not obvious why so much of the dream is significant for the primal scene. I would argue that the only reason why wolves became for Freud the master signifier – signifying both castration and its opposite – is the grandfather's wolf story. Without it, the textual line connecting the dream to the primal scene cannot be drawn. Freud writes:

Let us now proceed with our discussion of the relations between his dream and the primal scene. [...] At this point some connection is missing, some associative bridge to lead from the content of the primal scene to that of the wolf story. This connection is provided once again by the postures and only by them. In his grandfather's story, the tailless wolf asked the others *to climb upon him*. It was this detail that called up the recollection of the picture of the primal scene; and it was in this way that it became possible for the material of the primal scene to be represented by that of the wolf story. (p. 41-2)⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Another connection between the dream and the wolf story is the fact that there are *several* wolves. The dream *should* represent the parents by means of only two wolves, but, in the story, the tailless wolf needed several pack mates in order to form a pyramid. The excess of wolves needed for the pyramid seeps into the dream. This is relevant both for Deleuze and Guattari's

The story establishes the relation between tails and the phallus, thereby equating the tailless wolf of the story to the state of castration and the peculiarly bushy tails of the wolves of the dream to defiantly-displayed phalluses. Both the primal scene and the wolf story establish the crucial dichotomy between tailed and tailless – or between phallic male and castrated female – upon which the entire neurosis is grounded. The male penetrates the female; the tailless wolf had the other wolves climb upon him, and still cannot accomplish the erection of the pyramid.

In other words, the dichotomous nature of sexual difference itself is the main fuel of Pankejeff's anxiety and neurosis, but interchangeability never interests Freud. It makes no difference for him that the wolves could *not* reach the tailor on the tree, but were *on* the tree in the dream. It matters not at all that the wolves are looking, whereas it was the dreamer who was watching in the primal scene. For Freud, 'taillessness [appears in the dream] in the over-compensated form of the bushy tails of the putative wolves' (p. 41-2). If taillessness and bushy tails are interchangeable, that should mean the distinction on which sexual difference is based is a false one. The different states of the tail should be the only stable signifiers, for without them that which supposedly matters in the primal scene – the reality of castration – loses all meaning.

It is possible, therefore, that the wolves in the dream did not uphold the distinction between castrated and non-castrated at all. In fact, they are

discussion of *The Wolfman* in their 'One or Several Wolves?' and for *Black Swan / Swan Lake* and the need for a whole group of swans in the form of the *corps de ballet*.

completely indifferent to this distinction, since they are clearly able to signify both the phallus and its lack. And since the grandfather's wolf story is not really a fairy-tale and thus not verifiable, it is perfectly possible that it is the story, instead of the dream, which is the secondary production. Indifference to the phallus in the shape of the wolf is collapsed into one possibility, castration, in the form of the wolf story. Certainly its counterpart, a text signifying the phallic aspect of the wolf, could be found elsewhere in Pankejeff's life. After deciphering the wolves thus, we can say that the wolves do not mean anything. All they can 'mean' is the possibility of meaning, which is then Oedipally collapsed into the two signifying possibilities conceivable to psychoanalysis, castration and non-castration. The terror of the dream lies precisely in the radical affirmation of the non-necessity of the dialectics of castration.

A multiplicity of feathers

Before I move on to showing that the Black Swan haunting Nina's body – in other words, becoming-swan itself – functions according to the same structure as the wolf dream, it is illuminating to discuss Deleuze and Guattari's reservations regarding Freud's analysis of the Wolf Man and how it relates to becoming-animal. The first chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus* is dated and titled in reference to *The Wolf Man* ('1914: One or Several Wolves?'⁵¹), clearly with connection to the issue highlighted above of the 'correct' number of wolves in the dream. One may start by a cross-linguistic comparison – appropriate, given

⁵¹ Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, '1914: One or Several Wolves?', in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism & Schizophrenia* (London and New York: Continuum, 1987), pp. 26-38.

the transcultural character of the analysis itself – of Pankejeff’s Freudian name. Originally, in German, he is called *der Wolfsman*, meaning literally ‘the Wolfman’, or even ‘the Man of the Wolf’. Both the English and German versions, therefore, create the appearance of a single, lone wolf instead of the six or seven of the dream.⁵²

For Deleuze and Guattari, what is most striking (and condemnable) in *The Wolf Man* is Freud’s indifference towards the multiplicity of the wolves: regardless of whether one or several wolves actually appeared in the dream, ‘it was already decided from the very beginning that animals could serve only to represent coitus between parents, or, conversely, be represented by coitus between parents.’⁵³ Thus, they are able to summarise Freud’s ability to find the same primal scene symbolised by any number of wolves: *seven* wolves of the fairy-tale, where only *six* are eaten, the parents had sex at *five* o’clock, *three* times, *two* parents, *one* terrifying, castrating father.⁵⁴ This reverts back to the *multiplicity* inherent in Deleuze and Guattari’s becoming-animal as opposed to the unity of Freudian concepts such as *the penis*, *the father*, *the vagina*.

Regarding the neurotic ability of seeing in a sock a symbol for the vagina, Freud

⁵² The plural of *Wolf* in German is *Wölfe*, rendering the several-wolves, accurate version of the nickname *der Wölfemann* (Wolves Man), or *der Mann der Wölfe* (the Man of the Wolves). Interestingly, Romance languages (such as the French in which Deleuze and Guattari are writing) refer to him by means of several wolves: *l’homme aux loups* in French, *o homem dos lobos* in Portuguese, *el hombre de los lobos* in Spanish, and *l’uomo dei lupi* in Italian. (The French expression, however, is homophonous to its singular counterpart, *l’homme au loup*.) Unlike its Germanic siblings, Dutch follows the Romance languages with the plural *de Wolfenman* (instead of *de Wolfman*). Finally, in Russian the expression also has only one wolf: *человек-волк* (*chelovek-volk*), and not *волки* (*volki*), despite the fact that another Slavic language, Polish, rejects agglutination in favour of the plural genitive construction of *człowiek od wilków* (and not *wilka*). The same would also be possible in Russian as *человек волков* (*chelovek volkov*).

⁵³ Deleuze and Guattari, ‘One or Several’, p. 28.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

asserts that psychosis would *prevent* this identification since the sock is, in fact, an entire surface of cavities instead of only one – the assumption being that, from the moment one notices the multiplicity of holes, one cannot think of a vagina, since it is apparently defined by its singularity. Deleuze and Guattari: ‘comparing a sock to a vagina is OK, it’s done all the time, but you’d have to be insane to compare a pure aggregate of stitches to a field of vaginas: that’s what Freud says.’⁵⁵

For them, similar to my argument regarding the dream wolves’ indifference to castration, becoming-animal implies a multiplicity which is precisely averse to the kind of singular entities found in psychoanalysis.

Who is ignorant of the fact that wolves travel in packs? Only Freud. Every child knows it. Not Freud. [...] Freud obviously knows nothing about the fascination exerted by wolves and the meaning of their silent call, [their libidinal meaning], the call to become-wolf.⁵⁶

For them, ‘every animal is fundamentally a band, a pack. [...] We do not become animal without a fascination for the pack, for multiplicity.’⁵⁷ They therefore stress the inherent multiplicity in becoming-animal. One becomes-animal in direct relationship to the pack. Often, they argue, becoming-animal occurs *through* one ‘exceptional’ individual of the pack – the favourite, the Unique, the anomalous, with whom an alliance is made that makes becoming

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 27.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 28, 31. In this light, it is interesting to note that Matthew Bourne’s version of *Swan Lake* seems to borrow two striking images from the Wolf-Man’s dream, the setting of the wolf dream, and the dream itself: during the ballet overture, the Prince as a child has a nightmare in bed, while through the window behind his bed, one of the swans can be seen flapping his wings. And, during the ballet climax, a sick Prince lies again in bed, when the swans come to perch on the headboard one by one, resembling both Hitchcock’s *The Birds* and Pankejeff’s dream.

⁵⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, ‘Becoming-Animal’, p. 240.

possible.⁵⁸ This individual belongs to the pack but to its margins, the periphery, where it 'is neither an individual nor a genus; [it] is the borderline'.⁵⁹

In *Black Swan*, as in *Swan Lake*, multiplicity is present in the *corps de ballet* or swan flock. The fact that classical or romantic ballet choreographies are usually organised around the duality soloist vs. *corps* is possibly the entire reason of Nina's crisis.⁶⁰ That there is an entire troupe of dancers trained to dance alike and dressed to look alike both highlights the importance of the soloist and threatens the soloist with replacement. In the libretto of *Swan Lake*, the Prince pursues the flock, but ultimately finds the Swan Queen, Odette. As I argued, in his flight from the Oedipal constraints of royal succession, he seeks to lose himself in the multiplicity of the pack, but the fairy-tale plot reinserts marriage into the proceedings by the means of Odette, the shape-shifter, who ultimately serves to merge Oedipal and non-Oedipal projects so as to allay the audience's fear of marriage. In *Black Swan*, thus, it could be said that the dancers compete to determine who gets to be the one exceptional individual who makes the alliance of becoming-animal with the Prince, an alliance which, nevertheless, only confirms the marriage obligation it apparently diverged from.

Nina revels in being chosen to be the Swan Queen, and berates her mother for implying she is not up to the job: 'I'm the Swan Queen! It's you who never left the *corps*!' However, she does not wholly ascribe to this special

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 243-9.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 245.

⁶⁰ One might even speak about a *corps* of wolves in the wolf story: since the castrated wolf must form a pyramid to reach the tree, he as good as commands a troupe of dancing wolves.

individuality, since throughout the film she is startled to see the whole of the *corps* dancers actually have her face. Nina wants the role of Odette not to be above the other dancers, but in some level to 'lose herself' in the flock multiplicity of becoming-animal – in an entirely different fashion of losing oneself from the one encouraged by Thomas.

It is in what one may call Nina's becoming-animal drive (interpreted psychoanalytically as simply her inner Black Swan) that we can trace the

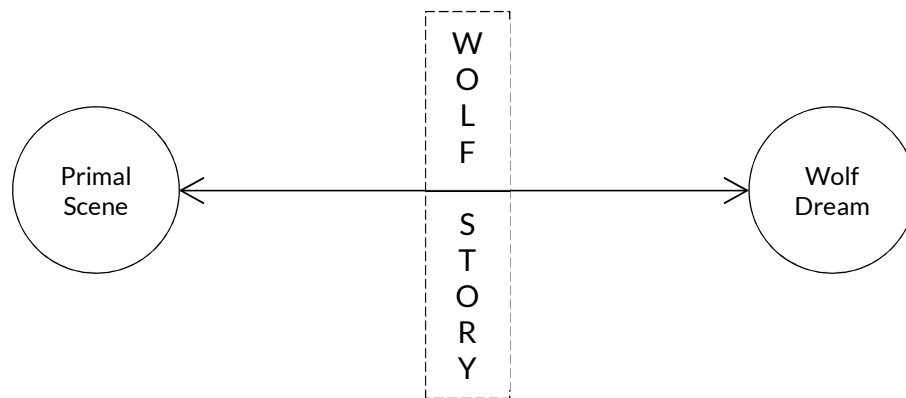


Fig. 13 Bidirectional line of textual influence in *The Wolf Man*.

similarities between *Black Swan* and *The Wolf Man*. I mentioned that, for Freud, the image of the primal scene gave rise to the dream by means of the vocabulary of the wolf story. However, we saw that the wolf story could be a product of the dream itself, so that the line of influence from primal scene to dream actually functions both ways (Fig. 13).

That means that not only can the primal scene have influenced the wolf story and the wolf dream, but that the dream may have retroactively (*nachträglich*) influenced the primal scene by means of the vocabulary of the

wolf story. This is a similar schema to the one presented by Whitney Davis (Fig. 14).

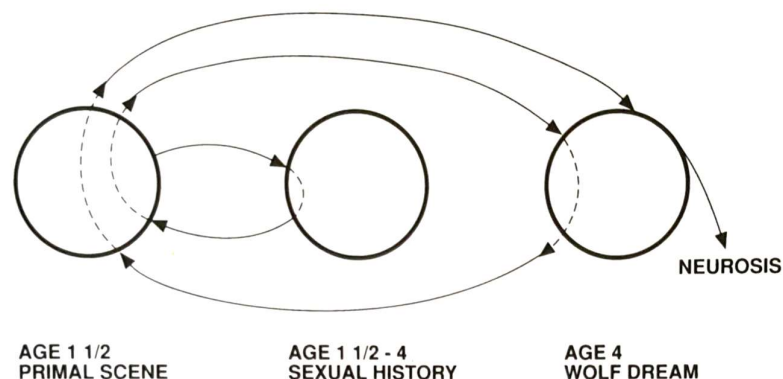


Fig. 14 Davis's diagram for the structure of *Nachträglichkeit* in the Wolfman's childhood.⁶¹

In his diagram, events in the past influence and shape coming events, but the latter also shape and determine the past retroactively. My own diagram, despite being simpler, includes the additional influence of the wolf dream on the child's sexual history, which I conflate with the 'authoring' of the wolf story.

If in *The Wolf Man* the signifying power of the wolves was collapsed into two possible meanings (castrated and non-castrated), the same is true regarding *Black Swan*. Initially, the duality in question might obviously appear to be between the White and the Black Swans, but I believe this is a misleading path. For one, one could say that this is the distinction at stake in *Swan Lake*, and that *Black Swan* is a different text. *Black Swan*, as a text, is much more invested, as I hope to have shown, in the contrast between *transcendanse* and *dancity*, where the former represents the disdain for and instrumentalisation of

⁶¹ Whitney Davis, *Drawing the Dream of the Wolves: Homosexuality, Interpretation, and Freud's "Wolf Man"* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 35.

embodiment in the pursuit of something 'greater', and the latter the image of animality as an undifferentiated, dense materiality, where one is lost and undistinguished 'as water in water'.⁶² As I hope it is now clear, these are the two most common answers to the problem of animal embodiment – *transcendanse* would be the standard Cartesian stance, whereas *dancity* would be the name for the materialistic approach to animal being in the strand of Animal Studies I am criticising. As I have argued, both are the two sides of the same linguistic conceptuality and are secondary products of arche-animality. As it is, I have already shown how becoming-swan does in fact function to represent both signifying procedures.

However, we can return to a psychoanalytic interpretation – and confirm that Black/White is derivative of *transcendanse/dancity* –, by focusing on the textual strata of the film. As in *The Wolf Man*, becoming-swan is *supposed* to be interpreted as a translation of Nina's psychosexual development as influenced by the *Swan Lake* libretto. Whereas the primal scene apparently inaugurates Pankejeff to the world of sexual difference as based on castration, Nina's psychosexual development similarly frames reality in terms of a duality. Girl/woman, reflection/reality, Imaginary/Symbolic are all related to the primordial psychoanalytic distinction between presence and absence of the phallus, castrated female and non-castrated male. Nina's mother's phallic-ness and cherishing of her daughter as a vicarious phallus work together to prevent Nina from entering the 'correct' understanding that only males are phallic, that

⁶² Georges Bataille, 'Animality', in *Theory of Religion*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1989), pp. 17-26 (p. 19).

females are castrated, that the seduction of mirror images in the Imaginary is unimportant, and that only subjection to the signifier in the Symbolic constitutes subjectivity. These last two points reveal the complicity between the psychoanalytic material and the arche-animal themes of *transcendanse* (the overcoming of reflections, and their resulting invisibility, by means of entry into the Symbolic) and *dancity* (Imaginary capture in specularity).

In the film, the issue of castration as a hinge for Oedipus' textual coherence is presented in Nina's scratch on the back, a compulsively self-inflicted wound. This scratch is ambiguous, since it could, on the one hand, be read as the castration wound that normative femininity should learn to accept, meaning that Nina resists her mother's infantilising influence by castrating herself, in order to finally actualise womanhood (i.e. the Black Swan). Ana España, in her 'El Doble y el Espejo en *Cisne Negro*', suggests as much when she argues that Nina's scratching works as a form of relief from maternal influence, as well as an 'onanistic substitute'.⁶³ The crucial moment of auto-affection – as is the case of masturbation – has been productive ground for philosophical discussions, as can be attested by Derrida's reading of Husserlian auto-affection in the form of 'the voice that keeps silent'. Nina's relationship to herself in masturbation, however, cannot help but go through the moment of specularity/otherness (the distinction here being irrelevant): this is revealed not only in the fact that the scratch is only visible to herself in a mirror's

⁶³ Ana España, 'El Doble y el Espejo en *Cisne Negro*', *Fotocinema: Revista Científica de Cine y Fotografía*, 4 (2012), 120-139 (p. 130), my translation.

reflection (Fig. 15),⁶⁴ but also in her explorations of sexuality, which are haunted by her doubles.⁶⁵



Fig. 15 Nina inspects the self-inflicted wound on her back with the help of a mirror.

On the other hand, the scratch can also be rightly read as the vehicle for becoming-swan which, as we shall see, shuns the distinction between castration and phallus. This means that castration registers not as the wound, but as the attempts by both Nina and Erica at preventing further scratching. Nina's nails emerge as a phallic power that threatens Erica's influences, rendering their clipping, by both of them, as a sort of castration. Nina's nail-clipping is, in fact, interrupted by the 'Black Swan' as it takes control while Nina holds the scissors in front of the bathroom mirror. Shown in the reflection, her face becomes that which the viewer comes to associate with the 'evil' Swan, and she ends up cutting her own finger (Fig. 16). España frames this as the

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 131.

⁶⁵ Her attempt at 'touching herself' as instructed by Thomas happens in the presence of her (hallucinated?) sleeping mother, and her sexual experience with Lily is framed by the film as fantasy or, in other words, as auto-eroticism channelled through Otherness.

Black Swan's attempt at 'halting auto-castration – and thus allowing the growth of the scratch'.⁶⁶



Fig. 16 While clipping her nails, Nina looks in the mirror. Her characteristic “Black Swan” facial expression stares back at her, and she cuts her finger.

It is in this light that it becomes crucial to inspect what consequences becoming-swan has for the reality of castration and for normative Oedipal sexuality. As it is, the scratching wound is the ideal signifier for the duality of castration, but the entire project of symbolising such duality fails. The scratch plotline reaches its climax when Nina feels movement underneath it, sees (in the mirror) little black bristles pushing out, and finally fishes out a single black feather (Fig. 17).

This scene foreshadows her becoming-animal, but also explains the presence of the scratch, as it is indeed irresistible to think its position signifies she will sprout wings out of her back, wings that have been silently working their way out of her body all along and causing the rash. *One* black feather, *one* scratching wound: the pillars of Freudian poetics. However, becoming-swan multiplies penises and vaginas, and extends to Nina's whole body the reality of

⁶⁶ España, 'El Doble', p. 132, my translation.

becoming: after this scene, corporal transformations include legs bent backwards like a bird's, elongated neck, and interdigital webs. Crucially, during her bravura performance of the Black Swan in the opening night, after having been completely taken over by becoming-swan, her entire skin ripples with bumps and valleys, all castrated wounds from which phallic feathers emerge (see Fig. 18 and Fig. 19).

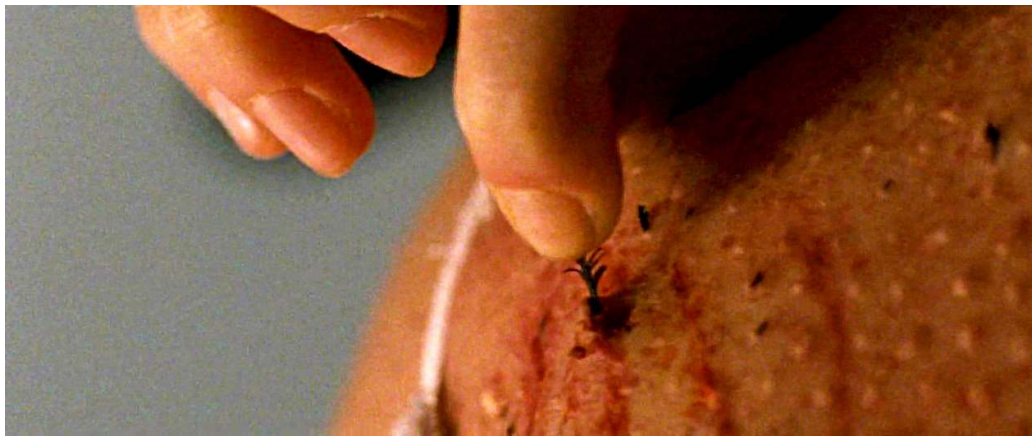


Fig. 17 Nina extracts a black feather from under her skin. However, other feathers can be seen erupting around it.

The multiplication of the unitary master concepts of psychoanalysis (phallus, vagina) is presented by Deleuze and Guattari as one of the main aspects of becoming-animal's multiplicity, which they connect to the Wolf Man both in regard to the wolf dream and his other symptoms.⁶⁷ Continuing on their discussion on the 'field of vaginas' of the sock, they write:

Salvador Dali, in attempting to reproduce his delusions, may go on at length about THE rhinoceros horn; he has not for all that left neurotic discourse behind. But when he starts comparing goosebumps to a field of tiny rhinoceros horns, we get the feeling that [...] we are now in the presence of madness. Is it still a question of comparison at all? It is, rather, a pure multiplicity that changes elements, or *becomes*. [...] The

⁶⁷ 'The Wolf-Man's pack of wolves also becomes a swarm of bees, and a field of anuses, and a collection of small holes and tiny ulcerations' (Deleuze and Guattari, 'Becoming-Animal', p. 249).

little bumps “become” horns, and the horns, little penises. No sooner does Freud discover the greatest art of the unconscious, this art of molecular multiplicities, than we find him tirelessly at work bringing back molar unities, reverting to his familiar themes of *the father*, *the penis*, *the vagina*, Castration with a capital C. [...] We’re not far from wolves. For the Wolf-Man, in his second so-called psychotic episode, kept constant watch over the variations or changing path of the little holes or scars on the skin of his nose.⁶⁸

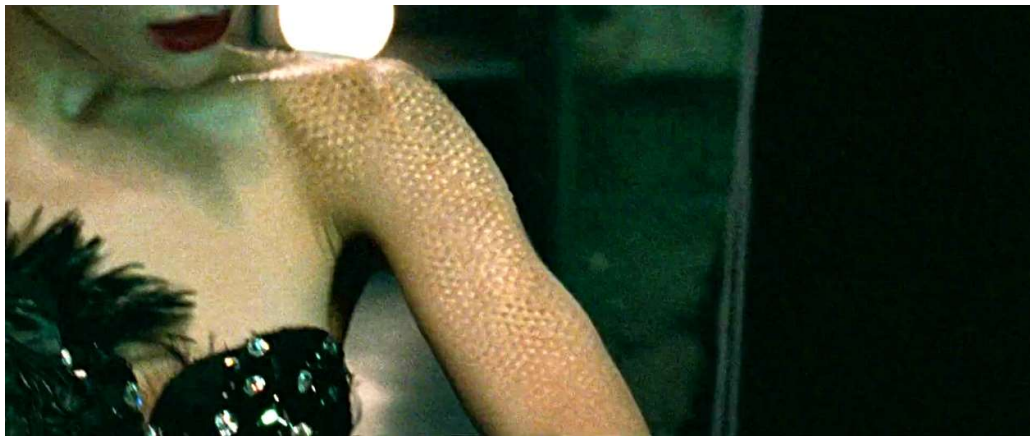


Fig. 18 Nina's arms get covered by 'goosebumps'.



Fig. 19 Black down feathers sprout from the goosebumps.

⁶⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, 'One or Several', p. 27-8, emphases in the original.

And the Wolf Man dreamed about 'six or seven' wolves, but, as we saw, they had 'to be purged of their multiplicity'.⁶⁹ Therefore, in Freud, 'the little scars, the little holes, become subdivisions of the great scar or supreme hole named castration; the wolves become substitutes for a single Father.'⁷⁰ I cannot stress enough that Nina's multiplicity of phalluses *is not merely an illustration* of a philosophical concept by Deleuze and Guattari. As I have argued, *Black Swan* as a text concerns itself entirely with the mapping and manipulation of Nina's body as the site of tension between different accounts of animality (how does the human 'inhabit' his or her animal body, and what can this animal *mean*?) and different sexual realities (how real and necessary is castration?). These sexual realities, moreover, could indeed be termed *sexual* possibilities, since it is in the wider drama of the castration complex – including the Imaginary order, the mirror stage as the promise of bodily plenitude, and, finally its relinquishment in the Name of Father and the Symbolic for the master signifier, the phallus – that linguistic meaning as commonly understood takes shape. Thus, the diffraction of arche-animality or becoming-animal across Nina's body engages in a literality – actually rejecting Oedipal projects – that abandons the entire field of philosophical illustration.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 28.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 31.

As with *The Wolf Man*, a bidirectional line of influence can be drawn for *Black Swan* (Fig. 20), where, besides the standard interpretation of swans as metaphors for sexual personae, the signifying power of the becoming-animal, indifferent to the distinction between phallus and castration, *transcendanse* and *dancity*, furnishes the meanings which are inscribed in the libretto of *Swan Lake* which, in turn, fuels the Oedipal drama. It should not be so shocking to suggest that a 'fictional' text such as *Swan Lake* should influence psychosexual development, if only one remembers that the Oedipus complex is itself based on a play. Beyond that, this schema helps uncover a certain fictionality of the standard Freudian psychosexuality.

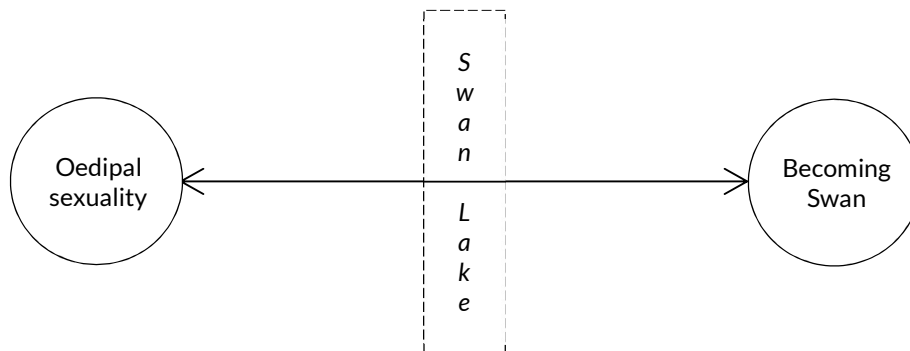


Fig. 20 Bidirectional line of textual influence in *Black Swan*.

It is thus fitting that the climax of becoming-swan is precisely Nina's dancing of the thirty-two *fouettés* during the opening night. After giving full reign to her becoming, all the excitations of her skin – the field of vaginas and penises – gradually sprout black feathers with each turn, until her arms have transformed into vast black wings (Fig. 21).



Fig. 21 Nina's arms fully transform into black wings.

This fuller transformation lays bare the textual aporias scattered in the text: is Nina really gradually becoming a bird? Have all the other dancers actually acquired her face temporarily? Will the audience flee in riotous horror at the monstrosity taking shape on the stage? More than anything, it is the reaction of the audience which will determine the 'meaning' of becoming-swan, whether it will be collapsed into any of its possible significations or remain as pure potentiality of signification. In a sense, the reality of monstrous transformation – a horrified audience – would endorse *dancity*: the truth of animality is its body; meaningless material density constitutes reality; consciousness is an effect of matter. The other option, applause, confirms that Nina has been hallucinating all along, and sides with *transcendanse*: animals and their bodies (even the ones human inhabit) are only metaphors, instruments put to use by a psyche, either conscious or unconscious; there is no reality outside mental life.

The audience applauds. Thomas has won.

There is a remainder, however: she stands with bare arms, as a completely unfeathered human, but her shadow still reveals her wingspan (Fig. 22). With this image the film offers a glimpse of what it could look like if becoming-swan were not collapsed into Oedipal alternatives. A much braver film would end before the audience provides its answer. All *Black Swan* does is show us the tragic consequences of this answer. All that follows the climax of becoming-swan rehearses its reduction into normative Freudian sexuality. Becoming-swan can now mean nothing but the simply sexual Black Swan, who can vanquish the virginal White one and make it accept female castration and the male phallus as the price of entry into Symbolic normalcy.



Fig. 22 A (slightly) more objective shot of the winged Nina shows that the feathers were not real, despite the fact that they are present in the shadows. Whether the wing shadows are diegetic is not clear.

According to my argument in the previous chapter, the truth of animality – *arche*-animality – is outside language but also its more intimate condition. Therefore, it cannot be said to be reducible to linguistic meaning. Similar to Kristeva's semiotic, it produces no specific signification, despite still 'having' meaning. This springs from the difference, highlighted by Barthes, between signification and what he calls *signifiance*: the former 'belongs to the

level of the product, of the statement, of communication'.⁷¹ *Signifiance*

constitutes

the signifying work, which belongs to the level of production, enunciation, symbolisation. [...] [It] closely resembles the dream-work, such as Freud began to describe it. [...] What 'dream-work' and 'text-work' have in common [...] is that they are a labour outside exchange, inaccessible to 'calculation'.⁷²

Derrida, too, underscores the commonality between *signifiance* and

Freudian dream-work. In 'Freud and the Scene of Writing', he writes:

The absence of an exhaustive and absolutely infallible code [for dream symbols] means that in psychic writing, which thus prefigures the meaning of writing in general, the difference between signifier and signified is never radical. Unconscious experience [...] does not borrow but produces its own signifiers; does not create them in their materiality, of course, but produces their status-as-meaningful (*signifiance*). Henceforth, they are not longer, properly speaking, signifiers.⁷³

As both *Black Swan* demonstrates in its working, and I demonstrate in my analysis of its 'animality', the animal can and indeed does break away from text. Not to affirm the primacy of non-textual matter, however, but to locate a site which comes in principle before this distinction, which makes it possible and that cannot, therefore, mean anything.

⁷¹ Roland Barthes, 'Theory of the Text', trans by Ian McLeod, in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. by Robert Young (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 31-47 (p. 37).

⁷² Ibid., p. 37-8, 40.

⁷³ Jacques Derrida, 'Freud and the Scene of Writing', in *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 196-231 (p. 209). Interpolation of the original French is the translator's.

Chapter 4: The Apple in the Dark

Introduction

In his *Sexuality and Being in the Poststructuralist Universe of Clarice Lispector: The Différance of Desire*, Earl Fitz notes that Lispector's 'extensive use of animals has been widely commented on. [...] Critics have long felt that, for Lispector, animals represented some form of "primitive," prehuman (and therefore prelinguistic) existence against which [...] women and men can orient and define themselves.'¹ It is clear from his assertion that the critics mentioned work under the understanding that animals are indeed the material backdrop out of which linguistic humanity emerges, or at least that this is the philosophico-theoretical schema they can read in Lispector's texts. To read animality in Lispector as bound up with language is not a controversial move, since the question of language – or poststructuralism, as per Fitz's title – is considered to be the main concern for the author. It would logically follow that if a writer interested in language were to explore animality, taken to be a site of non-language, it would be as a way to discuss the nature of human linguisticism. More than that, Fitz argues that her entire oeuvre was devoted to the exploration of the poststructuralist insight into language, thus writing poststructuralism *avant la lettre*. For Fitz, Lispector's texts are grounded in the poststructuralist belief that '[l]anguage, that most definitely human of our traits, structures our awareness of our existence at the same instant or

¹ Earl E Fitz, *Sexuality and Being in the Poststructuralist Universe of Clarice Lispector: The Différance of Desire* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), pp. 119, 120.

moment (these also being key Lispectorian motifs) that it “deconstructs” it’.²

Her fiction is therefore a way of dramatizing philosophy so as to make it more accessible,

humaniz[ing] the seemingly sterile and alien poststructural condition by making the reader feel the confusion, anger, fear, and frustration that arise from it and that, at its deepest level (the “primitivism” [...] that permeates Lispector's work), define our condition as human beings, as the self-conscious language animal.³

He connects this overarching Lispectorian project to her fourth and longest novel *The Apple in the Dark* (1961) by drawing attention to the theological overtones of the title:

In Lispector's language-inscribed world, our quest to understand inevitably exist just one word, one meaning, one interpretation away. Brilliantly captured in the semiotic complexities of her “apple” (*The Apple in the Dark*), the biblical symbol of perfect decoding that lies forever just out of our reach, our struggle to understand inevitably takes place in “the dark,” just beyond our capacity to grasp what we desire to grasp and always one sign away.⁴

Even if the symbolism of the Biblical apple as Fitz formulates it can readily be accepted, close attention to the textual semiotics of the novel show that the “darkness” that envelops it is far from being easily interpreted. It might surround the apple so as to keep it hidden from us, but it might, according to the novel, also mean that the apple can in fact be *grasped*, before or instead of being seen. Either lost in darkness or so at hand that it need not be lit, the apple’s relationship to light stands at the core of a flickering hesitation that structures the whole novel. Similarly to the hesitation between *transcendanse* and *dancity* in *Black Swan*, this undecidability reverts back to a prior,

² Fitz, p. 13

³ Ibid.

⁴ Fitz, p. 9.

grammatological instability regarding the status of animality. Or rather, this hesitation inhabits the very direction of the question: is its truth to be found by reverting back or moving forward? Are animals the backdrop from which humanity emerges, or are they the first bodily supplement to metaphysico-spiritual humanity? Who follows whom: do humans supplement animality, or does humanity supplement animals? I argue that, in *The Apple in the Dark*, Lispector works through these questions by revealing the extent to which it is animality itself – or, more precisely, the *arche*-animal – which performs the work of supplementarity that makes possible these articulations, in whichever direction they appear to advance.

Escuridade

In a novel with such a sparse plot, any summary will inevitably incur an interpretation. Rather than provide a synopsis myself, I shall initially discuss others' description of the novel as indices of their own interpretation, against which I can situate my own. One of Lispector's most famous readers, Hélène Cixous, states that '*The Apple in the Dark* is the lengthy story of a man who flees civilisation, thinking that he has murdered his wife, and of his encounter with two women on an isolated farm in the Brazilian countryside'.⁵ Her emphasis on the man's encounter with the two women – as well as on the relatively minor plot point of his crime – is illuminated by her assertion that the novel 'can be

⁵ Hélène Cixous, '*The Apple in the Dark: The Temptation of Understanding*', in *Reading with Clarice Lispector*, ed. and trans. by Verena Andermatt Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), pp. 60-97 (p. 60).

read around questions of sexual difference and of different libidinal economies'.⁶ While I do not dispute that, it is crucial to examine Cixous's textual evidence regarding the novel's engagement with sexual difference. As I hope to show, they are short-circuited by a hesitation that grounds them in sphere of 'grammatological evolution', as it were. That man – Martim – Cixous tells us,

has left the conventional world of the known. As the reader is led to guess, he was able to accomplish this only through a gesture of rupture, in his case a crime. [...] He had to accomplish a break in order to escape the ready-made, the world of likeness, that is to say, of death in life. [As in Kleist's *On The Marionette Theater*], after a passage to the infinite, after a fall and a return, there is a reconstruction, but outside the world of imitation and reproduction. Concretely, in the novel, Martim is apprehended by the police. This is but a metaphor. It illustrates the question Clarice [will ask] in *The Passion According to G.H.* [1964]: If I leave the world of the known in order to find the life of the unknown, what do I become?⁷

Others have similarly described the novel in the terms of a linguistic rupture. The English translator Gregory Rabassa believes that 'the story begins with the impression that something new will come about, that there will be a rebirth. The early symbolism is both biblical and Darwinian.'⁸ For him, Martim's rupture means that

he has been expelled, in a sense, as if out of Eden, and he hopes for some kind of regeneration as he loses language, the gift that raised man above the beast. He wants language, but he also rejects the form in which he has known it. His struggle for language is one symbolic track of the futility of his rebirth and rebuilding as he goes back to what he had before.⁹

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Cixous, 'The Temptation of Understanding', pp. 61-2.

⁸ Gregory Rabassa, 'Introduction', in Clarice Lispector, *The Apple in the Dark*, trans. by Gregory Rabassa (London: Virago, 1985), pp. ix-xvi (p. xiii).

⁹ Rabassa, p. xiii-xiv.

Rabassa, like many others, also stresses the multi-layered character of the novel, composed as it is of stages which complement or overturn the other.¹⁰ Thus Martim is said to go ‘from rock to plants to vermin to cattle to children and finally to contact with other humans, whom he had abandoned before’, in a progression which Rabassa terms ‘the evolutionary scale’,¹¹ readable – as the beginning of the novel – both in biblical and in Darwinian terms.

Kristin E. Pitt frames the novel initially as a post-criminal reconstruction: ‘Believing that he has indeed killed his wife, Martim suffers a profound existential crisis that drives him to flee society at the beginning of *A maçã no escuro* [*The Apple in the Dark*] and attempt to redefine himself throughout the course of the text.’¹² However, she, too, stresses the importance of Martim’s linguistic quest: ‘The novel explores the bases and limitations of language, reason, and knowledge: the narrative is driven in large part by the constructive construction of “como se” [as if] that simultaneously suggests and undermines the possibility of comprehensible similarity.’¹³ For Pitt, the recurrent phrase ‘as if’ is crucial, as ‘in the end, *The Apple in the Dark* suggests that all Martim has done is to occasionally act *as if* it were possible to understand without categorizing, without appropriating, and without

¹⁰ For example, Mara Negrón-Marrero sections her book-long monograph *Une genèse au féminin: étude de ‘La pomme dans le noir’ de Clarice Lispector* [*A Genesis in the ‘Feminine’: A Study of Clarice Lispector’s ‘The Apple in the Dark’*] (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997) according to Martim’s stages of ‘development’: ‘Cosmic Phase’, ‘Vegetal Phase’, ‘Animal Phase’, etc.

¹¹ Rabassa, p. xiv.

¹² Kristin E Pitt, ‘Discovery and Conquest Through a Poststructural and Postcolonial Lens: Clarice Lispector’s *A maçã no escuro*’, *Luso-Brazilian Review*, 50 (2013), 184-200 (p. 184).

¹³ Pitt, p. 185.

devouring.¹⁴ Negrón-Marrero defends that the novel 'is a book of origins [*livre d'origine*]. It tells of the originary [*originaire*] crime of humanity' – linking it inevitably to a quasi-mythical narrative as the one in *Totem and Taboo*.¹⁵

Nancy Gray Diaz also calls attention to Martim's attempt at engendering a new form of understanding and language, and she stresses the stages this process is made to go through:

Martim's quest is the attempt to establish, experientially and existentially, a new self. [...] The process of re-establishing an identity functions as perception and cognition of otherness: *first the rocks, then plants, then animals*, then Ermelinda and Vitória, and finally the four men who come to arrest him. [...] As Martim works the earth, he begins to feel a part of it. *This stage of his renewal* is dominated by physical labor, silence, the absence of thought. His encounter with the cows is the awakening of primitive communion of other sentient beings. He feels reduced, senses the cows sensing him, feels himself become a presence, become concretized. He gives himself over to 'cow time'.¹⁶

She, like many others, foregrounds the ubiquitous thematics of light and dark – present in the title, no less – as contributor to the poetics of progression: 'In the darkness which precedes the birth of consciousness and conscience, a darkness rife with alterity and fear, the apple occurs as a vital, life-affirming symbol of materiality and knowledge.'¹⁷ Rabassa agrees with the importance of the title, stating that it 'is a kind of symbol of all that goes to make up the final theme of the book, and what message we are left with, hopeless as it may be, is summed up in it.'¹⁸

¹⁴ Pitt, p. 198.

¹⁵ Negrón-Marrero, p. 44, my translation, as are all further references to her study. Ironically for my animalistic focus, *livre d'origine* is also the French term for a breed registry, or a herdbook, or a specific animal's pedigree.

¹⁶ Nancy Gray Diaz, 'A Maçã no Escuro', in *Clarice Lispector: A Bio-bibliography*, ed. by Diane E Marting (Westport: Greenwood, 1993), pp. 93-97 (p. 94, my emphases).

¹⁷ Diaz, p. 96.

¹⁸ Rabassa, p. xv.

Rebecca Biron stresses that the evolutionary scale of Martim's progression is treaded with a view towards linguistic renewal. For her, Martim

wants to escape language altogether. [...] The stages of Martim's progressive identification with rocks, then rats, then cows, then the hilltop view of nature, all revolve around his desire to free himself from the constraints of the 'language of other people'. [...] Because he wants to make himself over 'in his own image,' this character rejects a system of communication that relies on imitation, repetition, and relation.¹⁹

Martim's apparent dislike of the world of imitation and repetition readily clashes with the chain of supplementation at work in the flux of his developmental stages, and in the progression/alternation of days and nights which is how the novel signifies this supplementation. Negrón-Marrero calls attention to the play of light and dark when she writes that 'slowly, from day to night, from chapter to chapter, we discover the world in Martim's company', or when she refers to the 'circular succession of days and nights'.²⁰

Since I share Rabassa's opinion regarding the importance of the title, and in light of my focus on unstable dichotomies (tailed vs. tailless, *dancity* vs. *transcendanse*), I shall refer to the novel's exploration of the play of light and dark as its *escuridade*. In this neologism, I combine the word *escuro* ('dark') from the title, with the noun *claridade* ('clarity'), which is recurrent throughout the novel. It is interesting that *escuro*, like the English 'dark', is more often than not an adjective, which can function as a noun when preceded by an article: o *escuro* ('the dark'). The noun proper, just as in 'dark-ness', would have a suffix attached – *escur-idão*. Thus, *escurid-ade*, despite gesturing towards 'clarity',

¹⁹ Rebecca E Biron, 'Crime and Punishment Reconsidered: Clarice Lispector's *A maçã no escuro*', in *Murder and Masculinity: Violent Fictions of 20th-century Latin America* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2000), p. 75.

²⁰ Negrón-Marrero, p. 51.

consists in fact of the 'wrong' suffix being attached to the noun/adjective *escuro*. This underscores, I hope, the fact that, in the play of light and dark throughout Martim's journey, darkness is bound to 'win', since it not only appears as one of the elements of the dichotomy, but it also installs the very *différance* which structures the difference between light and darkness – that is, shades of light and dark are always already products of darkness. Also, I hope that it reveals the work of paleonymy involved in revealing the elements *différents* which structure the dichotomies they subsequently appear to take part in. If the difference between speech and writing is produced by an arche-writing, if before the human/animal distinction lies an arche-animal, if becoming-swan furnishes the possibility of opposing *dancity* and *transcendanse*, then before there can be a play of *escuro* and *claridade*, there is an arche-darkness – *escuridade*.

Escuridade as the alternation of days and nights is in itself a figure of supplementation, but this alternation is tied up with a different – albeit related – instance of supplementation from the very start of the novel. The novel is divided into three parts: 'How a Man Is Made' (eleven chapters), 'The Birth of the Hero' (nine chapters), and 'The Apple in the Dark' (seven chapters). The very beginning of chapter one of part one describes the darkness of 'a night as dark as night can get when a person sleeps',²¹ which is then contrasted with a daytime image:

²¹ Clarice Lispector, *The Apple in the Dark*, trans. Gregory Rabassa (London: Virago, 1985), 1.i.3. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the text, containing an Arabic numeral representing one of the three parts, a Roman numeral for the chapter number, and a page number. Rabassa's published translation, and his punctuation, have been most times silently modified in order to match the original more closely.

By day, however, the countryside was different, and the crickets, vibrating hollow and hard, left the entire expanse open, shadowless. [...] [A]nd like a point designed upon the point itself, the voice of the cricket was the very body of the cricket, and it told nothing. (1.i.4)

The last chapter of 'How a Man Is Made' presents a different image, which together with the cricket figure serves to frame the first part and establish precisely 'how a man is made'. Martim is climbing a hill on horseback along with his boss, Vitória, the same hill he had also climbed when he had first arrived at her farm. Climbing the hill a second time, and on horseback, will finally mark his entrance into the 'human' stage of his reconstruction:

As he faced the extension of enormous and empty land, with a suffocated effort Martim was painfully approaching—with the difficulty of someone who is never going to arrive—he was approaching something that a man on foot would humbly call the desire of a man, but which a man on horseback could not resist the temptation to call the mission of a man. And the birth of that strange eagerness was provoked, now as it had been when he first walked upon the slope, by the vision of an enormous world which seems to be asking a question. And which seemed to call [*clamar*] for a new god, who, understanding, would in that way complete [*concluir*] the work of the other God. Confused there on a jumpy horse, jumpy himself, in just a second of looking Martim had emerged totally and as a man. (1.xi.116-7)

Between the cricket's voice and its body – but also between God and god – there is displayed a case of supplementary addition. They represent the two possible meanings of the supplement according to Derrida: an unnecessary addition to something whole, or an essential part that comes to complete something unfinished. The addition of voice to the cricket is wholly external and accidental, to the point that it changes nothing: it can neither improve nor undermine the wholeness of its body. On the other hand, Martim as a supplementary 'god' is the emissary whose task is to 'complete [God's]

work'. The work of God is incomplete without external help – which in the end is no longer external for becoming an essential part of the work.

The trajectory of hominisation – of how a man is made – goes from a stage of non-supplementarity (of the supplement erased for being external) to a point of 'essential' supplementation. From the undifferentiated world of animality emerges the human who can, apparently, both *be* a supplement and also *manipulate* it. Martim as 'god' completes 'God', but he must also *act* in order to finish His work, so that the human is both the object and subject of supplementation.

Hominisation is framed as the history of spacing. The daylight expanse opened by the vibrating cricket represents nevertheless the plenitude of self-presence that neutralises all distance into accessible proximity. In contrast, the 'extension of enormous and empty land' faced by Martim during his epiphany is irreducibly distant, despite his clear desire of conquering and understanding it. That is, Martim's hominisation conforms to the traditional picture of the human as that which *is an instance of* the maximum distancing from the background of nature, but also that which is able to *perceive* that distance, only to then believe itself capable – because of this ability – of neutralising all this spacing by the power of *logos*.

That dangerous supplement

These paradoxes are famously explored by Derrida in *Of Grammatology*. He writes that, in Rousseau's thought,

[t]he difference between the glance [used in gestural language] and the voice [needed for true, human language] is the difference between animality and humanity. Transgressing space, mastering the outside, placing souls in communication, voice transcends natural animality. That is to say a certain death signified by space. Exteriority is inanimate. The arts of space carry death within themselves and *animality* remains the *inanimate face of life*.²²

Here Derrida lays bare the contradiction ingrained in humanism's view of animality: that which is life-infused and closest to nature, but also that which is most inanimate, embodying writing, technology, prosthetics – as death-giving 'arts of space' – by *being* embodiment itself.²³ There is a radical difference, 'at once interior and exterior', that cleaves every possible meaning of life, nature, animality, or humanity. That will mean that 'the animal who [...] has no relationship to death is on the side of death', whereas speech (or *logos*, reason, etc.) 'is *living* speech even while it institutes a relation to death, etc'. Human speech 'is more *natural* to man but more foreign to a nature which is in itself dead nature [still life]'.²⁴

²² Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Fortieth Anniversary Edition, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 2016), p. 213, emphasis in the original.

²³ 'Human nature' is constructed as a stage between animality (inferior because 'not yet' human) and technology (decadent, and corruptive of the natural state). This human nature, despite characterised as natural, is considered to be thoroughly human, and is thus never confused with the natural world of animality. The latter, however, would seem to come 'before' the human, but the uncanny temporality of technology can shed light on the animal's secondarity, for the animal is, despite this apparent primordality, still a modification of originary human nature. Technics, in its turn, is promptly coded as a threat as it distances the human from its origin and essence. But this technical threat is always shaped like an animal haunting, an animalistic threat. This is due to the fact that technics emerge as *supplements* to the human *body*, or rather, as supplements *alongside* the body, taken to be the first human tool, the first technical supplement of human nature, of the human *I*, which, in fact, simply *animates* this body. Therefore, since the body represents the animality of the human, pre-human animal and post-human technics merge as the two sides of the same worldly supplementation to human essence. This essence is, in short, what all metaphysics and theologies of disembodiment attempt to liberate from the threat of animal technics, now understood as the same danger. Embodiment itself is the first dangerous insinuation of technics, bounding the human to the earth and the world.

²⁴ Ibid.

In other words, the cricket has no relationship to the supplement and cannot understand it by dint of being plunged in the expanse of nature. It nevertheless is still 'on the side' of the supplement, instituting death, spacing, exteriority, since it has not the interiority of the voice, which, as we saw, cannot be distinguished from its body. That is why, after the continuous supplementation of stages in an evolution of the supplement – in which the human world becomes more and more marked by supplementary relations – the human can 'return to nature' by neutralising the very spacing that marks that humanity. Speech, language, signification – the very things that, by supplementing reality and standing in for real things, take the human out of nature – dream of their own spiritual power of eliminating the very supplementary space between thing and sign which makes signification possible. The break from nature which both necessitates and engenders language is undone by the belief that (human) signification can make the leap back and close the distance between reality and sign. It is indeed the same issue, discussed above with regard to *Totem and Taboo*, of the murder of the father which will make possible and necessary the signification of this very murder. While discussing Rousseau's writings on singing, Derrida formulates it thus:

On several levels, nature is the ground, the inferior step: it must be crossed, exceeded, but also rejoined. We must return to it, but without annulling the difference. This difference should be *almost nil*; separating the imitation from what it imitates. Through the voice [vowel] one must transgress animal, savage, mute, infant or crying nature; by singing transgress or modify the voice. But the song must imitate cries and laments. This leads to a second polar determination of nature: it becomes the unity—as ideal limit—of the imitation and what is imitated. [...] If that unity were accomplished, imitation would become useless:

the unity of unity and difference would be lived in immediacy. Such, according to Rousseau, is the archeo-teleologic definition of nature.²⁵

This absolute unity, the complete annulation of space, would only revert to animal immediacy. Nature is thus that *from* which (archeo) and *to* which (teleo) the human supplementary march *should* advance. In this sense,

[a]nimal language—and animality in general—represents here the still living myth of fixity, of symbolic incapacity, of nonsupplementarity. If we consider the *concept* of animality not in its content of understanding or misunderstanding [*méconnaissance*] but in the *function* reserved for it, we shall see that it must locate a moment of *life* which knows nothing whose appearance and play we wish to describe here: symbol, substitution, lack and supplementary addition, etc. [...] A life that has not yet broached [*entamé*] the play of supplementarity and which at the same time has not yet let itself be breached [*laissée entamer*] by it: a life without difference and without articulation.²⁶

And according to this logic,

[m]an *calls himself* man only by drawing limits excluding his other from the play of supplementarity: the purity of nature, of animality, of the primitive, of childhood, of madness, of divinity. The approach to these limits is at once feared as a threat of death, and desired as access to a life without difference. [...] All concepts determining a non-supplementarity [...] obviously have no truth-value.²⁷

Thus, reaching the stage of nonsupplementarity is both feared and desired, an ambiguity which is essential to Martim's oscillations regarding his crime and his progress. His first thoughts regarding his criminal act come to him soon after he flees the hotel at night, during the clear day that follows in which he, clearly in his 'stone stage', has 'his first clear thought since leaving the hotel': 'Today must be Sunday', and 'Sunday is a man's first day' (1.ii.18). With this Biblical conceptual background, Martim suddenly has an unexpected and

²⁵ Ibid., p. 214, emphasis in the original. Interpolation is the translator's.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 263, emphasis in the original, interpolations are mine.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 266-7, emphasis in the original.

unfamiliar feeling. After puzzling it for a while, he concludes that ‘that thing was a man thinking... Then, with infinite displeasure, physically confused, he remembered in his body what a man thinking is like’ (1.ii.25). Martim instantly revolts against what he sees as ‘the insidious return of a vice’; his whole project – at least as he now sees it – was to leave humanity behind and thus never ‘think’ again, to which he succumbs soon after his rebirth. Martim is clearly disappointed with the widespread functioning of the supplement: ‘thinking’, for him, is ineluctably tied to conceptual signification as grounded in signifying substitution – ‘[a] man thinking was that which, upon seeing something yellow, would say with dazzled effort: that thing which is not blue’ (ibid.). He attempts to fight it off, though, demonstrating Derrida’s argument that the supplement, while feared, is also employed as protection against itself or against the seductive danger of nonsupplementarity:

Unprotected, he shifted about on the hot stone: he seemed to be searching for an argument that might protect him. He needed to defend what, with such enormous courage, he had conquered two weeks before. With such enormous courage, that man had finally stopped being intelligent.

Or had he ever really been intelligent? [...]

“The fact is,” he then thought, using great care as he tried that defensive trick, “the fact is that I was only imitating intelligence just as I could swim like a fish without being one!”²⁸ The man moved about contentedly: “I was imitating, of course!” [...] The fact is, he concluded with great interest, he had only imitated intelligence, with that essential lack of respect which makes a person imitate. And along with him, millions of men were copying with great effort the idea of a man, next to thousands of women who were attentively copying the idea of a woman and thousands of people of good will were copying with superhuman effort their own face [*cara*] and the idea of existing; not to mention the anguished concentration with which acts of good or evil were imitated—

²⁸ Lispector uses dashes to introduce dialogue, as is usual in Portuguese. Internal thoughts are usually given inside double quotation marks. The English translation loses this distinction by employing quotation marks to frame spoken dialogue as well.

with a daily caution so as not to slip toward an act that is true, and therefore incomparable, and therefore inimitable, and therefore disconcerting. [...] Discomfort is the only warning of the fact that we copy, and we listen to ourselves attentively under the sheets. But so distanced are we by imitation that what we hear comes to us as soundless as if it were a vision as invisible as if it lay in a darkness [*trevas*] which is so dense that hands are useless.²⁹ Because one [*a pessoa*] would even imitate comprehension. Comprehension which had never been made but of the language of others and words.

But there was still disobedience.

Then—by means of the great leap of a crime—two weeks previously he had taken the risk of having no guarantee, and he had come to not comprehending. (1.ii.25-6)

In the original, ‘the idea of a man’ is ‘a ideia que se fazia de um homem’,³⁰

the particle *se* making the verb impersonal (i.e. ‘the idea one had of a man, or ‘the idea of man that people had’). While the verb ‘to have’ can also be used in the expression meaning ‘to have an idea (of something)’ – *ter uma ideia* – the same can be conveyed, as in the passage above, with the verb *fazer*, ‘to do, to make’. Thus, while *ter uma ideia* can mean both ‘to come up with an idea’ and ‘to have a concept (of something)’, *fazer uma ideia* has only the latter meaning. In the quotation above, the use of the verb *fazer* seems to emphasise a certain co-construction of the meaning of ‘man’, ‘woman’, etc.

²⁹ ‘Mas tão distanciados estamos pela imitação que aquilo que ouvimos nos vem tão sem som como se fosse uma visão que fosse tão invisível como se estivesse nas trevas que estas são tão compactas que mãos são inúteis.’ (Clarice Lispector, *A maçã no escuro* [Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1999], i.2.34). Possibly the strangest sentence in the novel, mostly due to the nesting of relative clauses with the structure ‘so much that’, the repeated ‘as if’ pattern, and the merging of distance, sound, vision, and touch. A more literal translation would be ‘But so distanced are we by imitation that the thing we hear comes to us so soundless as if it were a vision that were so invisible as if it lay in the darkness which it is so dense that hands are useless.’ The last relative pronoun *que* (‘which’) is also confusing, since the clause that follows it is *not* a relative clause, but an independent one (it has *estas* as its subject). The pronoun links two independent clauses as if one were subordinate. Of course, the idea of a darkness so dense where not only vision but also touch is of no use is important for the image suggested by the title and the apple’s supposed accessibility, in the dark, by hand.

³⁰ Ibid.

Therefore, Martim produces a fully-fledged – if acutely traditional – theory of representation. For him, humans live out their lives according to the supplement, imitating and referencing what they believe is transcendental reality. They constantly refer to that which they purport to wish to reach, but Martim is aware that people know that the full presence of reality would be lethal, and must therefore be kept at bay by means of the supplement. For Derrida,

[a] terrifying menace, the supplement is also the first and most secure protection; against that very menace. This is why it cannot be given up. [...] The supplement has not only the power of *procuring* an absent presence through its image; procuring it for us through the proxy [*procuration*] of the sign, it holds it at a distance and masters it. For this presence is at the same time desired and feared. The supplement transgresses and at the same time respects the interdict. [...] Enjoyment [*jouissance*] *itself*, without symbol or suppletory, that which would accord us (to) [*nous accorderait (à)*] pure presence itself, if such a thing were possible, would be only another name for death.³¹

The ‘interdict’ both respected and breached by the supplement – in this case, against access to the ‘real thing’ – resurfaces later in the novel as what Martim calls ‘the Prohibition’ and can easily be read both in *Totem and Taboo* and in the Biblical Genesis. Totemism is through and through a system of supplementation of the father’s absence which both respects the interdict (‘thou shalt not overthrow the father’, ‘thou shalt not kill nor eat the father or totem animal’) and transgresses it (‘replace the father with a signifying animal’, ‘kill and eat it in rituals’). Similarly, the Biblical Father-God presents Adam with an interdict, a foreclosed possibility: ‘thou shalt not eat the apple’. If the Forbidden Fruit was in fact capable of granting godly Knowledge to

³¹ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 168, last interpolation is mine.

humankind, transgressing the interdict equates to overthrowing the father, committing the primal crime. Adam, like Martim, feels that the human language that he was given falls short of grasping reality. After all, God can actively shape reality with His language alone. Desire for the apple thus registers as the wish for a 'better' language, devoid of the differential gap that cleaves the human subject and installs lack.

In this sense, Martim's identity as 'god' cannot be read only as the positive supplement that completes God's work. If his mission and desire of 'completing God's work' may stand for the obedient side of the supplementary sign-function that respects the interdict, he also transgresses it by offering up the difference that interrupts the uniqueness of capital-G-God, so as to inaugurate the plurality of gods-in-lower-case. The graphemic distinction between God and god represents the scriptural arche-difference (of the 'arts of space') that inaugurates differentiation in the heart of the self-present plenitude of the (divine) voice. The Edenic tale serves as a prologue that justifies the human condition as it is experienced by Fallen Man: exposition to supplementarity and mortality. The nudity revealed in the Fall underscores more than anything else the human need of supplementation (in this case, clothing). The double functioning of the supplement – obedience and transgression – figures as cognate to the 'double nature' of humanity: the human is materialised in an animal body but is also endowed with divine patronage and gifts (having been made in His image, having a soul, speaking, etc.). In truth, the human's animal embodiment, seen in the light of the supplement's mythology, is none other than the threat, posed by the signifier,

of opening distance from the origin – or posed by writing itself as the ultimate signifier. On the other hand, humanity's spiritual ascendancy reveals the obedient side of the sign, the one which dreams of the sign's effacement so as to let truth shine in full presence. And as can readily be seen in the philosophical tradition – for example in Rousseau, Saussure, or Husserl – the obedient type of sign is more often than not associated with speech, whose medium (air) appears to readily erase its own materiality. In more than one sense, then, the difference between God and god is a zoogrammatological one, or, one could also say, a product of the arche-animal.

Neoteny, or the internal cleavage of Nature

Thus, I propose that the novel's poetics of light and dark as the key in which the logic of the supplement – as *escuridade* – is inscribed. This logic, and the enchainment of supplements, will be understood both as an obstacle in Martim's quest for a non-supplementary language, and as crucial to reading the novel's arche-animality as it is intimately connected to this play. After the deep darkness with which the novel opens, variations of light are used throughout the text as a way of charting Martim's relationship to the stages he is going through and the level of *mediation* he experiences. *Escuridade* encodes the supplementary articulation between elements – such as original and copy, or thing and word – and between stages in a progressive line. Usually, light represents the immediate world of accessible things and transparent truth – a form of transcendence. Darkness, on the other hand, usually means the textural density of a world with intervals and gaps. *Escuridade*, therefore,

signifies both the difference between proximity and distance, and the distinction between free-flowing and intermittent. This is animalised in several moments in which the extension and openness of light is contrasted to animals' supposed independence from light for knowing their environment. Vitória qualifies 'animals' as 'the animals out of which the dark is made' (3.iii.245). In a crucial passage, Martim observes:

The maximum clarity had given in to our inhabited darkness: was that perhaps what Martim waited for each day as he stood there? As if with that submission [*vergar-se*] of the clarity he had been shown just how the harmonious union is made – not intelligible but harmonious, not with any finality but harmonious – as if in that submission of the clarity before the darkness there had finally come about the union of the plants, of the cows, and of the man that he had begun to be. Each time that day turned into night, the man's dominion would become renewed, and a step forward would be taken, blindly, in the end blindly, as is the advance of a person in wishing [*no querer*]. (2.i.130)

Clarity submits (*verga-se*, literally 'bends itself') to darkness, and that is the only way through which a union can be made between stages in his development. Only by accepting the interruption by night-time darkness can clarity move forward and bind together – by illuminating – the coming stages in this human evolution. By means of the cyclical, pendular movement between day and night, Martim can move forward; each alternation signifying one step ahead. Darkness thus *articulates*: it is that which both separates elements in their differentiating specificities but also keeps them together. In *The Apple in the Dark*, the emergence of the human – understood as a journey from out of nature and through animality – is encoded by *escuridade* as a supplementary force that can articulate and unite, while also separating and keeping things apart. As expected, humanity's self-image is again grounded in a paradox: the

human is expected to be that which instrumentalises darkness so as to leave the dark behind, only to then illuminate everything in its wake.³²

Thus, the issue of writing in *The Apple in the Dark* is not only relevant as a result of my theses on the resemblances between arche-writing and arche-animality: it also proves crucial to read the movement from nature to culture ('the harmonious union') as made possible by a certain scriptural supplementation ('that submission of the clarity before the darkness'). After all, in "...That Dangerous Supplement...", Derrida analyses Rousseau's opinions about writing and speech so as to reveal that they also refer to opinions about the relation between culture and nature. Similar to the way metaphysical thought requires us to leave nature to return to it, writing will be both demonised and praised by Rousseau: 'Rousseau *condemns* writing as destruction of presence and as disease of speech. He *rehabilitates* it to the extent that it promises the reappropriation of that of which speech allowed itself to be dispossessed.'³³ So the positive, obedient sense of writing (or the supplement) is brought forward when Rousseau writes of Nature as it *should* have been, 'to the extent that it *should* be self-sufficient'. Nature's supplements, 'art, *technè*, image, representation, convention, etc.', are thought to cumulate and accumulate it.³⁴ Their description as mere supplements (the surplus, the extra, the unessential, the spare) *constitutes* the meaning of Nature

³² The human claims to be able, unlike the animal, to read its own origins under the clear light of reason. Its future, however, while thought to be illuminated at least to a certain extent by the backward-looking light, has to be approached 'blindly'. This experience of blindness, too, justifies the ultimate objective of universal illumination, in the name of which darkness is employed.

³³ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 154, emphasis mine.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

as self-sufficient. Thus, Nature suffices, which means that it is irreplaceable: its substitutes will always fall short.

This *internal cleavage* of Nature (as that which must be abandoned and improved only to be rejoined) will be most productive in Rousseau's discussions of education, the 'keystone' of his thought. Childhood and education lay bare the intricacies of the supplement, and, not coincidentally, also underscore the meaning of animality as a supplementary concept when viewed in conjunction with 'human nature'. The paradox of the supplement is revealed by the fact that education is *good* and *necessary* to the extent that it is 'destined to reconstitute Nature's edifice in the most natural way possible'.³⁵ It must, as a cultural artefact, be added to Nature, but only to fulfil and realise the latter's perfection. Culture must supplement what 'cannot *by definition* be anything but an accident and a deviation from nature'.³⁶

The Apple in the Dark exposes the anxieties that surround childhood purity for their reliance on a certain incompleteness of the human child, the *default* of human Nature which calls for supplementation in a way the animal does not. In fact, it has been widely noted that not even the young of non-human animals face the need of being supplemented, so that animals seem to not only *be* perfect, but also *be born* perfect.

This human-animal difference with respect to the need of supplementation has been noted at least as early as Plato. In the *Protagoras*, he

³⁵ Ibid., p. 158.

³⁶ Ibid., emphasis mine.

recounts the myth of creation according to which the gods fashioned men and animals out of elements and then ‘they ordered Prometheus and Epimetheus to equip them, and to distribute to them severally their proper qualities’.³⁷ The two brothers’ names mean, respectively, foresight and hindsight, which is revealed to be meaningful by the end of the tale.

Epimetheus said to Prometheus: “Let me distribute, and do you inspect.” This was agreed, and Epimetheus made the distribution. [...] Thus did he *compensate* [the mortal creatures] with the view of preventing any race from becoming extinct. [...] Thus [distributed] Epimetheus, who, not being very wise, forgot that he had distributed among the brute animals all the qualities which he had to give, and when he came to man, who was still unprovided, he was terribly perplexed.³⁸

Epimetheus, as his name lays bare, was unable to work with foresight and so did not plan ahead of distributing nature’s gifts that would *compensate* the creatures for their nakedness. His brother comes to inspect and realises that humans were left with no qualities, and attempts to come up with a solution:

Prometheus came to inspect the distribution, and he found that the other animals were suitably furnished, but that man alone was naked and shoeless, and had neither bed nor arms of defence. The appointed hour was approaching when man in his turn was to go forth into the light of day; and Prometheus, not knowing how he could devise his salvation, stole the mechanical arts of Hephaestus and Athene, and fire with them (they could neither have been acquired nor used without fire), and gave them to man.³⁹

Thus, animal characteristics are furnished *by Nature* (here the stock of gifts Epimetheus has to distribute). Animals are indeed *compensated* for an otherwise thankless and arduous existence, but such compensation derives

³⁷ Plato, *Protagoras*, in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 3, trans. by W.R.M. Lamb (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 320d.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 320d-321c, emphasis mine.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 321c-321d.

from Nature. Humans are compensated *in relation to* animals, they are supplemented *so as to measure up to* animals. The arts, technics, technology, culture, etc. that Prometheus steals for humanity are a supplement to correct a fault or lack which is only revealed as such in comparison to animals. And this compensatory supplement does not stem from Nature, whose work and stock had come to an end at that point, but from the gods themselves. *Despite* the gods, since they are *robbed* of such gifts, and so cannot be held responsible for human difference from animals or for their 'having a share of the divine attributes'.⁴⁰

Humans in control of fire are a match for animals and can therefore survive. They managed to create 'articulate speech and names; and [they] also constructed houses and clothes and shoes and beds, and drew sustenance from the earth'.⁴¹ But they are not above animals yet, they do not live in the *polis*, since 'mankind at first lived dispersed, and there were no cities',⁴² despite the divine means by which they face up to the animal world. In an attempt to stave off animal threat, humans gather in cities for protection, but cannot co-exist peacefully as they are bereft of political abilities.⁴³ Zeus finally grants humanity political wisdom so that humans shall not destroy each other while attempting to live side by side in cities.⁴⁴ But cities were themselves founded as a protection against animals, highlighting the supplementary aspect of what is

⁴⁰ Ibid., 322a. But, most importantly, man's gifts originate from lesser gods, and not from Zeus himself. It is stressed in the tale that Prometheus did not succeed in entering Zeus's citadel, from where he could gather 'political wisdom' for humans (Ibid., 321d).

⁴¹ Ibid., 322a.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 322b.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 322c.

proper to humanity. Political existence is thus a compensatory supplement for a certain *immaturity* of the human. That man had to come forth into light as yet incomplete contrasts with the mature state of other animals who came into existence perfect and finished. Childhood can therefore be seen as a state which, while transient, reveals the essence of humanity as always yet unfinished. The technical term for this retention of juvenile traits into adulthood is *neoteny*.⁴⁵

A famous discussion of the biological concept of neoteny is *Ontogeny and Phylogeny* (1977) by biologist and palaeontologist Stephen Jay Gould, who defines neoteny as 'the retardation of somatic development for selected organs and parts'.⁴⁶ Two of his chapters focus on neoteny since that is a crucial aspect of his main topic, *recapitulation*, a popular nineteenth-century biological concept that Gould tells us influenced most areas of thought, including Freudian psychoanalysis.⁴⁷ This influence would explain why, in *Totem and Taboo*, Freud attempts to explain the reality of the Oedipus complex as a recapitulation, in ontogenetic (personal) psychosexual development, of a stage undergone in the phylogenetic development of the human species (the primal crime). In biology, recapitulation refers to the notion that stages in one person's development (be it embryonic, physiological, or intellectual) retrace the steps previously undertaken in a macro level by the whole of humanity. It results from the comparison 'between stages of ontogeny and a sequence of

⁴⁵ 'neoteny, n.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, 2015), accessed 23 January 2016.

⁴⁶ Stephen Jay Gould, *Ontogeny and Phylogeny* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 9.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 155-163.

adult organisms'.⁴⁸ Neoteny emerges as a strange temporality within recapitulation since it describes the fact that what would be, in one's ancestors, a transient stage before maturation actually becomes one's permanent state achieved after sexual maturity. Humans are highly neotenic due to the 'striking resemblances between juvenile pongids [great apes] and adult humans' and the subsequent 'obliteration of this similarity during pongid ontogeny' (the ape's aging process which, among other modifications, enlarges its jaw beyond human likeness).⁴⁹

Human personal development – that is, ontogeny – recapitulates the history of hominid species, but only up to a certain point. Our juvenile characteristics (large rounded skulls, small jaws, big eyes, hairlessness, etc.), which we share with the young of our hominid ancestors, are retained into adulthood, so that the recapitulatory clock appears to be detained. We are born incomplete and remain so, a fact that is represented both in the sudden discovery of nudity in Genesis and in Epimetheus' realisation that no other gifts are left for humans. The state of infancy that so puzzled Rousseau is, in fact, a proper of the human, and but the other side of political existence. Because we are (for all our lives) imperfect animals by nature, we need supplementary education, politics, and culture.

Ironically, human imperfection and lack when compared to animals still result in anthropocentrism insofar as what is remarkable about the human – language, thought, culture, etc. – is precisely grounded on such a lack. Derrida

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 13.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 353.

concludes as such when he comments on Lacan's views on the difference between humans and animals, as quoted in chapter 3 of this thesis. The (human) Symbolic order is more developed than the Imaginary in which animals are trapped, but the former can only come to be when the human subject is subject(ed) of(to) the signifier. This subjection is a result of this originary lack constituted both by human neoteny and the castration complex, so that they are two aspects of the same defect.⁵⁰ For Lacan, because animals are *not* born essentially lacking, their subjectivity is not constructed around an emptiness that would otherwise throw them against the Symbolic order. Their perfection is their downfall, so to speak, since human symbolicity justifies 'the superiority of man over beast'.⁵¹

The double nature of Nature

It is clearer now, after this discussion of the meaning of human neoteny, why Derrida would say that '[w]ithout childhood, no supplement would ever appear in Nature. Now the supplement is here both humanity's good fortune and the origin of its perversion.'⁵² The child is the site where the border between the human and the animal is erected, to the extent that all discourses of neoteny are, to a certain extent, theses on species difference, on the human/animal dichotomy, and on the passage from Nature to culture.

⁵⁰ Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume I*, trans. by Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 125.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 160.

Childhood first tempts the human with the supplement when the child learns to act by proxy, ‘through the hands of others, [...] mov[ing] the world by simply moving the tongue’,⁵³ getting others to do, via language, what the child is too lazy to do him- or herself. Here the scandal of infantile laziness lies with the corruption brought about by the linguistic sign, insofar as ‘supplementation always has the form of the sign. The sign, the image, or the representer, become forces and make “the universe move.” Such is the scandal’.⁵⁴ For Rousseau, this scandal can become truly catastrophic when one realises that the best cure for such childish imperiousness may have to be, not another social intervention, but to leave the child to his or her own ‘illness’ so as to be ‘naturally’ ‘cured’. The catastrophe resides in the fact that Nature here is not loved for itself, but is being instrumentalised as a remedy, as a *supplement* to corrupted culture. This is particularly striking if we read Martim’s ‘criminal project’ as a typically modern-day attempt at an ‘alternative therapy’ in which Nature is brought as a supplement to diseased culture. Exhausted by the hall of mirrors of human societal imitation, Martim may have chosen to radically ‘disconnect’ and go ‘off the grid’ by means of a criminal act that would have others disconnect him from society themselves.⁵⁵

⁵³ Rousseau, cited in Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 160.

⁵⁴ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 160.

⁵⁵ In *Human Error: Species-Being and Media Machines*, Dominic Pettman analyses the desire for ‘connection with nature’ in contemporary discourse as actually a sort of *un-plugging*. Discussing zoophiles’ accounts of their own activities, Pettman emphasises the use of the word *disconnected*. For him, zoophilic desire for a connection to animals and nature is configured as an act of disconnection, since, ‘in contrast to the alienation of modern life [...], postmodern people today are *all too connected* to each other. Communication is felt to be constant and instantaneous, allowing little room to perform the daily ablutions of self-reinforcement. This creates a kind of meta-alienation. [...] In a world of ubiquitous media, the urge to unplug is strong (as both MTV and *The Matrix* showed in the 1990s). Disconnecting from the grid thus

The recourse to Nature as a remedy against corrupted culture is further explored by Rousseau – and discussed by Derrida – in the form of time spent among plants as substitution for poor or rare human interaction. His focus on plants will lead him to juxtapose them to the riches found underground, in mines. Derrida's deconstruction of Rousseau's logic is not only an illuminating instance of paleonymy but also relevant to the thematics of darkness in Lispector's novel.

Thus, for Rousseau, one 'digs in the entrails'⁵⁶ of Mother Earth's womb/breast searching for richness to supplement 'the true wealth which is more within [one's] grasp'⁵⁷ – plants – according to one's level of corruption. The darkness of mines institutes the blindness to the 'real' goods that Nature offers when one pursues 'imaginary' ones buried deep 'at the risk of [one's] life and the expense of [one's] health'.⁵⁸ Derrida makes it explicit that metallurgy, agriculture, and society are, for Rousseau, entangled in one another at the very moment when the human passes from Nature to culture. This 'mine-blindness' thus produces that which emerges with society: language, substitution, and the supplementarity of signs. But this blindness also assures that one is blind to the

becomes a powerful gesture, albeit a temporary one. And in this extreme, particular case [zoophilia], it speaks of the desire to turn away from the human-machine interface and reorient the self toward the neglected third term of cybernetic triangle: the animal' ([Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001], p. 82). Martim can hardly be described a postmodern alienated subject, but his protests against the vacuity of language register a similar alienation before a proliferation of *signs*. For the communication which is felt to be constant in the postmodern condition is lamented precisely because it is felt not to be *real* communication – only ever empty signs constantly doing the loops of optic cable without carrying any meaning. Similarly, Martim's flashbacks show his discontent with what he perceives as the *technology of language* alienating humans from 'real' experiences.

⁵⁶ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 161.

⁵⁷ Rousseau, cited in Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 161.

⁵⁸ Rousseau, cited in Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 161.

very work and law of the supplement. 'Mine-blindness', as the blindness instituted by cultural corruption, is both 'the dark' that prevents Martim as the generic human from being able to see the plenitude of Natural truth, and 'the dark' that mystifies and mythologises the Apple by hiding the functioning of the supplement.

The 'dangerous supplement' in Rousseau – not surprisingly, as Derrida shows – refers also to the auto-eroticism of masturbation. Because the masturbator compensates for the absence of actual objects of desire with his imagination (and here it is indeed a concern for *boys*), masturbation is a supplement to actual erotic attachment. And this supplementation is described in the same language as the dangers of mine-blindness: 'that dangerous supplement that cheats nature and saves up for young men of my temperment many forms of disorders at the expense of their health, of their vigor, and sometimes, their life.'⁵⁹

Crucially, Rousseau differentiates between the loss of innocence brought about by masturbation, and the actual loss of virginity which would be inscribed in the body by the act of sexual attachment. He acknowledges he is no longer a virgin, since he has been spiritually deflowered by himself in masturbation, but corporeally he still recognises his *pucelage* – his 'anatomical' virginity.⁶⁰ For Derrida, the difference between the two kinds of virginity

⁵⁹ Rousseau, cited in Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 164.

⁶⁰ As Spivak reminds us in her translator's note, "*pucelage*" is the more earthy French word for the actual physical fact of sexual intactness, in the female the membrane itself' (Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 163). It is interesting that masturbation is discussed solely as a concern for males – surrounded as it is by the threat of castration and the 'loss of the vital substance' – whereas even *male* virginity is thought in female terms. Foreshadowing the parallels between

(which is, in fact, a difference between spiritual and bodily inscriptions) represents 'the irruption of the dangerous supplement *in nature, between nature and nature*, between natural innocence as *virginity* and natural innocence as *hymen-intactness [pucelage]*'.⁶¹ The supplement – here masturbation – irrupts *within* Nature itself to cleave it in two, shattering its self-identity. In a sense, the supplement inaugurates a certain articulation *within* that which it supplements, so that difference is installed not simply *outside* but also *within* the supplemented. Significantly, this hinge inside (human) Nature is located between two natures – two realms taken to be natural – which are always in tension: spiritual nature and animal nature. The truth of internal articulation highlights precisely the unstable characterisation of the human as that which must have a 'stratum' (the animal) to which something else is added (the spirit, language, etc.), *without for all that accepting that either of them is the artificial supplement of the other*. This tension structures most of the thematics of the *The Apple in the Dark*. Martim is unsure whether he 'has gone back in time' in order to find the ground of spiritual nature or animal nature. If the former, his quest would comprise the attempt of securing this spiritual nature against the corruption brought about by (animal) embodiment and the technical secondarity of language. If the latter, he would then be trying to find protection in animalistic human origins so as to stave off the fogging of 'reality' by

masturbation and writing, one could say that Rousseau multiplies scriptural meanings by simultaneously discussing masturbation and virginity: if masturbation configures the body as the masculine source of inscribing substances, virginity as *pucelage* entertains the notion of the (male) body as the feminine surface of inscription on which sexual experience can be marked.

⁶¹ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 163, first emphasis mine.

linguistic conceptuality. Interestingly, in both cases language is the enemy, whether due to its opaque materiality or its abstract ideality.⁶²

That Nature can be cleaved internally by the supplement (added from the outside, so to speak) will mean that the dialectics between essential and accidental needs to be understood outside the logic of metaphysics. The most extraneous detail can generate essential consequences at the core of being, whose essence becomes divided and non-identical to itself, to the point that the origin of being is not an origin at all. In Derrida, Nature is thus always already broken down into two natures, the articulation of which will figure as the 'true' origin of all that is engendered by or added to Nature – the paleonymy here exposing the scandalous logic of difference as originary to presence. I argue that this paleonymy is woven throughout *The Apple in the Dark* in the form of *escuridade*. The extent to which Lispector presents this paleonym as function of arche-animality will be crucial to my argument regarding the zoogrammatologies of the novel.

The cow of all cows

As mentioned above, Martim's journey is caught up with the question of otherness. Initially, alterity is shunned in the same gesture with which he rejects common language, which he terms 'the language of others'. Later on in his progress, however, Martim realises that, in order to fully accede to humanity, he must *create* otherness. Since he experiences his stages as

⁶² These two possibilities are discussed in more detail in the next chapter in relation to poetic language.

moments of creation – thus engendering new beings and new realities in a new world, like a poststructuralist Adam creating beings with a faltering language – he concludes he must create (i.e. give birth) to other humans so that he can be fully human. Not only that, however, but he comes to believe that his anthropogenic project is so heroic that all his discoveries and epiphanies should and will become the saving truth for the grateful throng of other humans, those who have not created their own language or made themselves in their own image.⁶³ Thus:

What a strange thing. Up to now I seemed to be wanting to reach with the tip of my finger the very tip of my finger – it's true that with that extreme effort I grew; but the tip of my finger remained unreachable. I went as far as I could. But why didn't I understand that the thing that I could not reach in me was already other people [*os outros*]? Other people, who are our deepest plunge! We who are you as you yourselves are not you. In that way, concentrating very hard on the birth [*parto*] of others, in a task that only he could carry out, Martim was there trying to be one with [*fazer corpo com*]⁶⁴ those who will be born. (3.vii.335-6)

In the original, 'we who are you as you yourselves are not you' is 'nós que vos somos como vós mesmos não vos sois'.⁶⁵ This sentence is syntactically innovative since it treats the verb *ser* ('to be') as a transitive verb with an object pronoun as direct object. While *ser* can be used transitively, it normally takes a personal pronoun as object (e.g. 'I am she'), and not an object pronoun (e.g. 'I am

⁶³ If his deeds shall become guidance for the others to come – as some sort of postmodern Gospel – the recurrent words for Martim-as-Reborn-Messiah are 'giant' and 'hero'. If the passage when Martim considers writing a book about himself were not so suffused with bathos, it is fair to say it could be called, not *The Birth of the Hero*, but *The Gospel of the Giant According to Himself*.

⁶⁴ '*Fazer corpo com*', literally 'make body with', is cognate with the French '*faire corps avec*' – much more common in French than its Portuguese counterpart is in Portuguese – which means 'to be united so as to make one thing only', 'to be one with', 'to sync with', 'to be joined to', 'to form one body with', 'to fuse with', 'to connect to'.

⁶⁵ Lispector, *A maçã no escuro*, 3.vii.310-1.

her'). Thus, *vos somos* instead of *somos vós* suggests the intriguing notion of *being* as something that not only one can be, but also as something that can happen to one.

Cixous reads this passage as a 'scene [...] of masculine birth', where 'the metaphor and the bodily labor' of giving birth 'cannot not be borrowed from the real other, here the woman'.⁶⁶ However, the entire passage is also readily connected to *escuridade* since it consists of Martim's reflections on lighting a bonfire; his ultimate direct manipulation of light, after chapters fascinated by it, intoxicates him. In one of the few long dialogue passages of the novel, which many critics consider to be its climax, Vitória monologues about her life and her secrets. She tells of the only time she loved, which was when admiring a young man lighting a bonfire. A few days later, she asks Martim to light one while she observes. Interpelated by her into the bonfire-lighting young man's position, Martim feels both uncomfortable and victorious. Light extinguishes all doubt and all distances, and Martim has created it himself, as a man – a proper, heroic one – should:

Dealing with the fire had been the work of a man, and he was proud and calm. [...] And the promise that was made to us—the promise was there. He could feel it there—it was only a matter of extending his hand that had finally been burned in the exercise of his function as a man.
(3.vi.316)

This is part of a clear sequence of events that transpire in the third and last part of the novel, which shares the latter's title. Chapter 3 could also be considered the climax of the novel, when a torrential rain interrupts the

⁶⁶ Cixous, 'The Temptation of Understanding', p. 61.

suspenseful drought that had plagued the farm during the two previous parts, releasing tension for all three main characters. Chapter 4 is dedicated to Vitória's long, winding monologue to Martim while he cuts down an old apple tree under her orders. He finds her so pathetic that he doubts she could pose the threat of turning him in. Chapter 5 is only a few pages long, and paints a picture of calm now that all three characters have found some sort of closure. Surprisingly, Martim feels strangely victorious despite his terrifying conclusion in the woods that he had failed. His embrace of the light of victory stands in contrast to how deeply and irreversibly marked his character had appeared to be by the darkness in the woods. Cixous's reading leads us to conclude that Martim more readily succumbs to the seductive promise of metaphysical, transparent language, the more he feels superior to Vitória. In this sense, belief in a transcendental language devoid of supplementarity seems to be closely tied to phallocentrism and the question of sexual difference. Chapter 5 starts:

And as if everything had come to an end before its appointed time, and as if everybody had got whatever it was they had wanted from the man [Martim] – they suddenly left him alone. The air was soft and full, and in the morning the cow gave birth to a calf [*bezerro*]. (3.v.309)

Victorious light is confirmed:

There followed a period of great calm. Life revealed obvious progress the way one suddenly perceives a child has grown. [...] And the few days that followed mounted up without incident, like one single day.

They were clear and tall days, woven into the air by the birds. [...] And in spite of the distance, the clear air brought the mountain within the range of a shout.

[...] And in the cowshed, after the birth of the calf, serenity reigned.

[...] [T]he sky was so high and beautiful that Martim, in spite of himself, joined in with the light and went over to the side of what wins.

And taking advantage of the crest of a wave [*onda*] to raise himself up, he let himself be carried along carelessly by the surge [*vaga*] of plenty. (3.v.309-10)

Sexual difference seems to short circuit Martim's most acute and productive insights – after having accepted, in the woods, the inescapable reality of 'the dark' which envelops 'the apple', Martim succumbs to the illusory power of light to reveal all of reality. This is connected both to Vitoria's monologue, which seems to Martim to confirm his sexist assumptions about her, and to the thematics of giving birth. 'Giving birth', in *The Apple in the Dark*, is irreducibly related both to the impersonality (and otherness) contained within the notion of animal reproduction, and to *escuridade*.

Martim's first developmental stage in the farm – his kinship with the plants – is prefaced in terms of light: 'It was only with a stupid effort that the man was able to bear the intense light of the countryside during the confusing days that followed as if he were not yet ready to understand clarity' (1.vi.79). And then:

But, day by day [...], he would come down from the high and open light of the countryside, from whence he came blind with incomprehension. [...] He would finally go to that Tertiary plot where life was only fundamental. [...] In that vegetal pit, which the light at best made hazy, the man would take refuge. [...]

The Tertiary plot had great perfection about it. Not even when the light came close did it change the air of the silence. Clarity, coming after stages and stages [*etapas*] of silence, became reduced there to mere visibility, which is the most that eyes need. [...]

And it was somehow so perfect that even the perspective of distance became a part of that world without God. (1.vi.79-80)

At this stage, Martim revels in the mere visibility of his plot of land which for him signifies the primitive life of plants and even rats. Not the darkness that surrounded the meaningless sleep which opens the novel, but neither the meaning-giving light that recognises distance only to undermine it in infinite illumination: only a sort of hazy visibility that gets life going. In

contrast to this, Martim's entrance in his next, cow phase is marked by the different luminosity associated with the cows:

[A]s if he had been imitating in his task of becoming concrete a fateful evolution whose traces he felt groping—thus it was that his new and confused steps led him one morning out of his reign in the plot into the half-light of the cowshed where cows were more difficult than plants.

[...] The light of the cowshed was different from the light outside to the point that at the door some vague threshold was established. (1.viii.93-4)

The cow stage is interesting since it not only introduces Martim to the realm of higher animals, but also encodes in the novel the meanings of sexual difference and reproduction which will crucially reoccur later. And, most importantly, the cow passages all make clear the deep connection between reproduction and *escuridade*:

In the dim filth [of the cowshed] there was the sense of a workshop and of concentration, as if from out of that shapeless entanglement little by little one more form were being concretely prepared. [...] Cows were made there. [...] [O]n the threshold of the stable he seemed to recognize the dim light that came out of the animals' [*bichos*] snouts. That man had seen that vapor of light [*vapor de luz*] wafting from sewers in certain cold dawns. And he had seen that light emanating from warm garbage. He had also seen it like a halo around the love of two dogs; and his own breath was that same light. [...] [H]e seemed to realize with reluctance that things had been arranged such that once in a stable a child had been born. For the great smell of matter was right. Only Martim was not ready for such a spiritual advance. [...] [H]e hesitated at the door, pale and offended like a child to whom the root of life has suddenly been revealed. (1.viii.94)

And further on, the passage from the light of the morning of plants into the 'half-light' of the cowshed endows both reproduction and *escuridade* with the evolutionary scale motif, the gradual addition of cumulative stages or steps that bridge nature and culture. That there could be stages at all, *The Apple in the Dark* implies, that time and space can be textured according to *spacing*, one

needs darkness and the differentiating capacity it brings to a world of diffuse light. Distance, difference, and spacing are part of a chain which, together with language, the sign, and the supplement, *seems* to accidentally happen to undivided presence:

[A]ll that was needed was a step backwards, and he would have found himself in the full fragrance of morning which is a thing already perfected in the smallest leaves and smallest stones, a finished work without fissures—and at which a person can look without any danger because there is no place to enter and lose oneself. A step backwards would have been all he needed.

He then took a step forward. [...] [T]he cows, used to the darkness, were aware of the stranger. And he felt in his whole body that his body was being tested by the cows: they began to moo slowly and moved their feet without even looking at him—bypassing, as animals do, the necessity of seeing in order to know, as if they had already crossed the infinite extension of their own subjectivity to the point of reaching the other side: the perfect objectivity that no longer need be demonstrated. While he, in the cowshed, had been reduced to weak man: that dubious thing that has never passed from one margin to the other.

[...] Then, sacrificing his own identification, he almost took on the form of one of the animals. And by doing just that he suddenly seemed to understand, with surprise, what a cow is like. (1.viii.95-6)

Rabassa's translation reads 'what it was like to be a cow'. However, the Portuguese *como é uma vaca* contains no suggestion of the cow's subjective experience. In other words, it describes Martim learning about cow-ness as an *object* rather than as a possible *subject*. Rabassa's misunderstanding might help explain the insistence among some critics to frame this passage as a moment of understanding otherness for Martim. Pitt, despite quoting the novel exclusively in the original Portuguese, nevertheless interprets that passage as Martim's being 'able to identify with a group that already inhabited the new space he has entered, to *put himself in their position*, and to become part of a bigger whole' by means of 'bypassing language so as to not be hampered by its

imperfect ability to communicate'.⁶⁷ However, Martim does not yet 'have' language in order to bypass it – if anything Martim is bypassing the clarity of the morning and its promise of direct knowing, unhampered by the vicarious working of language, in the name of the animal darkness of the cows. Negrón-Marrero acknowledges that 'we cannot talk about a personification of the cow', but she foregrounds the bodily sensations in the passage, according to a logic which is not quite clear. She reads the objectivity of the cows not in terms of the lack of a (human) ability that appears to put cows above humans, but as a kind of objectivity 'that is not abstracted from feeling and thus from the body'. The motif of animal perfection built upon a lack is not touched upon, so she contrasts a 'regular' objectivity which would rationalise objects with the 'perfect objectivity' of the cows, which according to her is set apart by the fact that it 'makes of [the body's] experience a tool of knowledge'.⁶⁸

Martim's birthing of others in his meditation about otherness is connected to the previous cow passages in its focus on impersonality. Martim initially wants to become so totally himself so as to be completely incomparable to any other human, in a dream of exceptionalism that shuns any semblance or any interchangeability. However, afterwards he seems to conclude that being the most human means being the least personal, like a cow that has extinguished all her subjectivity, so that he can be *all* humans:

A few hours before, beside the bonfire, he had attained an impersonality inside of himself: he had been so profoundly himself that he had become the "himself" of any other person, the way a cow is a cow of all cows. But if beside the bonfire he had made himself, right then he

⁶⁷ Pitt, p. 195, my emphasis.

⁶⁸ Negrón-Marrero, p. 107.

was using himself: now he had just attained the impersonality with which a man, falling, another rises up. The impersonality of dying while others are born. The altruism of the existence of others. [...]

[...] [A]fter all, “the other man” is the most objective thought that a person can have! he who had so much wanted to be objective.

[...]

Then, as many promises had been made to us, one of them was fulfilled right there: other people [*os outros*] existed. They existed as if he, Martim, had given them to themselves. (3.vii.335, 336)

(Animal) reproduction had already been flagged in the cowshed passage as intimately related to *escuridade*:

The cowshed was a warm and good place which pulsated like a thick vein. It was by [*à base de*] that thick vein that men and beasts [*bichos*] had children. Martim sighed exhausted at the enormous effort: he had just “unveiled” [*descortinar*].⁶⁹ [...] It was through [*à base de*] a cowshed that *time is indefinitely replaced by time*. It was because of that pulsating that migrating flocks went from cold zones to temperate ones. (1.viii.97, my emphasis)

Time is created at the base of a pulsating vein, by the means of which life can articulate stages by linking generation to generation. The chaining of time as the continuing movement of supplementarity structures the impersonality that Martim seeks, which is none other than the impersonality brought about by animal mortality. Death makes all living things impersonal to the extent that they must merge with the chaining of countless generations. This mortality is

⁶⁹ ‘*Descortinar*’, always between quotation marks, is a repeated word that occurs every time Martim enters a new stage. Unfortunately, Rabassa does not translate it uniformly in all its instances. It is clearly formed from the word *cortina*, ‘curtains’, and the *Aurélio* dictionary defines it as: ‘1. To make manifest, to show, by drawing the curtains. 2. To see, to spy: *From the window of the palace, he espied [descortinou] the crowd gathered in the square*. 3. To discover, to notice, to distinguish: *In that explosion of rage he noticed [descortinou] his friend’s temperament*. 4. To make manifest; to reveal: *The secret document revealed [descortinava] the revolutionaries’ actions*. 5. To open clearings in (the woods)’ (my translation). Also interesting is the fact that, according to the *Aurélio*, it is a transitive verb, but Lispector constantly employs it as if it were intransitive. Martim ‘unveils’, but does he unveil *something*? Is he revealing *himself*, even though the verb is not reflexive? Is he being unveiled before a third perspective?

the foremost experience of time as articulation, as discreet stages which interrupt an otherwise steady, undifferentiated time of an eternal 'now'.

The light that therefore I give (to)

However, the inter-connectedness between reproduction, alterity, and *escuridade* is made most acute in the short chapter describing the feeling of victorious calm after Vitória's monologue. As stated above, the first paragraph of the chapter informs that 'in the morning the cow gave birth to a calf' (3.v.309). The relevance of this sentence would probably not make itself felt in a translated version of the novel, or to someone like Cixous who famously read Lispector in Portuguese but who is also well known for her shortcomings in Portuguese.⁷⁰ The original sentence reads 'de manhã a vaca deu à luz um bezerro' (3.v.287), which literally translates as 'in the morning the cow gave to the light a (male) calf'. As in Italian and Spanish, the common-place expression in Portuguese for 'giving birth' directly references light. 'Give to the light' would be cognate with expressions in which the mother is said to 'bring [the child] forth' onto the world (of light).⁷¹ However, it would be correct to affirm that *dar à luz* is not the only form of the expression used to describe giving birth, since it is simply one variety, in fact the normative, high-register one. A similar construction, although considered incorrect and thus informal, is 'dar a

⁷⁰ Rosemary Arrojo, 'Interpretation as possessive love: Hélène Cixous, Clarice Lispector, and the ambivalence of fidelity', in *Postcolonial Translation: Theory and Practice*, ed. by Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 141-161.

⁷¹ Interestingly, 'to come out into the light' is the expression used in Plato to refer to the moment when the human should come into the world after having been prepared by Epimetheus.

luz', without the grave accent.⁷² Making use of a preposition, *dar a luz a um bezerro* literally translates to 'give the light to a calf'. The distinction between the two forms hinges on which is the direct object of the sentence and which is the indirect one. In *dar à luz um bezerro*, the calf is the direct object of the act of giving, and he is being given to the light, the indirect object. In *dar a luz a um bezerro*, the light is the direct object which is being given to the darkness-dwelling indirect object, the calf. The confusion between the two forms probably stems from the fact that, in Brazil, *a* and *à* are pronounced the same.⁷³

Earlier editions of *The Apple in the Dark* did indeed contain in this passage the 'incorrect' informal variety of the expression. More recent editions of Lispector novels in Brazil are not prone to correct her language, giving her free rein to explore and flaunt normative rules as she sees fit. The current Brazilian publisher of Lispector, Rocco, until recently appended to all her novels an introductory note explaining their editorial policy regarding possible

⁷² The grave accent over the *a* in the standard expression marks the gemination of the preposition 'to' (*a*) and the article 'the' (also *a*), in what is known in Portuguese as *crasis*: thus, **a a luz* is rendered *à luz*.

⁷³ "In the case of [the preposition] *a* plus the feminine article *a*, contraction of the geminate vowels was definitive. [...] Since European Portuguese typically has a vowel of open quality of a contraction of this type, the agglutinated form [a] is there opposed to [ə] for either the preposition or the article alone. In Brazil, on the other hand, neither the central vowel nor the mid vowels are ever open when in unstressed position, but there is, in compensation, a secondary stress on the agglutinated preposition plus article form, which therefore is open just as above. There is a slight difference, however, since secondary stress is possible, and indeed frequent, even on the simple preposition. This results, of course, in the loss of the phonological distinction between the latter and the agglutinated form" (Joaquim Mattoso Câmara Jr, *The Portuguese Language*, translated by Anthony J Naro [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972], pp. 156-7). "In European Portuguese, [...] [the] vowel /a/ is always realized as [ə] in unstressed position" (Maria Helena Mateus and Ernesto d'Andrade, *The Phonology of Portuguese* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000], p. 18). "In BP [Brazilian Portuguese], the unstressed vowel [ə] only occurs in word-final position" (Ibid., p. 134). It is worth noting that the slightly raised version of /a/ is sometimes transcribed either as [ə] or [e]. Therefore, in Portugal, *deu à luz* ("gave birth") is pronounced /ˌdewəˈluʃ/, whereas *deu a luz* is /ˌdewɐˈluʃ/. In Brazil, both forms are pronounced /ˌdewəˈluʃ/.

contradicting versions of the same Lispector text.⁷⁴ They quoted a letter from her in which she explains her own editing process, which consisted in careful rewriting and editing her manuscripts while she typed them out.⁷⁵ She did not, however, keep any manuscripts or originals after sending them to the publisher, and never re-read her own books either for pleasure or to revise them. The publisher presented that quote as justification of their strict adherence to the first published edition as the 'true originals' of her works⁷⁶ and as explanation for their unwillingness to correct her punctuation and grammar as if these were the result of absent-mindedness.

Lispector's writing is indeed marked by an abundance of constructions which would be considered grammatically wrong or colloquial, despite the general erudite diction.⁷⁷ Despite the disclaimer, a number of corrections have

⁷⁴ The note, authored by Marlene Gomes Mendes, responsible for revising Lispector's texts for Rocco, calls attention to the fact that books with various editions may present alterations that 'range from errors committed by absent-minded typists to the well-meaning "corrections" by revisers and copy editors'. She then concludes that it is necessary to pit editions against each other so as to 'restore to [the text] its fidelity and legitimacy' (my translation).

⁷⁵ She writes in the letter: 'I have always done the last copy of my books because every time that I copy I modify them, add to them; ultimately, alter them' (my translation).

⁷⁶ Mendes concludes that 'it is not possible to work with Clarice Lispector's texts unaware of the fact that she did not revise them and therefore did not make alterations from one edition to the next. In preparing this edition, we chose the first edition, published in 1961, by [the publisher] Francisco Alves, as the copy-text' (my translation). Rocco's webpage for *The Apple in the Dark* states that the current (1998) edition of the novel 'went through a rigorous textual revision, undertaken by the textual criticism specialist Marlene Gomes Mendes, based on the first edition' ('A Maçã no Escuro', Rocco

<<http://www.rocco.com.br/index.php/livro?cod=2213>> [accessed 26 January 2016], my translation). Curiously, the first edition does indeed contain the incorrect, colloquial 'dar a luz' (without the accent), which Rocco and Mendes have indeed corrected in the current edition despite their disclaimer to the contrary. As it is, one cannot know whether Lispector originally wrote the informal variety or whether the first edition might have changed her 'correct' use of the expression to the informal one that they published.

⁷⁷ A common feature of her prose that is very rarely preserved in the English translation is her colloquial use of adjectives where adverbs should be employed: 'He was guided by the softness that animals have, that makes them walk gracefully' (1.ii.16) was originally 'Guiava-o a suavidade dos brutos, a mesma que faz com que um bicho ande bonito' (Lispector, *A maçã no escuro*, 1.ii.24). A metaphor of the last clause would be 'that a "critter" walk beautiful'. Thus, in

indeed been silently incorporated to the latest editions, namely the changes prescribed in the 2009 Portuguese spelling reform. Considering that this is the second spelling reform since *The Apple in the Dark* was published, three differently spelled editions exist. However, this does not explain why there should be a discrepancy between *dar a luz a* in earlier editions and *dar à luz* in more recent ones, since this difference has never been the focus of spelling reforms. Previous editions, as Rocco likes to point out in their disclaimer, were more likely to correct Lispector's writing, hence it is improbable that the earlier construction was a result of editorial correction, since that would mean it was changed to what is technically a grammatical error.

The ambiguity between the two forms speaks of an irreducible flicker between two different ways of relating light and reproduction. Is the 'light' something that can be manipulated by a subject and thus given to the next generation, added to a stratum so as to constitute the next evolutionary step? Or are subjects, conversely, passively added to the light as that which will obscure it? Are subjects foreground objects that can occlude the light, or are they visited by it so as to be outshone? In a certain sense, this asks the very

that sentence the colloquial word *bicho* ('critter') contrasts with the literary *brutos* ('brutes'), but above all the use of the adjective to modify the verb is a colloquial use which creates a jarring effect with the formal, literary syntax. *Bicho* is an interesting word in the novel and in Lispector's work in general. An MA dissertation on animals in Lispector was titled *O Bicho Outro* ('The Animal Other', but replacing *animal* by *bicho*). Derived from the Latin *bestius*, which also gave rise to the English 'beast' and the French *bête*, *bicho* is a mostly colloquial noun that can describe 'any terrestrial animal' (Aurélio), thus near to the meaning of 'critter'. However, *bicho* is commonly and popularly used also to describe small insects, akin to the word 'bug' – possibly by influence of the similar word *bicha*, a colloquial, old-fashioned word for 'parasitic worm'. 'Critter-bicho' and 'bug-bicho' may be a pair of polysemous homonyms, two separate words that are spelled and pronounced the same, but with different, albeit similar meanings. Another Portuguese word also derived from *bestius* is *besta*, which can mean either any riding animal, or a mule, although it is also cognate with the French *bête* in the sense of 'stupid', which is also true for *besteira* and *bêtise*.

question of subjectivity, and thus prohibits the framing of the discussion in terms of subjects – especially since the novel provides this discussion in the clef of cows, who/which we are informed to have reached post-subjectivity. Only the free manipulation of light would constitute sovereign subjectivity, while being instrumental to the light equates to being objectified. Rather than the actions of a subject, the flickering grave accent (*a* vs. *à*) interrogates the mechanics of subject-creation. In the living being's relationship to death as that which chops up life's flow of time, 'giving the light' does admittedly come across as acceptance of mortality, but only insofar as death – as darkness – separates stages so as to take the light to a more advanced one. In other words, mortality is accepted simply because it is only way of being able to 'pass on the torch', and assumes the origin of life as light. Conversely, 'giving to the light' sees in mortality a more radical finitude rooted in embodiment, whose darkness would indeed be the origin of life as living-in-a-body. Giving offspring over to the light would register as approaching the 'light at the end of the tunnel' at the end of one's life, a light which by definition cannot be reached while living and thus must be left to the next generation. 'Giving the light' assumes a primordial light being interrupted by the dark, while 'giving to the light' supposes an original darkness kept only alive by the 'spark' of movement which death brings about.

Human *logos* – or Lispectorian 'light' – equals absolute self-presence and the complete illumination of all the space of the world, an illumination that in fact neutralises the world *as* space. Like speech, the world drenched in light in *The Apple in the Dark* has only one dimension, it is a linear extension through time and thus can be wholly comprehended instantaneously in each moment.

Darkness introduces spacing and distance themselves and makes of the luminous whole a series of discrete, different chunks. Dialectically, this darkness is pure negation. It only *is* to the extent that it *is not* and that it can interrupt light. *Escuridade* – understood as the play of light and dark, or the succession of days and nights – is revealed to be grounded on an *escuridade* that is in fact the very possibility of articulating light and dark, day and night. One night can separate two days – and thus make them two – only on the condition that there exists articulation and supplementation. Martim's quest and project – committing a crime so as to be driven from society and returned to square one – seems to attempt to run back along the chain of days and nights, of supplemented and supplementer, to encounter the originary element that had first to be supplemented. But rather than that, he finds that everything actually 'begins' with supplementation itself, and thus does not really begin. The dark 'spark' that sets the chain of supplements going can only be, like the primal crime in *Totem and Taboo*, an inscribed origin.

Human relationship to 'light' here rehearses the same questions raised in previous chapters about the relationship between human culture and animal nature. Whereas I described 'the animal' – as embodiment – as the first technological supplement to (and corruption of) luminous, spiritual humanity, it is also reasonable to picture humanity coming *after* animality, coming about *by the means of* and *in the form of* the addition of light to the darkness of animal density. Human nature, in onto-theological terms, is primordial: the first spark, which then gets corrupted by its descent into the materiality of the world, its incarnation into animal corporeality. Crucially, that is also true in

phenomenology. Parallel to that, however, and in the same tradition, humanity is also what emerges, as an improvement, from the background of natural animality, abandoning the dark realm of instinct and unreason.

It is well known that Derrida in 'The Animal that Therefore I Am (More to Follow)' inscribes identity, subjectivity, the 'I am' (*je suis*) or the *ergo sum* within the act of pursuit, of the 'I follow' (*je suis*). I *am* only to the extent that I *follow* and pursue something or someone (*je suis donc je suis*, I follow therefore I am), so that the pursued element emerges as primary. I am/follow an animal since humanity comes after animality so as to supersede and improve it, or so the humanist and/or evolutionary story goes. But, as we saw, the idea of the animal embodiment of the soul suggests a primacy of the thinking subject – if I follow the animal, things start with the *I*. Crucially, the connection between the verbs 'to follow' and 'to be' in French only exists in the first person singular.

I am given (myself?): *donner le change*

The vacillation between the two varieties of the expression *dar* (*à*) *luz* maps out onto the flickering of another *a* with a grave accent in the Derrida passage quoted above. He argues that 'presence is at the same time desired and feared', hence the double functioning of the supplement as that which approximates us to presence while also protecting us from it. For Rousseau, as we saw above, it was a question of re-routing his pleasure from the direct access to sexual experience towards masturbation, as a compensatory stand-in for the presence of sexual enjoyment, which Derrida describes as 'enjoyment

[*jouissance*] *itself*, without symbol or suppletory, that which would accord us (to) [*nous accorderait (à)*] pure presence itself'.⁷⁸

The parentheses suggest two symmetrically opposed options: either presence is delivered to us, or we are delivered to it. This is the same undecidability which is at the heart of the issue of 'giving (to) the light' and, as Derrida makes clear, ultimately describes a concept of death. After all, the full presence of enjoyment itself 'would be only another name for death', hence the fear and the need for the supplement. If supplements mediate the relationships that we, as subjects, entertain with presence, one would think that bypassing supplementation would grant us presence as an object to be attained. However, in a certain sense the fullness of presence could never be an object: the human subject would need to be the object which is then given over to presence or, in other words, to death. As Derrida has pointed out, life is another name for auto-affection⁷⁹ and that which touches itself is not one and not self-present.

Both *dar (à) luz* and *la jouissance elle-même [...] qui nous accorderait (à) la presence pure* interrogate what it means to be *given* – whether one is given *something* or is given *to* it (light/presence), communion with which would stop the work of *escuridade*/supplementarity and thus equal death. Interestingly, Derrida introduces the idiomaticity of French in order to stress this point. We learn that Rousseau believes he is *misleading* his own desires by rerouting them into himself instead of prostitutes. Fearing 'habitation with women' – *jouissance*

⁷⁸ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 168.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

itself – Rousseau conjures up their presence by means of the apparent self-presence of masturbation. This restitution of presence by means of symbols is experienced as *immediate*, despite being itself a form of mediation. This is the case ‘because as experience, as consciousness or conscience, [this symbolic restitution] *passes over passage through the world*. The toucher is touched, auto-affection gives itself as pure autarchy’.⁸⁰ However, Derrida demonstrates that this restitution is illusory insofar as it depends on the supplementary structure of auto-affection. Rousseau himself is thus sidetracked or deceived by the supplement:

But what is no longer deferred is also absolutely deferred. The presence that is thus delivered to us in the present is a chimera. Auto-affection is a pure speculation. The sign, the image, the representation, which come to supplement the absent presence are the illusions that sidetrack [*donnent le change*] us.⁸¹

Derrida foregrounds the French idiom *donner le change* as mapping the functioning of the supplement as the latter promises to procure an absent presence by means of the (false) self-presence of auto-affection:

Donner le change [literally “giving change”]: in whatever sense it is understood, this expression well describes the recourse to the supplement admirably. In order to explain his “disgust” for “common prostitutes,” Rousseau tells us: [...] “I had not lost the pernicious habit of sidetracking [*donner le change*] my needs”.⁸²

In their article ‘What Gives (*Donner le change*)’, Ravindranathan and Traisnel discuss Derrida’s use of this idiom. They point out that ‘in hunting parlance, *donner le change* was originally used to refer to the substitution by

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 167.

⁸¹ Ibid., translator’s interpolation.

⁸² Ibid., p. 167-8, translator’s interpolation.

which a chased animal, most often a deer, would escape by offering up another of its species in its place'.⁸³ However, in modern-day French, the expression means 'simply to *deceive* or to *mislead*, to pass one thing for another', often used pronominally and reflexively (or auto-affectionately, as it were) as *se donner le change*, 'to convince oneself of an untruth'.⁸⁴ Therefore, Rousseau believes it possible to mislead or deceive his own desires into accepting self-eroticism instead of intercourse, but the symbolic restitution performed by auto-affection is only an illusion brought about by denial. Like the deer which can give the *change* by giving the hunter the slip and offering up another as if it were the self-same, the supplement gives Rousseau the *change* by offering an image of himself in auto-affection as if it were truly himself. When something gives you the *change*, one could say that

the enjoyment [*jouissance*] of the *thing itself* is thus worked over, in its act and in its essence, by frustration. [...] Promising itself there as it hides there, giving itself as it displaces itself, is something that cannot even be rigorously called presence. [...] The supplement is maddening because it is neither presence nor absence.⁸⁵

After all, what does it mean to ask whether the deer who has given the *change* is present when it is able to give the change 'by inscribing a difference for which there is no mark of concept'?⁸⁶ For Ravindranathan and Traisnel, the Derridean supplement as *donner le change* inscribes the possibility of an animal subject, an animal able both to give and to give *another as itself*. In this scene of

⁸³ Thangam Ravindranathan and Antoine Traisnel, 'What Gives (*Donner le change*)', *SubStance*, 45 (2016), 143-160 (p. 146).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁸⁵ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 168.

⁸⁶ Ravindranathan and Traisnel, p. 147.

giving by an animal of its own likeness there is a challenge to our 'current economy of signification [...] in which the animal disappears, or appears merely *as (a) given*'.⁸⁷

The belief that animals are simply *given* or *a given* implies that they are part of Nature, conceived as the inert background against which human intentionality plays and which it fashions. The given would be that which is immediately ready to hand, as the Apple shrouded in darkness promising the direct intimacy of the touch. And, of course, auto-affection as suggested by masturbation is the ready-to-hand *par excellence*. And, like masturbation, the direct access to the animal as a given is complicated by the law of supplementarity, the moment the animal slips away from its status as a given raw material onto the confusion of the giving-given brought about by passing another as oneself. The animal presence sought in pursuit is thought to be reachable by means of the self-presence of the pursuing subject (as engendered by auto-affection), but the very mediation betrayed by auto-affection is also revealed in the interchangeability between the deer and its *change*: if I know that *I* who is following *am I* only by means of an auto-affection, which *I* is touched and which is touching? Which one gives and which one is given? Which one is using the other so as to 'pass one thing for another', like money, and thus engender presence? Similarly, which deer am I following? Is/are the deer/s merely matter given to be fashioned, lit under the subject's

⁸⁷ Ibid.

eye, or is/are it/they, conversely, the shadowy trickster with the presence of mind to elude us?

The sentence I coined previously, describing the necessity of following to being – *je suis donc je suis* – displays the same undecidability. It can mean both ‘I follow therefore I am’ and ‘I am therefore I follow’, with the latter establishing the primacy of the I – I can follow only to the extent that *I am an I*. In this sentence, it is not clear which version of phrase *je suis* follows which, since the phrase ‘gives the *change*’ as it exchanges itself with its double within the sentence unnoticeably.

The labour of self-creation

Hence, *dar (à) luz* is the pivot around which all the other undecidables in the novel turn. As discussed above, the title may refer either to a pessimistic view of human linguistic existence (we are always lost in dark, the Apple always out of reach), or to a triumphant affirmation of the vast knowledge we have at hand (if we abandon language and reason, we can actually access the Apple directly). Similarly, Martim’s original intentions when committing murder, due to his borderline amnesia in its aftermath, are also enigmatic and ambiguous. Especially because of this amnesia, the reasons he gives himself for the crime might be illusory and produced after the fact.⁸⁸ Often, he is certain he endeavoured to leave behind the human world of language, understood here in

⁸⁸ Of course, the ‘original’ motivation for the crime and the project may just as well be a mythical originary element that never existed. All explanations for the crime are all retrospectively given, *nachträglich*.

the supplementary sense: he believes he has revolted against the secondarity of language and the undermining by supplementarity of originary truth, in search of a magical, transcendental language. Other times he seems convinced that he has leapt out of humanity in order to shun conceptuality for good – to find pre-human wisdom and remain there – and that any evolving he undertakes after that is both the defeat of his project and the tragedy of inevitable human perfectibility.

Rebecca Biron, like Cixous, also calls attention to the thematics of the feminine and of gestation present in the novel. She reads *The Apple in the Dark* alongside *Crime and Punishment* as the story ‘of the protagonist’s attempts to escape the mundane by way of murdering women’.⁸⁹ The protagonists of both novels, however, repent their crimes before a woman and experience a rebirth which is framed as a kind of feminine labour (in both senses). In a way, Martim acknowledges Cixous’s suggestion that his metaphors of birth cannot not be borrowed from the feminine.

[H]e knew that she [Vitória] would never forgive him. Then Martim kneeled down in front of her and said:

“Forgive.”

[...]

But the woman with a sudden irrepressible movement clasped her womb [*ventre*] with her hands, there where a woman pains, her mouth trembled as it was touched by it, the future was a difficult birth:⁹⁰ with the movement of an animal she clasped her womb, where fate [*destino*] makes a woman pain, and joy was such a misery. (3.vii.352)

For Biron, both Martim and *Crime and Punishment*’s Raskolnikov repent before women they did not wrong, as if asking for forgiveness to the feminine,

⁸⁹ Biron, p. 72.

⁹⁰ Here, time itself must be brought about by animal reproduction, as I discussed above regarding ‘giving (to) the light’.

so that its love may re-create them. 'They must be humbled before an external power in order to be freed of the burdensome responsibility of self-creation.

They must ask a woman to give them a new birth.'⁹¹ For Lispector, spiritual renewal must come from submission, but

a submission to the lack of control we have over our own birth. Language creates us precisely by placing us always in relation to other people, as a 'whole long past' of 'images of women and kneeling men' [3.vii.353] [...] God is created in the shared experience of two human beings' recognizing that only impotence results from the solitary search for selfhood.⁹²

This 'responsibility for self-creation', which Martim initially wants to take up for himself, clearly resists both meanings of 'giving (to) the light' since it assumes an absolute independence from *escuridade* and the reality of articulation (of stages, of generations, of time, etc.). But Biron goes even further by linking this 'articulation' of living states or stages with the articulation brought about by and of language, understood here as arche-writing. In other words, the finitude inaugurated by birth and death is the same as the finitude established by language, an equation I defended when I read Cary Wolfe's two finitudes as one and the same.

The stream-like transparency of writing

Martim's sexist-infused developmental phase is particularly interesting for introducing the image of the stream that crosses the farm, whose transparency is equated with the immediate access to reality available to a perfect language

⁹¹ Biron, p. 83

⁹² Biron, p. 84

and/or writing. As mentioned above, he seems more readily susceptible to desiring non-supplementarity when he is convinced of a hierarchy of sexual difference. After spending the night with Ermelinda in the woodshed, Martim steps out in the morning towards the stream:

Martim breathed deeply as if until now he had been wearing a gag. It was sweet and powerful for a man to go out and for a woman to stay behind. That was probably the way things should be. Going down to the water of the river to wet his face he felt pride and calmness. Now that he had had a woman it seemed natural to him that everything should become understandable and within the reach of his hand. [...] Within his reach was the water, which the sun had turned into a hard mirror, and that was how it should be. [...] Before the water, which was cutting him down with its scythe-like brilliance, everything was his, a stupid happiness filled his head, in his arms he could still feel the weight that a submissive woman has. (2.vii.174)

In contrast to that, but affirming his sexist views, ‘afternoon’ is said to ‘ha[ve] arrived’ due to Ermelinda’s pushing the woodshed door open and joining him. ‘Like a continuation of the shadows of the room the whole afternoon had fallen apart. [...] The countryside was nothing but a larger woodshed. [...] And the countryside had lost its limitlessness’ (2.vii.179). That night, buoyed by the masculinist, logocentric views triggered by his relationship with Ermelinda, Martim attempts to write down his achievements and goals. In what I name his ‘writing lesson’, Martim comes into contact with the impossibility of simply notating, writing down truth. The full force of the supplementary work of language, of the signifier, and of writing powerfully undermines the certainties that followed sex with Ermelinda. Feeling the power of the inability to write ‘the other things’, the proper word, truth itself, Martim considers writing something else, *another* word, to *compensate* for the absence of the word he cannot seem to write:

And the choice became deeper yet: either keep the zone intact and live off it [by not writing anything]—or betray it for what he certainly would be able to do [write another word] and what would be simply this: the unreachable. Like one who could not drink the water of the river except by filling up the hollow of the hands—but then it would not be the silent waters of the river, it would not be its frigid movement, or the delicate eagerness with which water tortures stones, it would not be the thing a man is in the afternoon beside the river after he has had a woman. It would be the hollow of his hands. He would rather have the silence intact. For what one drinks is little; and one lives off what is given up. (2.viii.183-4)

His 'writing lesson' is readily paired with the night spent in the woods as his two main 'moments of darkness', so to speak. His distrust of the promises of the light, and his acute awareness of *escuridade*, is brought forward in these two moments but, as I argued before, his assumptions about sexual difference and about the dynamics between the sexes undermine both insights. If his sense of masculine power is sparked by his relationship with Ermelinda, only to be frustrated by the very act of writing that had been inspired by such power, this same relationship will rapidly bring him back to his previous assumptions about his project. And, similarly, lighting the bonfire for Vitória undoes his painful epiphanies in the woods. Only when confronted with the authorities that come, in the guise of society, to arrest him does Martim revisit his conclusions when writing and when reflecting in the woods. Perhaps most importantly, the only two references to apples in the dark are inserted in this context.

The first one outlines one of the meanings of the title and is marked by Martim's lighting of the bonfire. Despite having realised in the woods that his self-fashioning project had been an illusion, after the bonfire he seems to revel in the success of said project:

Unexpectedly, the first step of his great general building had been accomplished: if little by little he had created himself, now he was inaugurating himself. He had just reformed man. The world is vast, but so am I. With the obscure satisfaction of having worked at the fire and of having frightened what had to be frightened in a woman, his first honor had been remade. It seemed to him that from now on he would no longer need to have the voice of a man or try to act like a man: he was one. (3.vi.316)

He references his previous decision in the woods of giving up on his project based on the insight that it had been a sham:

“How is it that he could have imagined [in the woods] that time had run out?” his heart beat vigorously. For it had just, just begun... As if time had been created by the most profound freedom, now the future was suddenly being reborn for him. [...] [H]e [...] had been certain of having given up on his reconstruction. (3.vi.317)

Ironically, the reason he ascribes to his previous lack of success is an insufficient selfishness:

The time was ripe and the moment had arrived. [...] It was because until that moment he would not have been able to do it—as long as he had not recovered in himself the respect for his own body and for his own life, which was the first way of respecting the life that there was in other people. But when a man respected himself, then he had finally created himself in his own image. And then he would be able to look other people in the eye. Without the embarrassment of our great mistake, and without the mutual shame. (3.vi.318)

Martim then produces one possible interpretation of the title of the novel, in a tone full of bravado that should remind readers of the importance of producing resistant readings against the grain of the unreliable narrator in *The Apple in the Dark*. That this whole train of thought originated from his sexist musings about the bonfire should keep us alert to the fact that Martim must not always be taken seriously. In fact, most of the irony and absurd humour of the novel seems to be lost in Cixous's and Negrón-Marrero's readings, to the point that they side with Martim in passages where I argue that an attentive

reader should detect Lispector's irony, such as in Martim's first take on the title:

And as for not understanding other people... [...] [t]here was a way of understanding that did not need any explanation. And which came from the final and irreducible fact of standing up, and from the fact that another man too has the possibility of standing up—because with that minimum of being alive everything was already possible. No one until this day ever had greater advantage than that.

Besides—Martim thought, feeling that he was being slightly excessive but no longer able to hold himself back—besides, it was silly not to understand. “You don’t understand only if you don’t want to!”⁹³ he thought boldly. Because understanding is a way of looking. Because understanding is, besides, an attitude. Martim, very satisfied, had that attitude. As if now, stretching out his hand in the dark and picking up an apple, he recognized on his fingers made so clumsy by love that it was an apple. Martim no longer asked for the name of things. It was enough for him to recognize them in the dark. And rejoice, clumsily.

And afterwards? Afterwards, when he went out into the light, he would see the things his hand had felt before [*pressentidas com a mão*],⁹⁴ and he would see those things with their false names. Yes, but he would already have known them in the dark like a man who has slept with a woman. (3.vi.319)

We can readily contrast to this brief manifesto the lessons he painfully had when colliding with the reality of writing and when reflecting in the woods. He approaches the experience of writing since ‘he had had the very sensible idea of putting his thoughts in order, summing up the results that he had reached that afternoon—since that afternoon he had finally understood what he wanted’ (2.viii.180). He is feeling particularly successful after sleeping with Ermelinda and standing next to the river with its transparent surface. At that

⁹³ ‘*Só não entende quem não quer!*’ Extremely informal. Literally, it translates as ‘only doesn’t understand who doesn’t want’. Rabassa has it as ‘A person doesn’t understand just because he doesn’t want to!’.

⁹⁴ *Pressentir* (composed so as to literally mean ‘pre-feel’) normally means ‘to sense, to presage, to forebode, to augur, to foreshadow, to foresee’. The common noun *pressentimento* has a cognate in the English ‘presentiment’, which Ermelinda is prone to having. Here, the word seems curiously to be used to mean its composite parts: ‘to feel before’.

moment, Martim realised that his 'reconstruction' would be carried out not only for his own sake, but for other people's (2.vii). He wonders if that means he is a preacher, which might explain his will to write down what he believes may one day be humanity's salvation. Writing, however, reveals to be more difficult than mere notation, and his failure is presented in the very start of the chapter:

At night Martim had an excellent idea that would prove to be the opposite of excellent. Actually later on the man had occasion to compare the excellence of his idea and its subsequent disillusionment with a round fruit that he had once eaten—a pomegranate—and which had proven to be hollow to his teeth. (2.viii.180)

The reference to writing as a fruit seems to be a direct reference to the apple of the title as a symbol of knowledge and/or language. If the apple, with its sweet core, is language, the frustration occasioned by writing is figured by a hollow, disseminating fruit. Clumsily holding a pencil, Martim feels that 'as soon as he wrote the first word it would be too late—so disloyal was the power of the simplest word over the broadest thought' (2.viii.181). Martim wishes for writing – and here it could stand for the whole of language – to transparently notate reality and thoughts, but he is shocked 'as if his task were not that of simply noting down what already existed, but of creating something yet to exist' (ibid.). He tries to reduce himself so as to be only 'a sitting man who was going to note down what had already been thought', but he is surprised to conclude that 'there was no denying that he did not know how to write' (2.viii.181-2). One might be excused for perhaps believing that Martim's leap backwards has been so powerful so as to make him illiterate, were it not for the fact that we are told, many chapters previously, that Ermelinda finds a shopping list written by Martim. He is unable to write only insofar as he

understands 'writing' as the notation of pre-existing reality, and, coming in contact with the frustration of that idea, he comes to believe he 'does not know how to write'. He experiences a disenchantment of magical language that is readable in the transformation of the Apple into a pomegranate and in the appearance of another mythical garden:

As in the fables in which the distracted prince fatally happens to touch the one forbidden rose in the garden and to his astonishment disenchants the whole garden—Martim had carelessly executed among a thousand innocuous gestures some unfamiliar act that involuntarily had brought him face to face with something greater. (2.viii.182)

By taking writing in this passage as arche-writing or language writ large, the Biblical overtones appear even clearer, as when Martim feels like 'an old man who had never learned to read'; he then 'measured the distance that was separating him from the word and the distance that was suddenly separating him from himself'. He asks: 'Between the man and his own nakedness was there some possible step that could be taken?' He cannot write as he had wished, and this 'not being able had taken on the greatness of a Prohibition' (ibid). This Prohibition reverberates with a primordial law that connects both the Forbidden Fruit and the animal taboos that arise from the primal crime. The finitude revealed by writing — the impossibility of arriving through signs and language at reality — emerges theologically for Martim as God's 'no' surrounding the Apple. To be sure, the Apple is not reality, but would give the eater a language capable of producing signs flush with reality. A special, magical sign appears to be Prohibited, then – a transcendental signifier, as it were –, 'as if there was a word that once uttered by a man...' (2.viii.183).

Martim then recoils in horror at this conclusion, fearing that he may come close to the Prohibited word. We are told that 'he had fallen into that sacred zone a man will not let a woman touch, but two men sometimes sit in silence by the front door at dusk' (ibid.). The 'incomplete' syntax of the sentence seems to contribute to the preservation of the 'sacred zone', as if a relative pronoun linking the two clauses might indeed pinpoint and thus expose the masculine zone to the feminine touch.⁹⁵ This zone offers a choice, already discussed above in connection to the transparency of the river: he can either live off its intactness, or barter it for what would only be 'the other thing'. In writing, he can respect the Prohibition and preserve the ineffable character of reality, or write down what is only possible but never sufficient. 'In that way then, sitting there, restless, Martim had failed. The paper was blank [*branco*]. His brow was furrowed and attentive' (2.viii.184).⁹⁶ This failure is quickly

⁹⁵ The homoerotic undercurrent in this sentence is repeated in other passages of the novel, to the extent that the whole book could be read around such an allergy to, and then acceptance of, homoerotic – or homosocial – contact. In the early pages of the novel, when firmly in his stone stage, Martim tries to explain his crime to the rocks in the field: 'How can I explain to you—who have the calm of having no future—that every face had failed, and that this failure had in itself a perversion as if a man slept with another man and thus children aren't born' (1.ii.30). This is referenced towards the very end, in a comical flow of bravado in which Martim tries, for the last time, to reject what he knows he must do – he curses everyone to hell, and attempts to convince himself of his own 'rights': 'we have, thank God, good instincts and good teeth, not to mention intuition, and finally we have from birth this capacity to sit at night in silence by the front door. From which some ideas are born... Yes, that was the way it had happened to him. Some ideas, and fright. Fright, rage, love, and then the front door becomes small, and those feelings and those rights are not enough, something else remains to be born... [...] When the house itself becomes small, the man leaves at dawn to bring something back' (3.viii. 346). The first ellipsis in this quotation marks the slacking of his bravado and the return to sincerity: it is possible to suppose that the 'ideas' that are born are precisely connected to the 'sacred zone' that male vanity attempts to preserve. The birth of these ideas might trigger a reconstruction such as Martim's, in all its ambiguities regarding this very zone. The zone can readily be understood as the lack established in the subject by the signifier, the castration complex the male subject attempts to conceal from femininity.

⁹⁶ Interestingly, this sentence is followed by the first of the extremely few blank spaces interspersed between two paragraphs inside the same chapter, a feature preserved in Rabassa's translation.

reconfigured as a sort of victory, since there is a certain perfection to the Prohibition, and maybe the silence he is left with more than compensates for the right words – he feels, for the first time, that he has not deceived or been deceived.

He feels immense relief for not breaking the Prohibition and for ‘having escaped unscathed from the hollow darkness’, and, crucially, he feels that ‘none of his future thoughts would be untouched by this real cowardice of his, which had only been revealed just now. No heroic act of his would be completely free of that experience, which had immediately become old, like wisdom’ (2.viii.186). This recognition should qualify all of his subsequent feelings of victory, as for example his heroic meditation on not needing the Apple to be lit.

I argue that the two choices faced by Martim when attempting to write – either preserving ineffable reality, or writing down what is possible but insufficient – are akin to the two competing claims concerning the nature of animal embodiment *and* the functioning of the sign, and are in fact both products of the repression of arche-animality. In the novel, arche-animality is shown to be engendered by the supplementary alternation of days and nights, but this kind of supplementary substitution is in turn held up, in Martim’s ‘writing lesson’, as responsible for the very process of signification by means of which a sign stands in for something else. In the movement by which culture seemingly supplements nature – only to turn back to it as when Martim reverts to the dawn of time – the work of the sign as a supplement to real, natural world is established. And *The Apple in the Dark* theorises that it is animal embodiment and death, the enchainment of time by means of reproduction and

the sequence of generations, which give rise to this articulatory, supplementary work responsible for signification.

Aping(,) the arche-animal

However, this productive impotence revealed to him (and in him) by writing is quickly forgotten in his interactions with the women, which infuse him with sexist heroics. These insights will only return to him in his terrified reflections in the wood, during the rainy night that marks a peak of intensity for all three characters. He comes to realise that he has as good as taken no steps in his reconstruction or project, and that, in the woods, he has just leapt back to his starting point in his realisation that his progress was illusory, and 'Martim at that moment no longer even wanted any of the minimal things that he had once proudly wanted and he was even surprised at having wanted them' (3.iii.233). He entertains the possibility that, instead of the grandiose project of self-construction, he has been unwittingly tracing another journey, as if 'until now he had been traveling along superimposed paths', and 'his real and invisible journey had actually been made underneath the path he thought he was tracing' (3.iii.233-4). And surprisingly the narrator informs us exactly what the real journey was.

And the real journey had been this: that one day he had left his house of man and his city of man seeking, through adventure, precisely that thing that he was now experiencing in the dark, seeking the great humiliation, and along with himself, with ferocious pleasure, he was humiliating a whole human race. (3.iii.234)

As Rebecca Biron puts it, Martim humiliates himself before the lack of freedom he has in his own creation and birth. Beyond the hesitation regarding

his project of rebirth, breaking free both from the spiritual quest for infinite knowledge and the material regrounding into one's animality – in other words, beyond *dar a luz* and *dar à luz* – there exists a more primordial articulation that gives rise to these possibilities: *escuridade* itself. The primariness of *escuridade* is not, of course, structured as an origin, otherwise it would be a safe transcendental root onto which Martim could hold. It is only ever an inscribed origin, the non-origin which is originary *différance*.

And the novel intimately bonds *escuridade* and arche-animality when Martim recognises in fury the *primariness* of the *secondarity* of symbolicity, representation, and supplementarity. Moments after confessing his (attempted) murder, Martim tries to explain himself to God. He argues that he *elected* to suffer so that he could become the symbol of suffering to which other people could refer. 'Suffering', as a concept, would only be conceivable in reference to that which would be the 'symbol of suffering' – absolute, Ideal suffering, the most suffering of all:

But—he rebelled immediately then, justifying himself to God—someone had to sacrifice himself⁹⁷ and bring unconsolated suffering to its ultimate term and then become the symbol of suffering! someone had to sacrifice himself, I wanted to symbolize my own suffering! I sacrificed myself! I wanted the symbol because the symbol is the true reality and our life is symbolic of the symbol, just as we ape [*macaqueamos*]⁹⁸ our own nature and try to copy ourselves! now I understand imitation: it's a sacrifice! I

⁹⁷ *Se sacrificar*, gender-neutral in Portuguese.

⁹⁸ The verb *macaquear*, from the noun *macaco* ('ape' or 'monkey'), has the meaning of 'to imitate', as the English 'to ape'. Many other languages form a verb meaning 'to imitate' from the noun for 'ape': French *singer*, (from *singe*); Italian *scimmiettare* (from *scimmia*); German *nachäffen* (from *Affe*); Polish *małpować* (from *małpa*); Greek *πιθηκίζω* [*pithikízo*] (from *πίθηκος* [*píthikos*]), Russian *обезьянничать* [*obez'jánničat'*] (from *обезьяна* [*obez'jána*]), Esperanto *simii* (from *simio*), Finnish *apinoida* (from *apina*), Dutch *na-ape*n (from *aap*), Persian کپی کردن [*kapi kardan*] (from کپی [*kapi*]), Romanian *măimuițări* (from *măimuiță*), Icelandic *apa eftir* (from *api*), Ukrainian *мавпувати* [*mavpuvaty*] (from *мапа* [*mávpá*])

sacrificed myself! he said to God, reminding Him that even He had sacrificed a son [*filho*, also 'child'] and that we also had the right to imitate Him, we had to renew the mystery because reality is getting lost!⁹⁹ (3.iii.238-9)

This dense passage addresses most of the issues of the novel, and presents clearly an arche-animality (*macaquear*) which is other than a simple animal representation (e.g. *macaco*). Human nature, that from which the human emerges and which should not coincide with animal nature, can only exist through a structure of referencing and imitation, articulated by an animal – as arche-animal. This arche-animal emerges as a procedure by means of which the human can imitate the very thing which is in fact created by this imitation: here copying is originary. Theologically, also, the God/god structure implicated in this passage (between God and Jesus, and between God and Martim) delineates a case of originary secondarity. *Imitatio Christi* is a common theological concept which dictates that the righteous life is found in following Jesus' example. But here imitating Jesus gets easily confused with imitating God due to the process of multiplication God undergoes when He is incarnated as Christ. An imitation of Christ in this context would mean both a sacrifice and a self-sacrifice, blurring the lines between original or copy, or rather hesitating between an imitation which glorifies the original and one which empowers the copy. The human would originate from imitation regardless and the passage seems to suggest the scandalous notion that the sacrifice of Christ is not only

⁹⁹ *Porque a realidade se perde* could also be translated as 'because reality gets lost', or 'because reality is lost' (in the present habitual sense), or 'because reality loses itself', or even 'because reality, one loses it'.

also a sacrifice of God but that only through this self-sacrifice (of otherness) can God establish His own reality.

A similar blurring of God and god can be read in the complicity between the concepts of *imitatio Christi* and *simia Dei*. In *The Open*, Agamben similarly explores this aping power of self-imitation (which he calls *anthropophorous*, ‘human-forming’) by which the human constructs itself. Human identity, for him, is in fact

a machine or device for producing the recognition of the human. [...] It is an optical machine constructed of a series of mirrors in which man, looking at himself, sees his own image always already deformed in the features of an ape. [...] [Man] must recognise himself in a non-man in order to be human.¹⁰⁰

This non-man is not, however, simply an ape, since it is in fact a *device*. The non-man is in fact *aping*, *macaquear*, animality as a process of imitation and articulation that makes human identity possible. And theologically, the human’s aping of itself so as to be human is called *simia Dei*: ‘in medieval iconography, the ape holds a mirror in which the man who sins must recognize himself as *simia dei* [ape of God]’ (see Fig. 23).¹⁰¹ By looking back and forth between his own reflection in the mirror and the ape holding it, the human is supposed to conclude that he must ape God in the same way that the ape is said, precisely, to *ape* humans.

¹⁰⁰ Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. by Kevin Attel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 26-7.

¹⁰¹ Agamben, *The Open*, p. 27.



Fig. 23 *Simia Dei*, detail of an illuminated initial.¹⁰²

Macaquear, an arche-animal, is thus another instance of paleonymy in the novel, alongside *escuridade* and the flickering itself between ‘*dar a luz*’ and ‘*dar à luz*’. Interestingly, paleonymy is inscribed in the very opening of the book, in the epigraph taken from the Upanishads:

By creating all things, he entered into everything. By entering into all things, he became what has form and what is formless; he became what can be defined and what cannot be defined; he became what has support and what has no support; he became what is crude and what is subtle. He became every kind of thing: that is why wise men called him the Real One.¹⁰³ (p. v)

Martim similarly acknowledges paleonymy, in his case with regard to *escuridade*, understood here as the differentiating source of difference:

In the night of the woods his enormous fatigue made the man lose his lucidity, and instinctively his blind thought made him want to seek the most remote source. He guessed that in that dark source everything would be possible because in it the law was so primary and vast that

¹⁰² *Hunterian Psalter*, folio 176r, ca. 1170. Available at <http://special.lib.gla.ac.uk/exhibns/psalter/psalterindex.html>. Accessed 2 March 2016. Another ape holding a mirror is included in an initial in folio 76v.

¹⁰³ Lispector’s Portuguese version has ‘o Real’, which could be translated simply as ‘the Real’. This is taken from the sixth Anuvaka of the second Valli of the Taittiriya Upanishad. Max Müller translated it as: ‘He wished, may I be many, may I grow forth. He brooded over himself (like a man performing penance). After he had thus brooded, he sent forth (created) all, whatever there is. Having sent forth, he entered into it. Having entered it, he became *sat* (what is manifest) and *tyat* (what is not manifest), defined and undefined, supported and not supported, (endowed with) knowledge and without knowledge (as stones), real and unreal. The *Sattya* (true) became all this whatsoever, and therefore the wise call it (the *Brahman*) *Sattya* (the true).’ Available at https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Taittiriya_Upanishad#Sixth_Anuvaka_2. Accessed 2 March 2016.

within it the great confusion of a man would also fit. [...] [But] [t]o be admitted into that vast source, that man knew that he had to believe only in light [*claridade*] and in darkness [*escuridão*]. (3.iii.240)

Chapter 5: Hughes and Poetry

Introduction

Ted Hughes opens his *Poetry in the Making* with an essay titled 'Capturing Animals' in which he suggests that 'capturing animals and writing poems have much in common'.¹ He justifies this similarity with the argument that poems are 'a sort of animal': 'they have their own life, like animals, by which I mean that they seem quite separate from any person, even from their author, and nothing can be added to them or taken away without maiming and perhaps killing them.'²

With this opening, Hughes puts forth a sort of zoogrammatological understanding of poetics. If, as we shall see, his intriguing theorisation on the animality of poems is fraught with old metaphysical assumptions that can prove quite tricky to disentangle, that is due to the special challenges presented to zoogrammatology by poetry. In other words, the poetics of philosophy, of film, and of fiction, if still intent in repressing arche-animality for the sake of the vulgar animal, seem to present a less daunting task than the question of the animal in poetry. However, the very nebulous character of so-called 'animal poetry' – and its difficulty – also provides a productive site to establish zoogrammatology and its consequences for poetic – and literary – language.

¹ Ted Hughes, 'Capturing Animals', in *Poetry in the Making: An Anthology of Poems and Programmes from 'Listening and Writing'* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), pp. 15-31 (p. 15).

² Ibid.

In this chapter, I read Hughes's poem 'The Thought-Fox' (first published in 1957 in the collection *The Hawk in the Rain*) for its zoogrammatological contribution to debates concerning the nature of poetic language. I shall start by discussing Derek Attridge's presentation of Roman Jakobson's 'poetic function' and the aporias it raises, which I argue are derived from the repression of arche-animality. I then review Gérard Genette's account of theories of linguistic representation and how different strands of poetics dealt with them. This segues into a discussion of the benefits and traps of formalist criticism for Literary Animal Studies and how the field has positioned itself regarding formalist approaches. The apparent advantages of formalism is called into question by a revision of Derrida's critique of the material and ideal aspects of the linguistic sign in *Of Grammatology*. Finally, I analyse how 'The Thought-Fox' responds to these concerns by means of its intertwining the very nature of poetic representation with animal representation. I argue that the poem acknowledges the arche-animality of the fox in its constitutive role in the functioning of linguistic meaning.

The poetic function and its bodily form

Hughes is famous for nature and 'animal' poems such as 'The Thought-Fox', but in 'Capturing Animals' he strengthens his zoogrammatological point by emphasising that any poem can be 'like an animal'. His formulation thus supports the idea that Literary Animal Studies and zoopoetics are concerned with much more than simply the animal subject-matter of texts:

How can a poem, for instance, about a walk in the rain, be like an animal? Well, perhaps it cannot look much like a giraffe or an emu or an octopus, or anything you might find in a menagerie. It is better to call it an assembly of living parts moved by a single spirit. The living parts are the words, the images, the rhythms. The spirit is the life which inhabits them when they all work together. It is impossible to say which comes first, parts or spirit.³

For Hughes, animality in poetry is to be found not in the poetic 'message' or in any animal 'presence' in the text but in the very procedure of signification undertaken by the poetic form. The animality of a poem resides in its nature as an articulation of living parts – they are living insofar as they are 'animated', moved by a spirit that breathes life into them, according to the etymology of the word 'animal'. The hesitation encountered here between the primacy of the living parts and the primacy of the spirit comes across as very Derridean: it rehearses the same caution that underpins Derrida's refusal to support either materialism or idealism and thus his fashioning of iterability as the repetition of material iterations of a concept concomitant with the ideality of that concept. In the anima-ted poem, the life or spirit comes about when the living parts work together, but it is equally true that the parts need to be animated in the first place. By refusing to place either the initiative of the parts or the spark of spirit as primary, Hughes ultimately circles *animation* itself as the principle underpinning poetry.

To be fair, the same could be said and has been said about any literary text or any use of language, for that matter. Derrida, after all, was writing about language in general when criticising the materialism of Saussure's signifier, or

³ Ibid., p. 17.

Husserl's phenomenological idealism. However, there is something particularly tempting about poetry that seems to make writers and theorists isolate it as a special form of (literary) language in which the animality of meaning is felt more acutely. Derek Attridge describes this seemingly special status of poetry thus:

Far from being seen as held apart, signifier and signified [...] are seen as unusually united in poetry. [...] The idea that the distinctiveness (and special pleasurability) of poetic language lies in its capacity to heal, at least momentarily, the breach between signified and signifier, to produce a revitalized language that is not arbitrary and conventional but motivated and natural, echoes through discussions of poetry down the ages and receives both learned and popular expressions. [...] [Paul] Valéry's comment, "A poem should create the illusion of an indissoluble compound of *sound* and *sense*" could be matched in a hundred places from the writing of poets and their readers.⁴

Besides identifying that the relationship between signifier and signified (or living parts and spirit, as per Hughes) is deemed to be special in poetry, Attridge is also able to chart a polemic in the history of 'both learned and popular' poetic discussions regarding the exact character of this special relationship. He identifies it primarily in Jakobson, one of his main interlocutors in this essay. Attridge names Jakobson's main concern as the attempt to define what the 'literariness' of a literary text is, or in what way the language of literature differs from other forms of language.⁵ Jakobson's answer was to classify the different functions of language so as to isolate the so-called *poetic function* which would account for literary language. One sees in Jakobson's terminology that the literariness of literature will more readily be

⁴ Derek Attridge, 'Literature as Imitation: Jakobson, Joyce, and the Art of Onomatopoeia', in *Peculiar Language: Literature as Difference from the Renaissance to James Joyce* (London: Methuen, 1988), pp. 127-157 (pp. 132-3).

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

found, for him, in poetry rather than prose. That becomes clearer when he defines the poetic function as language which is primarily focused on the ‘*message as such*’ and not on other linguistic elements identified by him, such as addresser, addressee, context, code, or contact. As Attridge explains, the ‘message’ is not in fact the referential meaning produced by the piece of language in question, but the utterance itself. It becomes clearer that literary prose, concerned as it often is with the referential meaning – here termed ‘context’ – cannot rise to the task of embodying Jakobson’s poetic function fully.

However, Attridge highlights that the very formulation of the poetic function is not without sizable problems. Most importantly, the line demarcating the difference between “‘the context’ (the orientation toward which is the referential function) and the “message””⁶ is found to be shifting constantly so that the status of both functions remain unclear. For Attridge, Jakobson employs the term ‘message’ so as

to isolate meaning that is present as an inherent part of the sign in contradistinction to a more strictly referential meaning. The “message” thus includes not only the chain of material signifiers, aural or visual, organized into grammatical relations with one another but also their meanings as given by the linguistic system, though without reference to the world beyond language.⁷

In Saussurean terms, one could say that Jakobson is equating the message not only with the signifiers but also with their signified concept, without for all that signalling towards the referent. According to Attridge,

⁶ Ibid., p. 129.

⁷ Ibid.

Jakobson avoids the term ‘referent’ precisely because, for the latter, ‘the only relevance “reference” can have in a discussion of the language system is as an aspect of linguistic meaning’.⁸ The delicate distinction here between referential and poetic function – grounded as they are on a focus on context (referent) and message (meaning) – will depend on how clear one finds the difference between concepts and real referents to be, especially when the referents are themselves abstract concepts.

For Attridge, though, the main problem with this formulation is that one of the two functions is bound to have a very limited domain of language assigned to it. On the one hand, if the ‘message’ foregrounded by the poetic function comes to name the semantic functioning of linguistic signs, very little of language would be left to be accounted for by the referential function. As he puts it, ‘the “set towards the message” that characterizes poetry would embrace all language’s business with meaning and communication’.⁹ Jakobson does not wish to make of poetry and the poetic function such an ordinary aspect of language, and thus insists that what he calls the referential function equates to what others have named, as the bulk of language’s functioning, ‘ideation’ or the ‘denotative’ or ‘cognitive’ function. On the other hand, then, this concession pushes the poetic function to a very limited domain of language, detached from almost all linguistic meaning.

Attridge ascribes this conundrum to the conflict between two conceptions of poetic language that arrive to us (and to Jakobson) from a

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

philosophical tradition which I argue is inseparable from the poetics and metaphysics of animality. Attridge differentiates these two conceptions according to their views regarding the bodily reality of poems and the role their signifiers and their form play in the creation of their meaning. This old conundrum is the one that challenged Saussure to account for a material non-materiality of the aural signifier, or the one encountered by Husserl when trying to frame the ideality constituted by the materiality of writing, or, as mentioned above, the dilemma that Derrida faced, between ideality and materiality, when he proposed the trace, iterability, *différance*, or the inscribed origin, as explored by Joshua Kates. It is also the difficulty posed by the totem to our understanding of an animal species as neither material nor ideal, but also both material and ideal. Finally, it is the hesitation between embodiment and transcendence – collected in the flickering between *dancity* and *transcendanse* and between *dar a luz* and *dar à luz* – that now haunts the field of Animal Studies in general, but particularly of Literary Animal Studies, which does not know what to do with the bodies of animals and the animality of bodies.

The linguistic body of texts – their signifiers – is neglected in the transcendental practice of paraphrase and privileged in the formalist tendency to focus on the materiality of the text. Both stances are two ways of accounting for the production of meaning, therefore it is not surprising that the tension between them will be felt even more acutely in poetry, said to be even more powerfully meaningful.

Starting with the second of his scenarios, wherein the referential function is able to account for most of linguistic meaning-making, Attridge outlines one of the conceptions of poetic language:

If meaning is largely the preserve of utilitarian discourse, poetry may be said to be a linguistic practice that specially emphasizes *the material properties of language* in certain organized forms and the capacity of these forms to provide pleasure and significance independently of cognitive content—a position with which a Renaissance theorist like [George] Puttenham would have had some sympathy.¹⁰

In this idea, the ‘being’ of poetry is found in the opacity of its language and the specificity of its bodily reality as opposed to, or independently from, its signified concept(s). However, and especially confusing as Attridge points out later, this conception does not in any way challenge the idea that poetry is ‘distinctive’, ‘pleasurable’, and ‘powerful’ or, in other words, that it is able to breach the distance between language and world. In this sense, the ‘opacity’ of words when they foreground their own material constitution would still reinforce the poetic impression that words are not so dislocated from reality as one feels in the case of prose or everyday language, since the very sounds and textures of words would be able to constitute meaning. ‘If, on the other hand’, writes Attridge,

the task of poetry is to heighten attention to the meanings of words and sentences, the distinctiveness of poetic language must lie in the particular forcefulness with which it presents its semantic content—a view much closer to that of the Romantic poets and given forceful expression in Wordsworth’s Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*.¹¹

And to emphasise both the age of the dilemma and how enmeshed in it Derrida’s thought always was, Attridge argues that ‘we see here the familiar

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 130, my emphasis.

¹¹ Ibid.

structure of *supplementarity* which has characterized discourse on the distinctiveness of literary language since classical times'.¹² I suggest that the reason this discursive structure regarding poetics is so old and lasting is because it feeds (on) the productive, primordial force of arche-animality as well as the result of its repression: the vulgar animal (body) in all its philosophical promiscuity, as I argued in the chapter on *Black Swan*. Finally, Attridge summarises the dilemma thus:

We seem to be confronted, then, both in Jakobson's own theory and in the traditional ways, whether academic or popular, of talking about literature, with two conflicting accounts of the role of speech sounds¹³ in the reader's experience of poetic language as distinctive and gratifying. According to one, the sounds of language draw attention to themselves and their configuration, independently of their referential function; according to the other, they tend to disappear in an enhanced experience of referentiality. [...] The divergence of view is, of course, a version of the old battle between formalism and realism, a restatement of the fundamental disagreement between Hermogenes and Cratylus.¹⁴

Mimologism

Attridge's reference to Hermogenes and Cratylus cited above, as well as in the title of his section ('Hermogenes or Cratylus?'), is a clear nod to Gérard Genette's 1976 book-length study *Mimologiques: Voyage en Cratylie*, translated

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Attridge – and Jakobson – seems to foreground the *aural* mimeticism of words, but, as we shall see with Hughes, sound is not the only aspect of signifiers that can be said to imitate the world, not least because the world is not made up only of sounds.

¹⁴ Attridge, pp. 133-4. The sheer challenge of the task is compounded by the fact that the two positions themselves undergo constant blurring, even if their essential difference is not erased. For example, Attridge points out that Stephen Ullmann names the two 'kinds' of words employed by each mode of poetry as, respectively, 'opaque' and 'transparent' words. However, the Group μ use the terms 'opaque' and 'transparent' in the opposite way. This lack of clarity renders Todorov's definition of Jakobson's poetic function as 'a language that tends to become opaque' both inescapably correct and inevitably incorrect given Jakobson's own ambiguous position (p. 134).

by Thaïs E Morgan in 1994 as *Mimologics: Voyage in Cratylusland*. *Mimologics* is an arduous compilation and discussion of the history of the claim that language, both literary and not, can and does imitate the world, as well as of the counter-claim that language is simply conventional and unmotivated. Genette starts off with a careful analysis of Plato's *Cratylus* and attributes the belief that language is mimetic to the eponymous character of the dialogue, while finding in Hermogenes' arguments a defence of language as conventional. The character of Socrates in the dialogue disagrees slightly with Cratylus in that the former believes that actual natural languages fall short of the mimetic potential inherent in the linguistic raw materials (phonemes). That leads Genette into separating *mimologism*, the belief in mimetic language, into absolute (or primary) and secondary. Whereas Cratylus believes in primary mimologism insofar as he credits actual (Greek) language with realising its mimetic potential, Socrates would be an adherent of secondary mimologism since he believes that actual words fall short of the mimetic ideal that language can and should achieve. This mimologism is secondary to the extent that it invites its believer to interfere in the present linguistic status quo so as to *artificially* create the mimetic capabilities of which language is *naturally* capable. This secondary mimologism will have a considerable impact on poetic thinking throughout the centuries.

Hermogenes, in his turn, does not express any opinion on whether the best natural language should be a mimetic one, but he insists that the linguistic material is not able to truly function mimetically due to its conventionality, which naturally leads to the conclusion that actual language is wholly

conventional and thus not mimetic. Conventionalism would come to name the rather more modern stance taken by Saussurean linguistics, which views language as completely structural and differential. Saussurean conventionalism would reject entirely the notion that language should ideally be mimetic, since that would be an impossibility for a linguistics that ascribes linguistic functioning to differential relations. Finally, Genette finds yet another possible position in Leibniz, who agrees with Cratylus that language is mimetic (to some extent) but sees that as non-ideal. For him, the best language would be entirely philosophical and rational, devoid of the attempt to capture worldly reality, so that a philosophical necessity is felt to reform actual languages so as to make them less mimetic and more rational, in what Genette calls secondary conventionalism. He provides a helpful table which I have adapted here (Table 1).

	Language <i>should</i> be mimetic	Language <i>can</i> be mimetic	Language <i>is</i> mimetic
Absolute mimologism (Cratylus)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Secondary mimologism (Socrates)	Yes	Yes	No
Hermogenes		No	No
Absolute conventionalism (Saussure?)	No	No	No
Secondary conventionalism (Leibniz)	No	Yes	Yes

Table 1 Absolute and secondary mimologism and conventionalism.¹⁵

¹⁵ Gérard Genette, *Mimologics: Voyage in Cratylusland*, trans. by Thaïs E Morgan (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska, 1994), p. 51.

Poetic reformation and animal reality

The most relevant chapter for our purposes in *Mimologics* addresses the poetic and literary versions of secondary mimologism. While other thinkers had concluded that language needed to be reformed in order to fully take advantage of the mimetic resources provided by linguistics sounds, others believed that this reformed language would need to be poetry. For Socrates in *Cratylus*, the divine ‘law-giver’ who invented words and the names for things has clearly made a series of mistakes by combining sounds and things that do not resemble each other.¹⁶ Genette will thus point out that, for many, this failing in languages is the calling and task of poetry. The chapter, titled ‘Failing Natural Languages’ (*‘Au défaut des langues’*), addresses primarily Mallarmé’s poetics, and his belief on such a compensatory task for poetry:

Languages are imperfect because multiple, the supreme one is missing. [...] [S]ince the immortal word remains tacit, the diversity of the idioms on earth prevents anyone from uttering words which, otherwise, were they to appear in a single flash, would be truth itself incarnate. [...] I regret to see how discourse fails to express objects by means of keys that would correspond to them in coloring or in aspect – keys that do exist in the instrument of the voice. [...] We long for words of brilliant splendour in sounds and sense [...] – *only* let us remember that were it so, *verse would not exist*: philosophically speaking, verse remunerates the failing of natural languages, being their superior complement.¹⁷

Genette points out that reference to the multiplicity of languages is a traditionally Hermogenist or conventionalism argument and is clearly presented in Saussure: the bond between the signifier and the signified is

¹⁶ Morgan remarks that, ‘for Christian thinkers, [...] this “failing” in languages becomes implicated in the notion of original sin – the falling away of humanity from God and of human language(s) from Nature (unity)’ (*Mimologics*, p. 201), a Christian theorisation of language that we have seen at play in *The Apple in the Dark*.

¹⁷ Mallarmé, quoted in Genette, pp. 212-3.

proved to be unmotivated by the existence of different signifiers for the same signified across languages. However, this multiplicity has not always been able to undermine the Cratylist position: for the Cratylus character in Plato, language in general (*langage*) is synonymous with the Greek language (*langue*), to the point that there is indeed only one language. Other mimologists simply assumed their own language to be the superior one among all others and the only one to accurately represent the word mimetically. And a third, ingenious Cratylist strategy is to point out that the objects of the world are multi-faceted, so that each culture will represent objects linguistically by choosing to foreground one of their aspects.

As we saw, though, Socrates in the *Cratylus* points out that the actual lexicon falls short of true mimetic resemblance. However, language is still considered to be mimetic since it is simply a case of equating 'language' with 'the language of the gods' – a better version of Greek, as it were. A similar shift can be seen in the Christian myth with regard to the language of God. Genette argues that this privileged language, whether Homeric or Adamic, has 'the role of a nostalgic or consolatory myth into which are projected from afar all the virtues in which one's own language is lacking as a *real* natural language – the one I write in and speak in'.¹⁸ This insight is crucial for my reading of zoopoetics and the theorisations that come with it in the field of Literary Animal Studies. For the 'language of nature' as gathered in the prelapsarian divine language can in modernity be read as 'animal language' or, perhaps more accurately, 'animal

¹⁸ Genette, p. 214.

reality'. This self-titled non-humanist model would identify traditional (read: 'failed') literary and linguistic representations of the 'real' (i.e. animal, natural) world as symptoms of a corrupt human culture. In blunt terms, fables and the metaphoric use of animals as a whole are seen as consequences of some Babelian catastrophe or a Fall from Nature which has produced a contemporary poetics unable to represent animals 'accurately'. We shall have to read Hughes's animal poetry in the context of these claims and as an attempt to circumvent this supposed corruption in language that severs a linguistic human from an animal Natural world.

Animal poetry such as Hughes's, which I argue attempts in a way to refashion language so as to get at animal reality, thus finds in Mallarmé a theoretical predecessor. The latter, rather than advocating that language be reformed to fully exploit its mimetic capacity, posits poetry – or 'verse' – as charged with 'remunerating' this failure inherent to natural languages. Poetry would thus not correct or change language, but, '*compensate for it through some use of an order and a level ("superior complement") other than that of natural language*'.¹⁹ Two interconnected strange conclusions emerge. Firstly, this compensatory function of poetry turns out to be its *raison d'être* and that for which and from which it exists. And secondly, it logically follows that,

if natural language were 'perfect,' 'verse' would have no reason for being; [...] language itself would be a poem: poetry would be everywhere and consequently nowhere. [...] A naturally mimetic language system²⁰ would render useless the poet's art, which is the creation of an

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 215, emphasis in the original.

²⁰ This 'naturally mimetic' language would be opposed to the artificial supplement of poetry that seeks to artificially render language mimetic – although in the name of the natural mimetic capacity believed to have always already been present in the linguistic system.

artificially motivated (artificially natural, all in all) language system: 'verse'.²¹

Here we are not very far from the claim that, if everyone were a poet and if language were perfectly mimetic, humans would be 'at one' with animal reality and the natural world. We shall see that, for Hughes, the task of poetry is not so much to reform language so as to make it more mimetic, but actually to bridge the gap between a failed everyday language and the rich world of animal reality. In short, a perfect (natural, mimetic, etc.) language is synonymous with a communion with the animal world.

However, animality will be at play not only as the utopian realm which an imperfect language keeps foreclosed to us but, as we saw in Hughes's statement, will also be lurking behind the very conceptualisation of literary meaning. In a way, this is entirely symptomatic: the bridging of the gap between the cultural human world of imperfect languages and natural animal reality is rehearsed, evoked, and projected in the attempt to fuse form and content, signifier and signified, word and meaning. The ubiquity of animality in this discussion may at first seem dizzying and court analytical inaccuracy, but will be key to finding an appropriate answer to the questions raised by the linguistic portrayal of animals and by the history of Western poetics.

Therefore, the successful poem for Hughes comes across as an animal, a living entity with a life of its own, 'but if any of the parts are dead... if any of the words, or images or rhythms do not jump to life as you read them... then the

²¹ Genette, p. 215.

creature is going to be maimed and the spirit sickly.’²² A failing poem would not even be a poem, but a simple collection of words, which are not alive and are not moved by a spirit. Mallarméan ‘verse’, as Genette describes it, rejects the element of chance (the arbitrariness of the sign) at work in everyday language and seeks to create ‘the irrefrangible necessity of a perfect, “supreme,” and [...] divine language’.²³ The fusion of Mallarmé’s and Hughes’s formulations points us to a desire for a divine language to the extent that it is able to create perfect, whole living beings. The poet would thus be an envious Adam, wishing to replicate in verse the power of God of creating animals by the means of the Word.

The formation of ‘form’

At this point, it can be said that the question of form emerges as crucial to a discussion of the poetics of the animal or the animality of poetry. Genette refers to it as ‘the *autonomy* of the poetic form in relation to its signification’.²⁴ In Cartesian terms, the formalism that poetry seems to invite suggests an independence of the (animal) body from the soul-or-mind, or even some kind of radical materialism that prioritises bodies before souls. This has direct consequences for the field of Literary Animal Studies for two apparently contradictory reasons: firstly, as we saw, most scholarship on animality in literature does not work within a formalist framework even if, secondly, it

²² Hughes, ‘Capturing Animals’, p. 17.

²³ Genette, p. 218.

²⁴ Ibid.

strives precisely for a radical materialism that would resist speciesist accounts of animality. These complications derive from the very concept of *form* and how it has been understood in poetics.

Angela Leighton, in her *On Form*, lays bare the discursive grid which form feeds and into which it emerges – it is veritably a matrix of disembodied spirits and material bodies which seem to suffuse the discourse of species. Looking back towards German Romanticism and Victorian aesthetics, Leighton quotes Schiller as saying:

In a truly successful work of art the content should effect nothing, the form everything . . . Subject-matter, then, however sublime and all-embracing it may be, always has a limiting effect upon the spirit, and it is only from form that true aesthetic freedom can be looked for. Herein, then, resides the real secret of the master of any art: that he can make his form consume [*vertilgen*] his material.²⁵

According to Leighton, the complex formulation connecting body and soul here can best be understood by light of the biological, animalistic overtones of the word *vertilgen*. Here we have the schema that reads 'form' as spiritual, in opposition to material *matter*. For Schiller, aesthetic form, therefore, ought to consume the (subject-) matter it attempts to express, if not obliterating it, at least 'digesting' and incorporating it into its spirituality. Material subject-matter, as the animal, biological substrate of the spirit, is disavowed and discredited in the call for spiritual, formal privilege.

It is curious to note, thus, that in Schiller the artistic subject-matter is in no way conceptual or abstract, but actually thought of as the materiality of the

²⁵ Schiller, quoted in Angela Leighton, *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of a Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 6.

‘real world’. Form, therefore, avoids embodiment and animality by discrediting not only the materiality of things, but also the materiality of art itself: if one were to read the quote as referring to painting, for instance, there is no reference – especially when discussing form – to paint as the material stuff of art.

Schillerian form is defined as *forma efformans*, ‘forming form’, as the principle that gives shape to objects. This is the Ancient Greek concept of form, expounded by Aristotle, and discussed by Judith Butler:

For Aristotle the soul designates the actualization of matter, where matter is understood as fully potential and unactualized. As a result, he maintains in *de Anima* that the soul is ‘the first grade of actuality of a naturally organized body.’ He continues, ‘That is why we can wholly dismiss as unnecessary the question whether the soul and the body are one: it is meaningless to ask whether the wax and the shape given to it by the stamp are one, or generally the matter [*hyle*] of a thing and that of which it is the matter [*hyle*].’ In Greek, there is no reference to ‘stamps,’ but the phrase, ‘the shape given by the stamp’ is contained in the single term ‘*schema*.’²⁶

Therefore, in Aristotle, too, ‘form’ stands for a shaping, immaterial principle that gives the shape through which matter appears. Wax exists materially, of course, even before taking the shape given to it by the stamp, but once stamped, it is not possible to separate the wax itself from the insignia whose shape it has taken. The materiality that the formal principle itself has in this analogy – the stamp – conveniently vanishes in the word *schema* so as to secure its spirituality. On the other hand, the difference between Schiller and Aristotle is also clear: whereas the former makes no mention of the material

²⁶ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On The Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 32-3.

substrate of form (e.g. wax), the latter does not refer to subject-matter, that which the waxen seal design is supposed to represent. This difference, however, points towards my ongoing argument that both these 'instances' of materiality (i.e. material things in the world, and the matter of signifiers and media) are mirrors of each other, both effects of a body being disavowed by the spirit.

One could also conclude that Schiller and Aristotle collapse differences in different ways. Aristotle, despite claiming that the wax and its shape are indistinguishable, does differentiate between them, to the point of proposing a distinguishing terminology. But he conflates the *schema*, the image the wax takes, with that which it represents. That truth in the real world for Greeks resided not in the empirical phenomenality of things but in the abstract *schema* that made them possible is well-known, therefore enabling Aristotle's conflation of image and reality here. Reality is thus abstract and spiritual, comprising of things and *schemata*, while only unrealised, potential, formless matter such as wax – or animal flesh – is purely material. Schiller, on the other hand, conflates the difference, in painting, between paint and brushstroke, in fact heeding Aristotle's dismissal of the possibility of distinguishing between paint's materiality and the lines and shapes it takes on the canvas. Schiller's body and soul dichotomy is reversed, since he believes that spiritual form (comprising both 'wax' and its shape) is opposed to the materiality of the things in reality it represents.

Leighton shows that this confusion regarding form is both unsettling and productive. Coleridge, for example, 'worries about [form's] dual affiliation

to shaped thing and imaginative outline', so that 'he writes that "all form as body, i.e. as shape, & not as forma efformans is dead." [...] Form is not a body but an agent. It forms'.²⁷ While form is still spiritual, the idea of a disavowed (animal) body is still there, as the formed product of form. Victorian aesthetics, however, shifts the meaning of the word to give it a bodily presence, equating it with the visual shape of art and, ultimately, with beauty.²⁸ Form is associated with sensual tactility, but also – perhaps when overdone – criticised as 'affectation' getting in the way of a direct message, that is, becoming *opaque*.²⁹ The dichotomy between form and message is already sedimented in Oscar Wilde, shifting the positions of matter and spirit: if for Schiller subject-matter is material and form spiritual, for Wilde and other Victorians form is the *bodily* aspect of art, which conveys not the material world, but a *conceptual* message.³⁰ This formulation of the relationship between form and content is the one that most agrees with Saussure, the linguistic turn, the structuralist revolution that followed, and, of course, the one most relevant for Hughes's Modernist poetics.

Modernist aesthetics mostly ascribed to this formula, with British painter Clive Bell, for instance, insisting on the privilege of 'forms and colours' over subject matter or message, echoing the traditional autonomy of form in

²⁷ Leighton, p. 7.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 9.

²⁹ The moral overtones of this formulation are clear: the sensuousness of embodiment always poses a threat to the natural primacy of spiritual conceptuality. This threat is perceived both as the danger of animalisation and as the 'sins of the flesh'. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida connects the similar definition of sin by Malebranche ('the inversion of the natural relationship between the soul and the body in passion' [p. 37]) to the subjugation of writing to speech.

³⁰ Leighton, p. 11.

poetry as described by Genette.³¹ Bell, in fact, famously used the term 'significant form' to refer to the formal aspects of painting he was foregrounding. If, on one hand, 'lines and colours' seem to be isolated from signification by their privileging, the fact that such formal features are '*significant*' complicates matters. As Leighton puts it,

'Significant Form' in fact registers the contrary pressure of significance. [...] Mostly, of course, Bell is simply arguing that 'lines and colours' are more significant than the thing they represent. But the fact that 'significance', in the sense of both 'importance' and 'import', is essential to form does somewhat qualify the formalist sounds of the phrase. [...] The need for 'significance' compromises the purity or self-sufficiency of form.³²

The form of art must have priority over the message, but it must still be 'significant', in a hesitant formulation that betrays an inability to find the proper place of, precisely, *significance*. This problem is strikingly similar to the tricky issue faced by Jakobson, as described by Attridge, of how to account for interaction between the poetic function and the referential function. This points to a systematic difficulty in decoupling bodily form from immaterial meaning and ultimately derives, I argue, from the fraught poetics and conceptualisations of animality as the result of the repression of arche-animality.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 12-3.

³² Ibid., p. 13.

Mimological contradictions

Genette sums up the paradox operating in many accounts of poetic language, also pointed out by Attridge when he stresses how the word ‘opaque’ can describe both a mimetic and a non-mimetic word, depending on the author:

In this way, paradoxically (we encountered this paradox [...] in Valéry [...] [and] in Jakobson), far from increasing the transparency of the vocable, its very mimetic virtue seems to be the necessary and sufficient condition for its aesthetic autonomy and opacity. The more ‘semblant’ the poetic word is, the more *perceptible* it becomes.³³

We are here back to Jakobson’s conundrum as described by Attridge.

Genette points out that Jakobson initially put forth a formalist understanding of poetics grounded on the palpability of the signifiers when they call attention to themselves independently of their meaning.³⁴ However, Jakobson presents a different side of his theorisation which actually defends that ‘poetic language no longer deviates from the expressive potentials of natural language; it respects and exploits them’.³⁵ In poetry, Jakobson argues that ‘the internal nexus between sound and meaning changes from latent to patent and manifests itself most palpably and intensely’.³⁶ It is clear that now poetic language is credited with being able to copy reality, even if the palpability of this nexus stands in stark contrast to the palpability that was said to be produced by the independence of sound and sense. Genette tries to provide an account of how these two different, seemingly contradictory kinds of palpability can be made to co-exist: in a formalist framework, ‘the “arbitrary”

³³ Genette, p. 238.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 239-40.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 241.

³⁶ Jakobson, quoted in Genette, p. 241.

signifier is perceptible because it is arbitrary and therefore made prominent by its very lack of motivation, its mimetic inadequation, ultimately its incongruity, which is a form of defamiliarization (*ostranenie*).³⁷ However, according to a mimological desire,

the mimetic sign (or the sign considered to be mimetic), theoretically 'transparent' through its mimeticism, is in fact unusual and therefore perceptible for this very reason, especially if it produces a contrast and an exception within the context and/or within the system.³⁸

In this second scenario, we have the apparently paradoxical idea of a perceptible transparency, whereas in the former it was the opacity of arbitrariness that was perceptible. Both these 'palpabilities' seem counter-intuitive, though, for different reasons: if perceptible transparency seems to be contradictory, the perceptibility of arbitrary signs would have to be present in every utterance produced with regular linguistic signs, even in 'ordinary' everyday language. What I have called the philosophical promiscuity of such animalised concepts is pointed out by Genette when he stresses that 'these theoretical rationalizations are perfectly reversible, and the positions actually determine each other' and that it is at the level of unarticulated and unthought biases that Jakobson's (and others') 'Formalist attitude enters into conflict with Cratylan desire – to the great advantage, here, of the latter'.³⁹ As it is, formalism comes across as a theoretical position of principle, even if its practical application is uncertain of success and undermined by a mimological desire.

³⁷ Genette, p. 242.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

This seems to confirm what Genette argues to be the ‘untenable’ status of an essentially formalist poetics for Genette. However, the animalised meanings that underpin the very formulation of formalism would seem to invite us to strive to make formalism work in the name of a non-speciesist poetics that would liberate the body of form from subjugation to the soul of content. The whole problem seems to stem from the double pressure exercised on form, and this connects to some of Derrida’s complications of the concept of the signifier.

The Derridean trace as a meditation on bodily form

As I have shown before, Susan McHugh, in her position papers on Literary Animal Studies, arrives at a dilemma: assuming that an animal has a subjectivity similar to a human’s threatens to efface species difference, and ignores the metaphysical basis for the difference between body and mind. On the other hand, defending an animal transcendence to textuality overlooks the limitations of philosophies of materialism. As I have consistently argued, I believe there is a Derridean, paleonymic answer to the problem.

This conundrum is the same that Derrida faces when deconstructing the linguistic sign. More specifically, the question of how to approach the materiality of signs is the problem that opens the way for Derrida to propose most of his ideas. This is also, not coincidentally, analogous to the age-old discussion regarding form I attempted to outline above. Either form is material as opposed to an ideal content, or it is ideal as opposed to material matter. This materiality, however, is never clearly delineated, since neither paint or wax – to

use the same examples – are ever seriously considered to be actual formal (i.e. material) aspects. The material aspect of artistic expression is never *purely* material and can always refer to an even more material substrate. Hence,

- a. Speech is the material medium for signifieds, but is in turn supported by the voice, which is grounded on sound, whose material substrate is air;
- b. Writing is traditionally thought to represent speech, so it is already a material manifestation of something else. But written words exist phenomenally as ink, graphite, pixels, etc. and these in turn require a substrate such as paper;
- c. In painting, one speaks of form when referring to brushstrokes, but they are made entirely out of paint itself, which also requires a material support such as canvas;
- d. In (written) literature, ideas or content are ‘expressed’ by means of words, or, more rigorously, signifiers. Written signifiers (graphemes) are, however, supposed to be nothing but the materialisation of aural signifiers (phonemes). Even graphemes, however, cannot coincide with their own instances: each grapheme occurs only ‘once’ in a language and each instantiation of it is only a citation. These instantiations are, again, constituted by a material such as ink, which needs a support such as paper.

In literature, therefore, one would hardly consider pertinent to a formal analysis the chemical composition of the ink, the typography of the text,⁴⁰ or the texture of the paper. Yet these are the most material aspects of texts, in which formalism is purportedly interested. This insight can be found already in Saussure and Husserl, for example, for whom signifiers, though more material than the concepts they express, are nevertheless reconfigured as a 'sound-image' or 'the voice that keeps silent'. 'Material' signifiers are constituted, according to Saussure and Derrida, by a play of differences, and cannot, therefore, be entirely material. For this and other reasons, Derrida in *Of Grammatology* will multiply the form/content duality into three elements: expression, form, and content. He credits Hjelmslev with

isolat[ing] a concept of *form* which permitted a distinction between formal difference and phonic difference, and this even within 'spoken' language [*langue*] itself. Grammar [form] is independent of semantics [content] and phonology [expression]. [...] The idea of a linguistic function [...] excludes then not only the consideration of the substance of expression (material substance) but also that of the substance of the content (immaterial substance). [...] The study of the functioning of language, of its *play*, presupposes that the substance of *meaning* and, among other possible substances, that of *sound*, be placed in parenthesis.⁴¹

In his deconstruction of Husserl, Derrida identified in the former's conception of subjectivity the unspoken possibility of both Husserlian idealism

⁴⁰ With the exception, perhaps, of concrete poetry and prose – texts which work the possibilities of page layout, typography, etc. However, as Genette argues, the radical formalism of concrete literature may be ultimately untenable, since it would invite poets and readers to consider words and signs as *things*, which, as we saw, risks the very identity of the sign. Concrete poetry, for Genette, is 'the ever open possibility of an activity that would effectively utilize the phonic and/or graphic material of natural language for artistic ends'. However, the limitation to this possibility is that 'this material would then no longer consist of "words," or at least that these words would no longer exist as such' (p. 233).

⁴¹ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Fortieth Anniversary Edition, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 2016), p. 62, first interpolation is the translator's.

and of a naïve empirical materialism. Originary difference, its play and work, *différance*, the trace, iterability – these are all names for that which is enmeshed in its material support but which cannot be reduced to it. Literary Animal Studies can, therefore, find both the specific materiality of the animal and the bodily form of texts in the impure undecidable of that which is neither material nor immaterial.

It is also no coincidence that the only passage in *Of Grammatology* that addresses literature as a theoretical problem emerges precisely in the discussion I have just quoted. Hjelmslev's glossematics, for Derrida, frees the functioning of form from any specific substance, but, on the other hand, it also calls attention 'to everything that, in the *stratification* of language [*langage*], depends on the substance of graphic expression'.⁴² In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida frees writing from its subordination to speech by showing that language depends on arche-writing. Therefore, he suggests that by

recognizing the specificity of *writing*, glossematics did not merely give itself the means of describing the *graphic* element. It outlined access to the *literary* element, to what in literature passes through an irreducibly graphic text, linking the *play of form* to a determined substance of expression. If there is in literature something which does not allow itself to be reduced to the voice, to epos or to poetry, one cannot recapture it except by rigorously isolating the bond that links *the play of form* to the substance of graphic expression. [...] It radicalizes the efforts of the Russian formalists, [...] who in their attention to the being-literary of literature, perhaps privileged the phonological instance and the literary models that it dominates. Notably poetry. That which, in the history of literature and in the structure of a literary text in general, escapes that instance, merits a type of description whose norms and conditions of possibility glossematics has perhaps better brought forward. It has perhaps thus better prepared itself to study the purely graphic stratum

⁴² Ibid., p. 64, my emphasis.

within the structure of the literary text within the history of the becoming-literary of literality, notably in its “modernity.”⁴³

For Derrida, the play of form and difference is, to a certain extent, inseparable from all that is spatial and differential in writing. Here we find what in literature is essentially animalistic, insofar as ‘the animal’ and ‘writing’ rehearse the same questions concerning materiality. But it would mean no step away from a simple phenomenology of animal embodiment if it completely reduced the play of form to the spatiality and materiality of writing. It is the articulation between materiality and ideality, as mentioned above, gathered under the names supplementarity or *arche-writing*, that allows us to satisfactorily secure both the ‘literary’ and the ‘animal’ of Literary Animal Studies. Thus, Derrida adds that

if the phonic substance lost its privilege, it was not to the advantage of the graphic substance, which *lends itself to the same substitutions*. [...] Glossematics still operates with a *popular* concept of writing. [...] It is very dependent and very derivative with regard to the *arche-writing* of which I speak here.⁴⁴

From this passage we can conclude that Derrida wishes to privilege not writing as a substance of expression, but *arche-writing* – not as a substance, but as the play of form. However, it is impossible for this play to emerge phenomenally, in texts, *as such*, for that would require the process of signification to appear without actually signifying anything – what Derrida and Barthes call *signifiance*. Similarly, there is no signification which is not, in a way, *trapped* in the support of a substance, since there are no signs without a sensible face. It is therefore only possible to identify the moment when or the

⁴³ Ibid., p. 64-5.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 65.

site where textuality reveals the scar of the impossibility of simply signifying. Animal embodiment resides there, as the *process* of incarnation where that which is immaterial takes on a bodily shape. However, the act of embodiment proves elusive, even though to circle it might mean to isolate animality in textuality. This is the case since all that is embodied is immaterial as a spirit, and comes to reside in what is solid as a body, when we were, conversely, seeking a way of bracketing off both the immateriality of meaning and the bodiliness of signs. This is related to the impossibility of the sign *as such*, as exposed by Derrida: 'There is no sign as such. Either the sign is considered a thing, and it is not a sign. Or it is a reference, and thus not itself'.⁴⁵ In a text, signification appears to collapse into the material substance of expression or the immaterial substance of semantics, both of which I have argued are counter-productive objects for Literary Animal Studies. But signification *as such* – the *signifiance* that makes specific meanings possible – even if crucial for a zoogrammatological understanding of arche-animality, is not simply locatable for the reasons quoted above: it is either a referential arrow, and then not itself, or it loses its status of signification.

Hughes

These are indeed profound questions that could guide the most arduous, Derridean attempts at reading texts' unspoken conditions of meaning-making. In order to provide examples of reading practices that may be guided by such

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 222.

questioning, but also as some kind of manifesto exposing the difficulties of animal poetry, I turn to Ted Hughes's 'The Thought-Fox', originally published in

The Hawk in the Rain in 1957:

I imagine this midnight moment's forest:
 Something else is alive
 Beside the clock's loneliness
 And this blank page where my fingers move.

5 Through the window I see no star:
 Something more near
 Though deeper within darkness
 Is entering the loneliness:

10 Cold, delicately as the dark snow,
 A fox's nose touches twig, leaf;
 Two eyes serve a movement, that now
 And again now, and now, and now

15 Sets neat prints into the snow
 Between trees, and warily a lame
 Shadow lags by stump and in hollow
 Of a body that is bold to come

20 Across clearings, an eye,
 A widening deepening greenness,
 Brilliantly, concentratedly,
 Coming about its own business

 Till, with a sudden sharp hot stink of fox
 It enters the dark hole of the head.
 The window is starless still; the clock ticks,
 The page is printed.⁴⁶

This poem rehearses not only many of the issues raised in the discussion above regarding the ability of poetic language to capture and/or represent accurately the other-than-human world but also the poetics of animality (or the animality of his poetics) that Hughes espouses in *Poetry in the Making*. In

⁴⁶ Ted Hughes, 'The Thought-Fox', *Ted Hughes: Poems*, selected by Simon Armitage (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), p. 3, line numbers added.

fact, the chapter 'Capturing Animals' does include 'The Thought-Fox' as an 'example' of the poetics Hughes describes, and the cover of *Poetry in the Making* contains a drawing of a fox. Hughes ends up by offering the poem as a form of compensatory poetic activity analogous to capturing animals, since he confesses that 'an animal that [he] never succeeded in keeping alive is the fox', as the ones he captured were either set free or killed by others.⁴⁷ 'The Thought-Fox' is then presented as his first 'animal' poem, as a direct compensation for those 'lost' foxes.

Thus, Alex Davis argues that the poem sets out to be clearly mimetic in its attempt to 'render its object [...] in all its physical actuality' and he quotes Neil Roberts as stating that the poetic fox becomes 'a real autonomous creature moving the natural world'. Most importantly, Davis points out that the poem comes across as almost a poetic manifesto by Hughes, and that he selected this poem to open his three collections of poetry.⁴⁸ What is surprising for Paul Bentley is that 'early critical response to Hughes [resists] the idea [...] that Hughes's animals have any symbolic meaning'. As one critic puts it, his poetry is 'a kind of naïve admiration for animal life – a kind of raw nature cult, which assumes that human consciousness brings only limitation' and, in the words of another, his interest is in 'the bruising darkness of instincts and sensations, where the mind runs itself hard against the brute physical facts of

⁴⁷ Hughes, 'Capturing Animals', p. 19.

⁴⁸ Alex Davis, 'Hughes and Post-Modernism', in *Ted Hughes*, ed. by Terry Gifford (London: Palgrave, 2015), pp. 25-39 (p. 27).

blood and action, landscape and weather'. Finally, Bentley summarises that Hughes's 'animals are just animals, their violence, life itself, without meaning'.⁴⁹

From a slightly different perspective, Bentley shows that A. Alvarez 'places Hughes in the context of an age of psychoanalysis, an age coming to terms with new revelations about the Holocaust',⁵⁰ similar to Davis's claim that Hughes's poetry 'is a monumental chapter in that which [Carrie] Rohman, [in her book *Stalking the Subject: Modernism and the Animal*], describes as "[t]he twentieth-century eruption of animality, often encoded as the eruption of the unconscious, [which] parallels the Modernist explosion of linguistic convention".⁵¹ This debate goes to the heart of the issue of the transparency of poetic language and of the reality of that which is perceived beyond the glass of the linguistic sign. Alex Davis shows that, for Antony Easthope, Hughes ignores Modernism and the linguistic turn of the twentieth century so that his poetry aims, instead, for transparency. However, Davis himself argues that Easthope identifies only 'the *desire* for unmediated "transparency" in Hughes's poetics, [and] ignores the nagging recognition, repeatedly raised in Hughes's poetry and prose, that language is a sign-system by means of which the referential world is constructed, and thus occluded, rather than simply accessed', and he cites 'The Thought-Fox' as an instance of an animal poem that seek to capture what is 'out there' all the while recognising itself *as* a poem.⁵² Given that Hughes

⁴⁹ Paul Bentley, 'The debates about Hughes', in *The Cambridge Companion to Ted Hughes*, ed. by Terry Gifford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 27-39 (pp. 28-9).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁵¹ Davis, p. 34.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 33.

admits in 'Capturing Animals' that 'the words [of 'The Thought-Fox'] have made a body for [the fox] and given it somewhere to walk',⁵³ Davis's point would suggest that Hughes's is a poetics of tragedy: it constantly asserts the necessity and desire to break with and from the limitations of human linguistic conceptuality for the sake of a unity with the animal energies of Nature, but also constantly admits the failure to do so.

However, the hesitation already present in Hughes's formulation of the interface between a poem's 'parts' and its 'spirit' emerges again in his description of the poem in a way that points towards a more sophisticated answer than those described above:

This poem does not have anything you could easily call a meaning. It is about a fox, obviously enough, but a fox that is both a fox and not a fox. What sort of a fox is it that can step right into my head and where presumably it still sits... smiling to itself when the dogs bark. It is both a fox and a spirit. It is a real fox; as I read the poem I see it move, I see it setting its prints, I see its shadow going over the irregular surface of the snow. The words show me all this, bringing it nearer and nearer. It is very real to me.⁵⁴

As I argued before, this hesitation may suggest an attempt to eschew the paralysing dilemma sketched out by Attridge and Genette regarding the true character of the poetic function and the true extent of language's mimetic power. Richard Webster, however, sees it as an inevitable consequence of Hughes's proclaimed interest in fusing with Nature as it clashes with his own identity as a rational, intellectual, masculine poet:

It might be suggested that the sensibility behind Hughes's poem is more that of an intellectual – an intellectual who, in rebellion against his own

⁵³ Hughes, 'Capturing Animals', p. 20.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

ascetic rationalism, feels himself driven to hunt down and capture an element of his own sensual and intuitive identity which he does not securely possess.⁵⁵

For Webster, 'the orthodox rationalist, it might be said, inflicts the violence of reason on animal sensuality in an obsessive attempt to eliminate it entirely', 'for he doesn't want the hot sensual reek of fox clinging to his pure rational spirit, reminding him that he once possessed such an obscene thing as a body'.⁵⁶ Hughes, however, apparently *celebrates* this sensual reek, but the poem reveals a surprising similarity to the 'puritanical rationalist' in that Hughes 'unconsciously inflicts the violence of an art upon animal sensuality in a passionate but conflict-ridden attempt to incorporate it into his own rationalist identity'.⁵⁷ For him, Hughes only allows himself to nurture his 'feminine' poetic sensibility if encased and protected by a hard shell of 'masculine' violence. Thus, he points out that the poem's delicate description of the fox's nose – and its fascination with the sensual stink of the fox – is overthrown by the 'predatory impulse' behind the equation of poetic creation with capturing animals. The last stanza of the poem, recording the success of poetic craft and animal capture, would come across as 'a ritual of tough "manly" posturing'.⁵⁸ Therefore, Webster reads the poem as 'one in which a sensuality or sensuousness which might sometimes be characterised as "feminine" can be incorporated into the identity only to the extent that it has been purified by, or

⁵⁵ Richard Webster, "'The Thought-Fox' and the Poetry of Ted Hughes', *Critical Quarterly* 26.4 (1984), 35-45 (p. 38).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

subordinated to, a tough, rational, artistic will'.⁵⁹ These arguments are extremely relevant to Hughes's own claim that he was able to make a body for the fox in the very words of the poem. According to Webster's reading, the corporeality of the fox – which the poet allegedly celebrates – is sacrificed and transmogrified into the corporeality of poetic form. As we saw, Hughes does indeed conceive of poetic form in animal terms, so that it may be said that he believes 'The Thought-Fox' operates a successful act of translation of vulpine corporeality into textual corporeality. Webster disagrees: for all the concessions given by the poet that he treasures bodily sensuality, he reveals an allergy to it which is in fact soothed by the ideality of poetic form. In other words, Webster believes that Hughes chooses to overlook the limitations of poetic formalism and the inevitably ideal status of the supposedly material signifiers of poetry.

Surely, in 'Capturing Animals' Hughes does come across sometimes as defending what Genette would call a naïve 'mimological reverie' with regard to the mimetic power of language. Consequently, in order to grant a poem the life he believes it deserves, he says one must picture it like an animal with living parts and a spirit. Poetically, that means that, 'as a poet, you have to make sure that all those parts over which you have control, the words and rhythms and images, are alive.'⁶⁰ He then produces a list of 'words that live', which for him mean words that mimetically present what they mean: click, chuckle, freckled,

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 40.

⁶⁰ Hughes, 'Capturing Animals', p. 17.

veined, vinegar, sugar, prickle, oily, tar, onion, flick, and balance.⁶¹ These living words not only stimulate the senses, but

belong to several of the senses at once, as if each one had eyes, ears and tongue, or ears and fingers, and *a body to move with*. It is *this little goblin in a word* which is its life and its poetry, and it is this goblin which the poet has to have under control.⁶²

Hughes's recipe to be able to exert that control and not allow words to 'kill each other' is to

imagine what you are writing about. *See it and live it. Do not think it up laboriously, as if you were working out mental arithmetic. Just look at it, touch it, smell it, listen to it, turn yourself into it. When you do this, the words look after themselves, like magic. If you do this you do not have to bother about commas or full-stops or that sort of thing. You do not look at the words either. You keep your eyes, your ears, your nose, your taste, your touch, your whole being on the thing you are turning into words. The minute you flinch, and take your mind off this thing, and being to look at the words and worry about them... then your worry goes into them and they set about killing each other.*⁶³

This passage is striking and presents a coherent if rather familiar poetics. Living, poetic words should be transparent, and they achieve that transparency when they emulate that which they are representing so as to vanish in resemblance. The words may be unusual and eccentric in their vividness, but the successful poet does not pay attention to them as words. Attention is entirely focused on the subject-matter of the poem, which is then 'turned into words' by a rather magical procedure of coupling the sensual aspects of reality to the sensual aspects of words. It is unclear what role the semantic meaning of the words play, if at all, and whether it guides the poet into selecting them for the poem. If this formulation comes across as simple

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., p. 18, my emphases.

⁶³ Ibid.

mimologism, it also presents a clear vision of the interrelatedness of the corporeality of reality and the corporeality of the text. This interrelatedness, however, is not theorised in enough detail by Hughes himself. After all, as Davis pointed out, this passage could be read as an extremely vague description of language as ‘constructing’ the referential world, which is then ‘occluded, rather than simply accessed’: the reason why the poet can find ‘living’ words that match the vividness of reality is that this very vividness is composed of the vitality of the words. For Davis, ‘the thought-fox’s corporeality, its “body”, is linguistic; and Hughes is determined, in this context, to emphasize the animating power of poetic language’.⁶⁴ At any rate, we do not need to find in this Hughes passage a definite position regarding *il n’y a pas de hors-texte*. More likely than not, Hughes shows here poets’ familiar shortcomings when talking about their own work and giving an account of their own poetics, which can usually come across completely differently in their poems. Alternatively, these suggestions can be read as guidelines for beginners and children interested in writing poetry, reassuring them that they do not need to worry about technique.

The notion that Hughes’ poetry represents, not reality itself, but the poet’s mental experience of that reality, can not only be read in the passage quoted above about concerted imagining, but is brought out by Davis when he writes that ‘Hughes’s is an *expressive* form of mimesis; that is, it seeks not only to render its object [...] but also the experiencing subject’s (the poet’s)

⁶⁴ Davis, p. 28.

emotional and imaginative *response* to that object', which he recognises as a Romantic influence.⁶⁵ An important difference would be that, 'whereas in Romanticism the "organic form" of a poem is usually perceived as comparable to that of vegetable life, in Hughes it is here rendered in bestial terms',⁶⁶ as we could see in his equation of a poem with animal life. For Keith Sagar, Hughes adopts the fox as his 'totem', which means that Hughes 'recognized it (along with the wolf) as an outward living embodiment of everything within his own psyche which has been persecuted, injured, imprisoned, either by his culture or by his own rational intellect', which is similar to Webster's argument. 'The poet must,' Sagar continues, 'hunt for what will give his thought a living body, with a life beyond his own.' The hunting image, already highlighted by Webster, is then softened by the assertion that 'the first words [of 'The Thought-Fox'], "I imagine", are his opening of the door, his *invocation* to "something else" to visit him out of the darkness'.⁶⁷

Pawprints and onomatopoeia

In an attempt to experiment with the zoogrammatological poetics that I have been discussing, and to tentatively give in to the formalist seduction as it is apparently triggered by the poetics of animality, I shall read 'The Thought-Fox' for the procedure of its formation as it tries to capture the form of animality.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 26-7, my emphasis.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 28.

⁶⁷ Keith Sagar, 'The Thought-Fox', *Keith Sagar: Literary Critic and Poet* <<http://www.keithsagar.co.uk/downloads/hughes/thought-fox.pdf>> [accessed 14 February 2017] (p. 3, my emphasis).

Rather than the fox 'itself', the most animal aspect of the text seems to be a technique one could simultaneously call visual rhyming and visual onomatopoeia: the recurrent appearance of the letter w, seemingly representing the pawprint of the fox. The third stanza has three lines ending in w, its fourth line also containing two internal word-ending ones. The fourth stanza contains two lines ending so. A letter thus isolated does not, of course, constitute a morpheme and has, therefore, no meaning. It has simply a material face. Not thoroughly material, though, otherwise we would not be able to say that it is a *repeating* letter: strictly materially speaking, each of the inky shapes we are calling instances of the letter w are completely independent, unique material occurrences. Repeatability, or what Derrida calls iterability, requires a certain ideality so that the 'same' letter can be manifest in different instances. What the text seems to mark as its bodily, material aspects already seem to betray some textuality.

This is especially relevant since onomatopoeia is precisely Attridge's focus in the remainder of his essay 'Literature as Imitation', since onomatopoeia is, for him, 'a concrete example of what appears to be language functioning unproblematically as direct imitation of the real world'.⁶⁸ In analysing the use of onomatopoeia by Joyce, Attridge intends to address the problems he himself identified in Jakobson and other commentators on poetry. Attridge separates onomatopoeia into *nonlexical* and *lexical*. Regarding nonlexical onomatopoeia, which he defines as 'the use of the phonetic

⁶⁸ Attridge, 'Literature as Imitation', p. 136.

characteristic of the language to imitate a sound without attempting to produce recognizable verbal structures',⁶⁹ he lists eight complicating factors to their task of sound imitation, being four of them focused on the supposed directness of the onomatopoeic representation and the other four on the alleged preciseness of that representation.

His first example, from *Ulysses*, consists of a series of 'words' representing the sounds of farts and a passing tram: prrpr, fff, pprpffrrppffff, kran kran kran, krandlkrankran, kraaaaaa, etc. Attridge's first and second points stress the fact that onomatopoeia, despite appearing to autonomously reference a non-linguistic reality, depend wholly on a language system for their functioning. The reader must be familiar not only with the phonological system of English but also with its writing system in order to interpret these graphemes as representing a specific sound. In short, even these nonlexical strings must make reference to 'common' words that employ the same letters so as to offer the reader the sound they are meant to represent, so that 'onomatopoeia does not lead us into a realm of direct and concrete significance [...]; we remain firmly held within an already existing system of rules and conventions',⁷⁰ and the mimetic capacity the strings seem to have are entirely dependent on these conventions. Not only that, but the reader cannot help but read these sequence of letters within what Bolinger calls a 'phonesthetic constellation' or what Genette calls 'eponymy'. Hence, the series of *fs* suggests

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 138.

the word 'fart', 'kran' resembles 'tram', 'krandl-' connects to other words ending in '-le' that refer to 'movement and noise', such as 'trundle', 'rumble', 'grumble', 'scramble', etc.⁷¹ And 'prrr-' suggest the word 'purr' which is, according to Attridge, like a fart, 'another long-drawn-out sound made by the expulsion of air through a restricted passage',⁷² a physiological point made in passing that I shall come back to in order to discuss the perceived success of onomatopoeia.

His third and fourth points also discuss the necessity of conventionality, especially of onomatopoeia itself as a genre. For example, the reader must be aware that a long sequence of f's is supposed to represent an elongated sound, even though a multiplication of letters does not result in that effect in the regular lexicon. Also, the difference between the onomatopoeia 'cran' and the alternative 'kran' is only understandable within the conventions of the genre, since they are both able to represent the sound /k/ equally well. Attridge ascribes the advantage of 'kran' over 'cran' to the fact that k sounds harsher than c owing to the latter's possible 'soft' pronunciation in words like 'cease'. This entirely graphemic distinction leads Attridge to the visual aspects of onomatopoeia, which comes closer to the phenomenon at stake in Hughes's poem. Therefore, not only does k have harsher aural connotations than c, its sharp, angular shape can represent a harsh sound better than the smooth curve of the c. Possibly, the fact that the sequence of letters do not form a word

⁷¹ All these words are composed, etymologically, by means of the frequentative verbal suffix '-le', which derives words such as 'suckle' from 'suck', and describes actions that occur repeatedly.

⁷² Attridge, p. 139.

would lead the reader into considering them in their materiality and shape.

Some of the sequences are in fact unpronounceable, which would in fact undermine their status as onomatopoeia, so that they must rely in their visual effect. 'Prrrpffrrppffff', for example, differs from the other ones in that it contains letter that protrude above and below the line, perhaps suggesting the electricity cable of the tram above and the noisy wheels below connecting to the tracks.

Points six and seven argue that onomatopoeic sequences cannot tell us much about the sounds they are supposed to represent. After all, the tram and fart in *Ulysses* are clearly introduced and portrayed linguistically before the reader is able to understand the sequences as representing such sounds. At any rate, most of these sequences are indeed very imprecise. As Attridge points out, 'only a few nonvocal sounds, in fact, can be imitated with any degree of closeness by the speech organs',⁷³ so that no collection of letters will sound like a tram since the human mouth, whose sounds alphabetic systems were designed to represent, cannot properly emulate the sound of a tram. Most importantly, the relative success with which flatulence is onomatopoeically represented derives from the fact that a fart is 'unusually amenable to vocal imitation in being a sound produced by an orifice by the human body'.⁷⁴ Both its articulatory and acoustic properties resemble that of speech. Attridge then concludes that 'we might even say that the only fully successful onomatopoeia

⁷³ Ibid., p. 146.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

occurs when the human voice is imitated, which is what written language, in a sense, does all the time'.⁷⁵

It is indeed a strange notion that phonetic alphabets consist in fact of onomatopoeia of normal speech sounds. However, this does point to the important realisation that aural onomatopoeia *do not* represent acoustic phenomena, but rather articulatory ones. In other words, they do not represent sounds in the world, but the sounds a human mouth might produce when attempting to imitate those sounds – rather than sound waves, they represent *phonemes*. I have discussed before Saussure's definition of the phoneme as ultimately not material, and this has been a contentious point for other commentators, as can be seen in *Of Grammatology*. We saw that Derrida demonstrates the impossibility of a phoneme that is wholly material, since it depends on the work of iterability. But it is also undeniable that it was convenient for Saussure's phonocentrism to eliminate the materiality of the phonic signifier so as to secure something analogous to Husserl's 'voice that keeps silent'. What Attridge's analysis of onomatopoeia demonstrates is the *muscular* nature of speech as it is produced by a series of bodily surfaces with different textures and movements. Certainly, they have to be acted on by air from the lungs, but whereas this airy aspect of speech has been seized upon by various thinkers to emphasise the 'spiritual' character of speech and language, the embodied, physical – one might say, *animal* – aspects of it have been overlooked, since even this jet of air must, of course, be pumped by a muscle.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

These realities of speech have been known literally since time immemorial, but somehow it takes an analysis of onomatopoeia to highlight that language cannot imitate any sound – unless it is produced by a body cavity, when they can be approximately emulated by graphemes and phonemes. This realisation will have an even more forceful import for Attridge’s analysis of *lexical* onomatopoeia and how it addresses the conundrum he sees in Jakobson. Lexical onomatopoeia, unlike its non-lexical counterpart, the sound and the sense are experienced as much more inseparable from each other: ‘context is present in the words themselves, and it is virtually impossible to hear a sound as a sound when it simultaneously informs us what sound it is supposed to represent.’⁷⁶ Initially, then, lexical items which present us with some kind of onomatopoeic force that can be said to have their ‘material’ face (i.e. their ‘sheer sound’) always already contaminated by the ideality and conceptuality of their signified sense. That concession to the represented concept on the part of lexical onomatopoeia explains the attraction of non-lexical ones in their apparent unwavering materiality. In short, Attridge ultimately states that the theoretical interest of onomatopoeia lies in the opportunity it offers for an account of the experience of *heightened meaning*, which is one way of defining Jakobson’s poetic function. Non-lexical onomatopoeia, besides giving the lie to the notion of onomatopoeia as a form of realism, is less interesting because it cannot offer these insights.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 149.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 150.

His privileged example of lexical onomatopoeia from Joyce is the phrase 'thick syrupy liquor for his lips'. The inclusion in the phrase of the mouth as a referent is extremely relevant for the importance of the physical realities of speech as we saw above. Attridge then locates the source of the pleasure produced by this onomatopoeic phrase as 'the momentary and surprising reciprocal relationship established between phonetic and semantic properties, a mutual reinforcement that intensifies *both* aspects of language', although this reinforcement does not derive from a relationship of simple resemblance, as per his list of all the ways in which onomatopoeic mimesis falls short.⁷⁸ The impression of heightened meaning is an experience of 'interdependence and indivisibility between semantic and phonetic properties', so that

the result is neither direct apprehension of the physical world nor a focus on the sounds of speech as sounds: rather, it might be called a heightened experience of language *as language*. By that I do not mean language as a mere sequence of sounds, or a series of physical articulations, or even as sounds given identity by a system of differences, but language in the act of *producing meaning* and thereby momentarily fusing the abstractness of *langue* and the concreteness of *parole*, the ahistoricity of the system and the historicity of this moment in time, the shared social convention upon which language depends and the individuality of my vocal activities as I speak these words.⁷⁹

Here Attridge circles what he argues to be the being-language of language: the *articulation* between the material and the ideal which constitutes the work of language. The importance of Attridge's conclusion for my discussion cannot be overstated: the 'solution' he puts forward for the poetical dilemma concerning the corporeality of poetic language consists of specifying a

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 151.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 152.

site where the very distinction between corporeal phonemes and ideal systemic meaning is both irrelevant and secondary. In a gesture that could be described as deconstructive, Attridge posits an 'originary' element that in its turn will furnish the differences between the material and the ideal. It is, of course, highly relevant that he finds this element in an instance of language that puts focus on the vocal apparatus as an embodied reality. The individuality of the 'vocal activities' and the historicity of the utterance in question is brought to the foreground by the highlighting of tongue, lips, and palate as one pronounces/reads the utterance itself. After all, the experience of drinking the syrupy drink would stimulate and bring pleasure and attention to the same body parts that are now being used to describe this very experience. It is the materiality of the vocal apparatus that secures the utterance's historicity and individuality that Attridge ascribes to *parole*.

At the heart of material existence, however, there seems to lie a lack which must continuously be referred to and compensated for by means of the ideal system of language. In lexical onomatopoeias that describe the mouth, there is enacted the articulation between ideal and material that takes place when a subject fills the material void of the oral cavity with the ideal breath of language. In that moment the subject can not only use language but also experience what Kristeva and Attridge would describe as the truth of language. This human experience of language *as* language is analogous to Hughes's description of poems as an articulation of living parts and spirits and thus points to a parallelism between animality and language itself. Finally, it serves as a methodological guide for Literary Animal Studies to find its true

object of study if it accepts the importance of finding both the animal and the literary in the process of *animation*.

All that being said, it is very telling that Attridge, when describing the source of power and pleasure of lexical onomatopoeia, admits that this experience of language 'seems to depend upon a semantic content [of the lexical onomatopoeia] that is relatable to some aspect of the physical characteristics of speech'.⁸⁰ This is precisely the aspect of his point that I have been exploring, but it ultimately confines his conclusions to a very limited scope. Starting from a discussion regarding the true nature of the poetic function, Attridge weighs antagonistic theoretical and philosophical positions regarding the very functioning of language. In the end, his 'answer' to the problematic question lies in one type of language use (onomatopoeia) of a specific kind (lexical) that has a specific semantic content (the 'physical characteristics of speech'). Even though I do not disagree with his conclusions and their relevance to the overall issue of linguistic representation, they are nevertheless too narrow in scope and application to be able to address the issue of poetic language and its relationship to animal 'reality'.

Three levels of poetic experience

I propose to analyse how 'The Thought-Fox' responds – or attempts to respond – to this issue. From the start, the poem offers us the possibility to expand Attridge's formulations by means of its use of visual onomatopoeia. As we saw,

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 151.

Derrida suggested that something in literature is tied to the substance of written expression, to the point that the emphasis laid by Russian formalists – such as Jakobson – on poetry as an inherently oral medium limited their exploration of the poetic function.

The relationship, mentioned above, between internal poetic imagination and external (animal) reality is duplicated in the poem's confusing set-up of interior and exterior. 'Through the window I see no star:' (l. 5) irresistibly draws attention to the outside world visible from the room where the speaker is, only to dismiss it as either inaccessible or uninteresting. Rather, 'something more near' (l. 6) is the topic of the poem, which is located 'deeper within darkness' (l. 7). The image of depth seems to reinforce the notion of nearness and interiority, but this description is introduced with a 'though' – 'Something more near | *Though* deeper within darkness' (ll. 6-7) – suggesting that deeper does not mean nearer or more internal. There is a possibility that the deepening actually relates to the landscape outside the window, the dark starless midnight. In this way, the poem sets up the paradoxical positioning of this 'something' which 'enter[s] the loneliness' (ll. 6, 8) and which seems to refer to the same 'something' which is also 'alive' (l. 2): it is nearer to the speaker than the starless night outside, but it still originates or is located 'deeper' within darkness – possibly deeper even than the dark night. It is, thus, simultaneously more intimate and further removed than 'reality out there'.

The 'forest' of this moment has blurry edges: inside and outside are not clearly delineated. Other than the 'something else' which is being described, two living things are said to inhabit this forest, 'the clock's loneliness' and 'this

blank page' (ll. 3, 4). The relationship between these living things is confused by the first of a series of ambiguous lexical choices. We learn that 'Something else is alive | *Beside the clock's loneliness*' (ll. 2-3), but it is not clear whether 'beside' here means 'other than, besides' or 'next to, near'. If the latter, it could be argued that lines 2-4 are describing the desk in front of the speaker. The 'something else' that is 'more near though deeper within darkness' inhabits the desk, next to the clock and the blank page, haunting what I call 'the scene of writing'.

This architectonics of the poetic space is also encoded by punctuation, in the way that colons are used to introduce the different levels of experience the poem describes. If we understand the colons as leading into a next, more internal level, which is then not left until a full stop is reached, the poem can be divided into three such levels, which I call 'the window', 'the desk, and 'the page'. Since my overarching aim is to discuss the visual aspects of the poem, its spacing and lineation are of utmost importance, but I believe rewriting the poem into paragraphs separated by colons or full stops may serve to facilitate the mapping of these levels.

I imagine this midnight moment's forest:
 Something else is alive beside the clock's loneliness and this blank
 page where my fingers move.
 Through the window I see no star:
 Something more near though deeper within darkness is entering the
 loneliness:
 Cold, delicately as the dark snow, a fox's nose touches twig, leaf; two
 eyes serve a movement, that now and again now, and now, and now sets
 neat prints into the snow between trees, and warily a lame shadow lags
 by stump and in hollow of a body that is bold to come across clearings,
 an eye, a widening deepening greenness, brilliantly, concentratedly,
 coming about its own business till, with a sudden sharp hot stink of fox it
 enters the dark hole of the head.

The window is starless still; the clock ticks, the page is printed.

Interestingly, we can see that the third and fourth paragraphs above (lines 5 and 8 in the poem) both end in colons. That means that the reader does not return from the level introduced in the third paragraph or line 5, but is taken directly into a next one. This creates a nested structure in which one level is inserted into the previous one, and the poem takes us back and forth between them. Fig. 24 shows the levels or realms one goes through while following the normal order of reading:

The first level adopts a matter-of-fact tone of objective description, with active, first-person verbs describing how the speaker relates to the world. We are in the realm of everyday existence, where each subject must experience the world according to their own abilities and limitations. However, the speaker here initially appears to be only mildly interested in the 'real world' outside. The two verbs contained in this level are 'imagine' and 'see': the former registering an abandonment of realistic observation and the latter its futility.

The colons then take the reader into the next level, which is that of the poetic craft or of the artistic imagination. Lines 2-4 describe the characteristics of what the first level described as the fruit of imagination. Line 5 again takes place at the first level after the full stop of line 4. Again it describes the speaker's ordinary experience of the world and the futile attempt to explore that experience. Lines 6-8 depict the moving away from the window after the dissatisfaction with the elements beyond it. In fact, line 5 would probably work equally well as the first line of the poem, describing the catalyst for the poet-speaker's imagining and retreat into writerly contemplation.

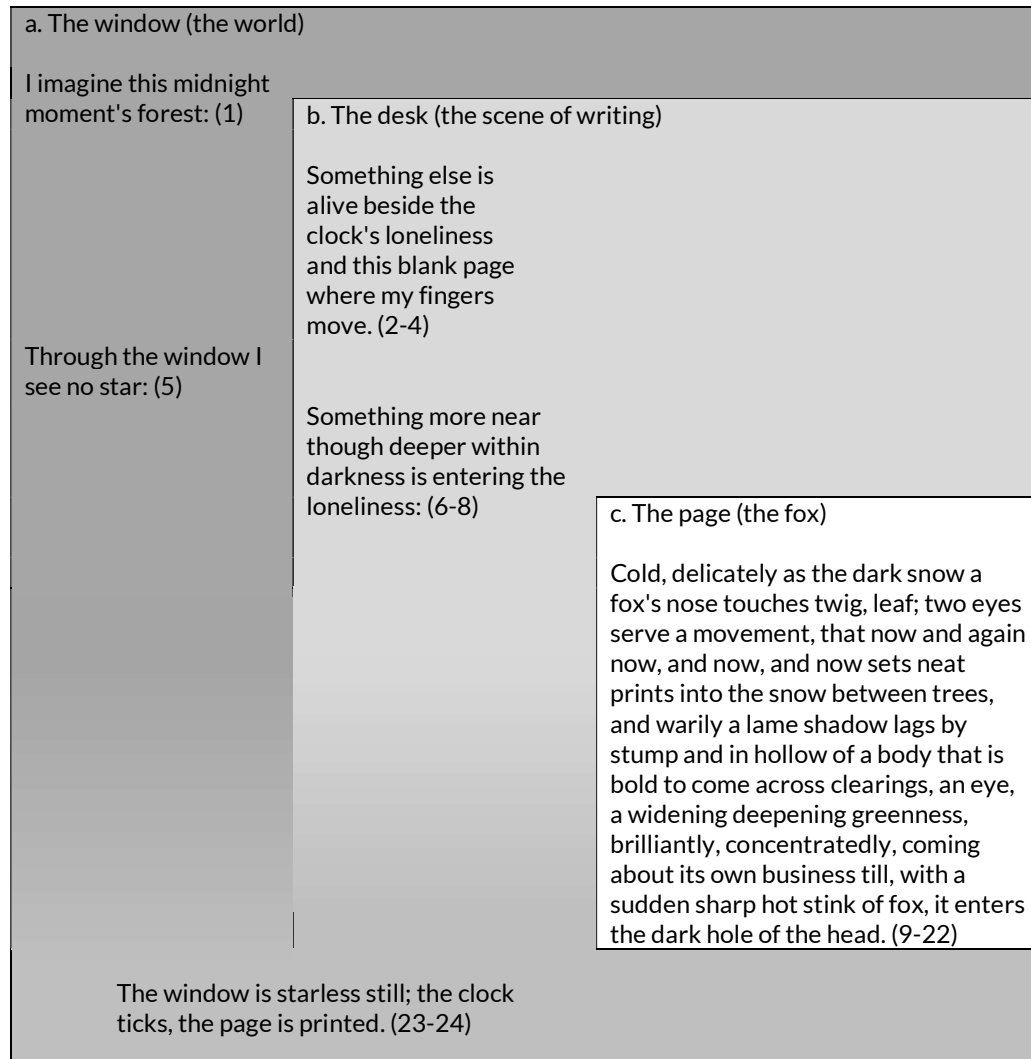


Fig. 24 Distribution of lines into three poetic levels

Line 8 takes place at the second level and ends in a colon, therefore opening up the third level. Line 8's colon frames the third level as a detailed description of that which the speaker is concentrating on *instead* of the invisible outer world. The second level thus functions as a threshold, describing the experience of entering in contact with the third level. The latter is entirely textual and takes place nowhere specific. It is not a description of poetic content, but is in itself set up as an example of the very stuff poetry is made of. Of course, the overall focus of the poem is to insist that the events of the third

level are carried back to the outer ones – the third level’s fox has the power of printing the second level’s page and of entering ‘the head’ (l. 22).

Thus, the most striking aspect of the spatial arrangement of the poem comes at the end of the third level. Line 22 ends on a full stop, which should mean the closing of that level and the return to the previous one. However, we cannot be sure if lines 23 and 24 take place at the very next level above – the second – or whether the full stop takes the poem back to the first level of objective observation. The content of the last lines does in fact refer to elements which had been introduced both in the first level (the window) and in the second (the clock and the page). This unclear hop back to the outer levels – a hop whose landing straddles the border between them – works to blur the very distinction between first and second ones, undermining it retroactively from the very start of the poem. To be sure, the events in the third level, as we saw, do affect the elements outside it, but access to it is described as much more inscrutable, so that the border separating it from the others must be negotiated cautiously. On the other hand, the border between first and second levels is almost ignored by the imprecise hop back and the merging of previously disparate elements in the same sentence.

The poem’s goal seems to have been all along to find a way of bridging the distance between the first and second levels. It tentatively steps back and forth between them, testing them out and experiencing the border. By entering a third level and making recourse to the fox’s powers, the poem can then come back and wield that power so as to dissolve the border. This is of course related to Hughes’s understanding of poetic art as a sort of shamanic practice that can

compensate for modern humans' linguistically constituted estrangement from reality. For Alex Davis, 'the overwhelmingly mimetic impulse of Hughes's poetry is driven, at its roots, by a quest-romance to represent a pre- or non-linguistic otherness'.⁸¹ For Hughes, language in general, *language* itself, is 'fully implicated in humanity's alienation from the kind of unmediated relationship with the natural environment supposedly enjoyed by [...] the animal kingdom and early hominids'.⁸² Therefore, poetry, rather than a perfunctory aesthetic practice, represents for Hughes the very useful possibility of helping humanity out of 'the prison-house of language'. This is a shamanic role, 'for the shaman's function', writes Laurence Coupe, is 'to adventure in the spirit world – the dangerous flight of the imagination – to return with the healing gifts of stories and poems and songs, and thereby restore the balance between culture and nature'.⁸³

The second level of poetic craft strives not only to represent mimetically the world of the first level, but also to question the perception of that world as it is actually depicted in this level of everyday, human existence. Withdrawing into the second level may at times feel like solipsistic contemplation, but it is ultimately justified due to the limitations of first-level sensibility. The window of line 5 becomes itself the prison-house of language, and no amount of gazing at it will shatter its framing so as to give access to the spiritual truth of Nature. It is this realisation that then justifies the shamanic flight into the third level.

⁸¹ Davis, p. 31.

⁸² Ibid., pp. 28-9.

⁸³ Laurence Coupe, 'Hughes and Myth', in *Ted Hughes*, ed. by Terry Gifford (London: Palgrave, 2015), pp. 13-24 (pp. 22-3).

Rather than further isolation, the adventure in the third level proves to be essential to healing first-level perception. After all, what is summoned poetically in the lowest level is precisely the energies and the capabilities of the animal kingdom that connect it to those spiritual truths. As I argued, the poem announces itself victorious not only in having the fox print the page, but also in securing the role of poetic contemplation in the perception of reality. In the end, the window still reveals nothing and the stars are still not visible, implying that ordinary perception has not been transformed. Nevertheless, the 'truth' sought in the world is recorded on the page, arrived at by alternative means. Poetry cannot itself change the human condition once and for all, but is constantly needed to regularly bring, shaman-like, the animal truths of Nature.

Shamanic zoopoetics

The outdoor scene described in the third level seems to irresistibly take the place of the outside world occulted by the window in the first level. The scene is blanketed in 'dark snow' (l. 9), which reinforces its similarity with the nocturnal image of lines 1 and 5. In fact, we learn that not only the snow, but a 'fox's nose' (l. 10) is also dark – and 'cold' (l. 9). The similarities between the outdoor images of the first and third levels in a way explain the journey into the last level. We saw that the 'something more near' was also connected to the darkness outside, so that the recourse to the (thought-)fox is justified as simply another way of reaching outside reality. A different fashion of apprehending truth is available to us, and even though it actually comes from 'more near' – from an intimate, ancient communication with animality – it is nevertheless

rooted in the world. Comparing the nose of the fox to how the snow falls 'delicately' (l. 9) on the landscape is how the poem introduces the third level. This reveals a fascination with the appropriateness with which the fox – and its nose – can perceive its surroundings. Not only does it apprehend reality delicately – respectfully, as it were – it is also in fact *like* reality: cold and dark as snow itself.⁸⁴ It is perfectly attuned to Nature at the moment it perceives the natural environment and registers it. The movement that prints the snow is suffused with an urgency which is revealed in the way the poem seems to run alongside it, synchronically. The repetition of 'now' not only traces the fox's pawprints as they are left on the snow, but also carefully records the careful observation to which the printing is being subjected.

If the nose is clearly ascribed to the fox, the eyes on line 11 come across as rather disembodied. There is an ambiguity regarding to whom the eyes belong. Earlier, on line 4, the fingers were 'my fingers', and the nose was the fox's, just as the forest was the moment's (l. 1) and the loneliness seemed to belong to the clock (l. 3). In the third, poetic level, one is dispossessed of one's one body and one's eyes are simply 'the eyes'. The eyes may very well belong to the fox, cautiously sounding out the ground before stepping forward, submitting vision to the urgency of the movement, which is 'serve[d]' by it (l. 11). Alternatively, they could be the poet-speaker's eyes, fascinated by the active fox now that the speaker has taken a passive, observant position. In this

⁸⁴ The appropriateness suggested by the similarity between the fox's nose and the snow recalls the notion of a poetic signifier which could, by the means of likeness, accurately represent reality.

possibility, the very passivity of the speaker is to the advantage of the vulpine message being scribbled on the snow-page, produced without any sort of human intervention or coaxing. It is, of course, telling that the body of the fox is not materialised, either, at least not yet. The poem so far offers only its nose and its movement 'in hollow of' (l. 15) its body. The speaker is clearly seeking out the fox and picking up its traces, this search being mirrored by the fox's sniffing. But, if the fox not only smells but actually touches the objects around it, the speaker cannot smell, hear, or reach the fox – or at least not yet. The body of the fox must be fashioned poetically, formally, as if in compensation for the absence of its real body: Richard Webster argues that, in this passage, 'both rhythmically and phonetically the verse mimes the nervous, unpredictable movement of the fox as it delicately steps forward, then stops suddenly to check the terrain before it runs on only to stop again.'⁸⁵ I add that the poem also mimes the fox by copying its pawprints as its graphemes, as if elated for touching the fox. The elusiveness of the fox's body leads the poem into lexical acrobatics to describe but still fail to describe what is only half there:⁸⁶ '[...] warily a lame | Shadow lags by stump' (ll. 14-5) is both vague and full of

⁸⁵ Webster, p. 36.

⁸⁶ The elusiveness of the approaching fox whose body is announced but not revealed is reflected in the French expression *à pas de loup* as discussed by Derrida in *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume 1*. Derrida explains that he privileges this expression (which translates literally as 'by wolf steps', meaning 'stealthily, like a wolf') in the seminar 'because the wolf itself is there named *in absentia*, [...] it is still absent, save for its name', where 'the absence of the wolf is also expressed [...] in the silent operation of the *pas*, the word *pas* which implies, but without any noise, the savage intrusion of the adverb of negation (*pas* [step], *pas de loup* [step of wolf], *Il n'y a pas de loup* [there is no wolf])'. He explains that 'where things are looming *à pas de loup*, the wolf is not there yet, no real wolf, no so-called natural wolf, no literal wolf. [...] There is only a word' (Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume 1*, ed. by Michel Lisse, Marie-Louise Mallet, and Ginette Michaud, trans. by Geoffrey Bennington [Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009], p. 5.)

suggestion. 'Stump' is both a noun and an adjective. As a noun, the word suggests that the shadow hesitates next to a stump, meaning the bottom of a felled tree or perhaps gesturing towards the lame figure's shortened limb. As an adjective meaning 'worn down to a stump' or 'obtuse in outline', the word may function quasi adverbially, describing *how* the shadow 'lags by', and that it is not clear-cut as the prints it sets on the snow. Webster sees this 'lame shadow' as a description of the fox 'as it freezes alertly in its tracks, holding one front-paw in mid-air'.⁸⁷ The poem seems to confess that it (carefully and vaguely) describes nothing but a shadow because it is what is available 'in hollow of a body', that is, instead or in the absence of a full body. Of course, the sylvan lexis of stump and trees adds to the confusion by pulling the word 'hollow' into suggesting a hole in a tree: 'in hollow of a body' (in the sense of 'in the absence of a body') can easily transform into 'in the hole of a tree trunk', aligning the fox's body, movement, and reality with the very significant 'forest' of line 1.

The poem then states that this body is 'bold to come | Across clearings' (ll. 16-17), where 'bold' is another instance of lexical ambiguity. In an ordinary sense, the fox is described as bold for crossing the clearing since it was up to now wary and shy. But in a different sense recorded in the *OED*, 'bold' can mean 'confident (*in*), certain, sure (*of*)', so as to suggest that this body is *bound* to come across clearings. Of course, 'bold' also means "'standing out to the view; striking to the eye"; firmly marked, "pronounced"'⁸⁸ and thus reveals the

⁸⁷ Webster, p. 37.

⁸⁸ 'bold, adj.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, 2017), accessed 27 June 2017.

simple conclusion that the shy, concealed fox will come – is *bound to come* – into view when it crosses a clearing and is exposed out in the open, clearly outlined by the snowy background of the forest clearing. The typographical meaning of bold face is clearly not far off, given the interest the poem shows towards printing. Webster supports this notion by pointing out that ‘the gap between the stanzas [between lines 16 and 17] is itself the clearing, which the fox, after hesitating warily, suddenly shoots across’.⁸⁹ This point makes the equation between snowy ground and the blank page still more forceful. Line 4 informs that the page is blank, and after the ‘movement’ sets prints into the snow between trees (i.e. in the clearings), the page is printed. Against the clear, virgin, blank, writeable surface of the snow, both the fox’s body and its pawprints will be neatly visible, just as the materiality of poetic writing – or printing – is felt acutely in its relationship with line endings, stanza gaps, and most importantly the white space that usually surrounds poetry.

In addition to the visual, spatial meanings of the poem, Webster also finds an aural echo of the snow-printing: ‘The first three words of this line [‘Sets neat prints into the snow’] are internal half-rhymes, as neat, as identical and as sharply outlined as the fox’s paw-marks, and these words press down gently but distinctly into the soft open vowel of “snow”’.⁹⁰ The close vowels of the three stressed monosyllables, together with the plosives towards their ends, do contribute to the impression of a neat, soft pressure. The nasal consonant in ‘neat’ could also be ascribed to that overall effect, differentiated from the same

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

consonant in 'snow' due to the latter's fricative softening. However, I would argue that the poem betrays an impatience with such representational techniques. This sort of mimesis has always been available, from the very beginning (i.e. the first level), and does not differ essentially from flawed perception.⁹¹ This realisation is precisely the conclusion of the effort in the second level: it struggles with creating a sensibility unique and powerful enough to contribute significantly and add to the first level. It cannot, since no tricks of poetic language can heal or help limitations which are themselves fruits of a linguistic existence. The futility of trying to revolutionise or overcome language *with* language is what leads the poem into the third level. In the end, the success of this venturing, if any, is reflected in the extent to which the poem demonstrates that it has euphorically touched the fox itself and registered its presence in the sequences of w's. Or, more boldly, it is reflected in the very existence of the poem: if the page has been printed by means of the fox, the fact that a printed page lies before the reader is supposed to convince the latter that fox-writing has taken place and been captured.

The strange lucid dream quality of the third level narrative is easily relatable to an actual dream that Hughes reports having had in *Winter Pollen*. Hughes writes that, while an English undergraduate student at Cambridge University, he started to feel an increasing frustration that affected his ability

⁹¹ The impatience to which I refer here is the same one Genette registers in many mimological thinkers when they admit that specific sounds do not really resemble in any meaningful way the things they are supposed to represent. Here, for example, it is clear that the fox is careful enough not to make any sound while walking on snow, so that the aural effect of the line is based on an indirect linguistic flight of fancy that has been rejected on the first level of the poem.

to write essays. After a stressful, unsuccessful attempt of essay writing, he fell into exhausted sleep only to have a cautionary dream or nightmare. In an uncanny resemblance to the Wolfman's dream, Hughes dreamed he was still sitting at his desk, trying to write, in the same room where he was now sleeping, when an anthropomorphised, bipedal fox walked into the room:

a figure that was at the same time a skinny man and a fox walking erect on its hind legs. It was a fox, but the size of a wolf. As it approached I saw that its body and limbs had just now stepped out of a furnace. Every inch was roasted, smouldering, black-charred, split and bleeding. [...] It came up until it stood beside me. Then it spread its hand – a human hand as I now saw, but burned and bleeding like the rest of him – flat palm down on the blank space of my page. At the same time it said: 'Stop this – you are destroying us.' Then as it lifted its hand away I saw the blood-print, like a palmist's specimen, with all the lines and creases, in wet, glistening blood on the page.⁹²

Hughes presents this story as an account of his change of studies from English Literature to Archaeology and Anthropology. The dream seemed to warn him that systematic study of literature was suffocating the true poetic vision and energies of which he was capable. Or rather, *they* were capable, as the Foxman accuses Hughes of 'destroying *us*'. The 'us' to which the Foxman refers can mean the two sides of its own being – skinny man and fox-wolf – or it could of course also mean the Foxman and Hughes taken together. In a certain sense, Hughes himself as the dreamer ends up being the Foxman, as Pankejeff was the Wolfman. He always knew deep down that from his becoming-fox he could produce the poetry needed to speak the spiritual truths he felt were needed, and his academic study was paralysing his becoming. His own

⁹² Ted Hughes, 'The Burnt Fox', in *Winter Pollen*, ed. by William Scammell (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), pp. 8-9 (p. 9).

becoming-fox – himself as Foxman – comes to warn him of that, and leaves on the page – on which he was struggling to write – a mark of the importance of this becoming. It is entirely irrelevant whether Hughes actually did have this dream in his youth, which would then go on to haunt him for decades and influence his writing of a poem about a fox printing a page. In a certain sense, it is actually more interesting to read this short piece – written in 1993 and published in 1994 – as itself a reading of ‘The Thought-Fox’. With this account of the dream, Hughes sets up neatly the opposition I detect in the poem between ordinary, institutional poetry, on the one hand, and the kind of revealing energies unleashed by animals and the ancient truths he would be able to study in anthropology, on the other. As in the poem, the writer in the dream abandons the writerly space in order to succumb to a dream-like state in which an inexplicable hybrid being can complete the poetic work for him. In ‘The Burnt Fox’, Hughes writes that ‘the impression of reality was so total, I got out of bed to look at the papers on my table, quite certain that I would see the blood-print there on the page’.⁹³ As in the poem, the sojourn in the oneiric realm is expected to have a *literal* impact on reality, as if crossing the boundaries of the levels shown in my diagram above.

The arche-animal in the forests of the night

This dream diary entry that also works as literary criticism reinforces the idea that the journey into the third level of the poem, together with the fascination

⁹³ Ibid.

with the material traces of the fox, reveals a suspicion directed towards 'ordinary' poetic language. The imprecise language used in the poem to describe the fox, while rich with allusions, seems to point to the futility of trying to capture it linguistically. This connects to the heavy conceptual work being carried out by the forest and the trees in the poem. If the clearings between trees are the white gaps between stanzas – the page itself – it follows that the stanzas themselves are instances of trees, small clusters of forest. However, the privilege ascribed to the fox-writing that happens *between* trees downgrades the trees themselves and, consequently, of the stanzas as a form of poetic writing. This allows us to interpret that the forest in line 1 is also being indirectly referred to in line 5: the window is black because it is blocked by trees, whose denseness make a mockery of the transparency of the window pane. Surrounded by a confusing, dense linguistic forest, the human speaker-poet craves the clarity afforded by a clearing from which one can see both the black-on-white prints against the snow below and the white-on-black of the stars against the night sky above – and, of course, the black-on-white of a printed poem on a page after the successful work of poetic mimesis.

With this image of a poetic forest⁹⁴ that must be shaped and manipulated, Hughes comes close to the literary meaning of the word 'sylva'. Derived from the Latin *silva* for 'woods' or 'forest', the word 'sylva' is used in English to form adjectives such as 'sylvan' to refer to forests. The *OED* records

⁹⁴ It is also entirely possible that the 'midnight moment's forest' from line 1 is a reference to the 'forests of the night' from William Blake's poem 'The Tyger', a famous early example of an 'animal poem'.

that it also means a treatise on forest trees or the group of trees of a particular area. However, 'sylva' also has the literary meaning of 'a title for a collection of pieces, esp. of poems', inspired by Roman poet Statius' (c. 45 – c. 96

AD) collection the *Silvae*. The *Silvae* are a collection of occasional, impromptu poetry, which led Ephraim Chambers, in his 1728 *Cyclopædia: or, An Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences*, to define the literary term 'sylva' as 'a poetical Piece; composed, as it were, at a Start; in a kind of Rapture or Transport'.⁹⁵ This idea might have stemmed from the fact that, in Latin, *silva* can mean both 'forest' and 'material', cognately to the Ancient Greek *hýlē* (ὕλη) for 'wood' or 'timber', but which also meant 'matter' or 'substance'. In fact, the *OED* states that the etymologically incorrect English spelling 'sylva' (instead of 'silva') was adopted under influence of the Greek term. This suggests that impromptu poetry, composed 'in a kind of rapture', struggles with the materials of poetry still in their raw state and tentatively tries to fashion them into some kind of *form*. As discussed by Butler, 'form' as opposed to material *hýlē* is an abstract forming principle, unlike the animalized form that poems take when they embody spiritual meaning, as described by Hughes. It is as if Hughes were rejecting the Ancient Greek duality of ideal form and material substance by disregarding the material trees, the poetic stanzas, as the *stuff* of poetry. The third level establishes that form is, as in modern poetics, the material aspect of the poem, and that this form is secured by means of the bodily materiality of the fox. In other words, the poem takes on a form by borrowing the material

⁹⁵ 'sylva | silva, n.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, 2017), accessed 27 June 2017.

body of the animal. However, in a certain sense, it is clear that the fox is not – or at least it is not only – an object or being in the world that is then represented or mirrored in poetry. As we saw, it is the representation of the fox, the mimesis undertaken by the fox, that the poem wishes to borrow and register. That means that the fox is less the *subject-matter* of the poem than its actual *subject*. It is the fox who writes the poem, since it perceives the world better than the actual poet can and then writes it down as prints in the snow-page, which are subsequently copied by the speaker-poet.

This is a telling paradoxical reversal, for the fox is being asked to carry out two opposing tasks. It must, as a more ‘embodied’ being than a human, furnish the very *form* of the poem, its structure of ‘living parts’, which has a life of its own, etc. On the other hand, perhaps also because it is so connected to its own body, it is able to look ‘beyond the trees’ and find the clearing, tear the veil of language away from the window, touch the whole world with its nose, write about it on the snow, and thus produce the kind of ‘poetic *message*’ which a poet like Hughes feels poetry is tasked to convey. In short, any animal capable of writing cannot be reduced fully to its body or its consciousness – it is neither material nor conceptual – and thus must be read zoo-grammato-logically.

Keith Sagar, both in the book *The Art of Ted Hughes* and the article ‘The Thought-Fox’ defends that the poem is purely metaphorical: ‘The poem is about writing a poem, about poetic inspiration, not about a fox at all.’⁹⁶ ‘This is not, primarily, a poem about a fox, but a poem about writing a poem, about the

⁹⁶ Keith Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 19.

kind of thinking which produces poems.⁹⁷ For Webster, too, it is a self-referential poem, in which

the night is itself a metaphor for the deeper and more intimate darkness of the poet's imagination in whose depths an idea is mysteriously stirring. At first the idea has no clear outlines; it is not seen but felt – frail and intensely vulnerable. The poet's task is to coax it out of formlessness and into fuller consciousness by the sensitivity of his language. The remote stirrings of the poem are compared to the stirrings of an animal – a fox, whose body is invisible.⁹⁸

But, by the end of the poem, 'the fox is no longer a formless stirring somewhere in the dark depths of the bodily imagination; it has been coaxed out of the darkness and into full consciousness.'⁹⁹ Webster's arguments point to the role that the fox's body and form play in the poem's own formation, so that it cannot be solely about writing a poem, since the poem can only take from by borrowing it from the fox. Of course, the arguments presented by the poem try to persuade us that not only is it indeed about a fox, but that its elusive body and writing have been recorded. Davis is doubtful, as he believes that the thought-fox is ultimately a 'paper being'. He supports his argument by means of the thesis on the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign:

[The] lack of identity between word and thing, sign and referent, leads Hughes elsewhere to lament language as cripplingly unable to communicate fully the immediacy of lived experience. From this perspective, the thought-fox's 'body' is that of a verbal zombie, a kind of walking corpus.¹⁰⁰

The image of the zombie describes rather accurately the poem's fox, which, as Hughes wrote, 'is both a fox and not a fox'.¹⁰¹ However, Davis

⁹⁷ Sagar, 'The Thought-Fox', p. 1.

⁹⁸ Webster, p. 36.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 37.

¹⁰⁰ Davis, p. 28.

¹⁰¹ Hughes, 'Capturing Animals', p. 20.

overlooks the lengths to which the poem goes in the third level to bypass such limited language for some kind of visionary experience of touching and capturing the fox. The act of recording the outline of the pawprints in the shape of the w's is itself a record of the attempt to signify the fox without using signification. The pawprint shape irresistibly seduces the poem itself with the promise of a linguistic code which seems to abandon systemic functioning to sensually touch animal embodiment itself. However, Davis is ultimately right: this visual onomatopoeia, too, works solely on the basis of the differential relationships between grapheme shapes. As is well known, Saussure's thesis of differential value is supported by scriptural metaphors of the differential character of alphabet letters, which Derrida discusses in detail when describing arche-writing.

In the end, the poem defends a sort of *contamination* or *undecidability* between materiality and ideality – which is, of course, the basis of the functioning of iterable graphemes or phonemes – so that the conclusions regarding the thought-fox's 'paper being' or the differential value of the w's seem to apply to *real foxes in the real world*. If the task of capturing the fox poetically results in marks that are, while not totally 'ideal' or 'conceptual' as systematic language is criticised for being, still not completely embodied or material, it must follow that foxes, too, are not exclusively corporeal. The bodies of animals are also caught in the play of the text, and this play is, in fact, the very hesitation gathered in their bodies. In 'The Thought-Fox', Hughes captures not the animal, but an arche-animal, and records not the tracks of a

fox, but its *traces*:¹⁰² not a presence – either simple or modified by temporality – but ‘a new structure of non-presence’.¹⁰³ The traces of the fox are not present marks of a fox that was once fully present to print them, but are only *traces of traces*. That what we understand as animal being or embodiment is, as the arche-animal, a trace is what Hughes did not set out to discover but ends up revealing. The stakes of the poem are set up to accept either success or failure: either the fox will be captured in its reality or the poem will continue to suffocate in nothing but language. What actually happens would probably register as failure for Hughes, but escapes from the initial parameters of the poem: the fox cannot be grasped in a simple reality because it is not purely extra-textual. Likewise, the poem is also successful to the extent that the fox, not being extra-textual, can be and indeed is enacted by the textuality of the poem.

So does ‘The Thought-Fox’ suppose that the specialness of poetic language relies on the material opacity of its form or on the transparency of signifiers which disappear before signified concepts? Does the poem’s version of the poetic function – which, for Jakobson, should foreground the ‘message’ – include meaning ‘as an inherent part of the sign’¹⁰⁴ or does it depend on words functioning ‘independently of their referential function’?¹⁰⁵ As Attridge has so aptly demonstrated, this question is an aporia, and either answer provides insurmountable problems both for literary theory and for (literary) Animal

¹⁰² As we saw in a previous section, Derrida’s problematisation of the Saussurean sign (i.e. the formulation of the *trace*) was carried out in terms of its non-simple materiality and ideality.

¹⁰³ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 91.

¹⁰⁴ Attridge, p. 129.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 134.

Studies. The first option collapses poetry into the ordinary functioning of language at the same time as it submits (animal) materiality to the primacy of conceptuality. The second option risks losing the very identity of the linguistic sign and the relevance of meaning to poetry, and it also threatens to posit animality as definable solely on material terms. We saw how the materialist account of animal being wrongly assumes that animals are wholly extra-textual and that formalism as a materialist form of literary analysis is untenable.

‘The Thought-Fox’ plays with the impurity of graphemes and phonemes – neither wholly material nor ideal – in its attempt to circle animation and significance as the being of both poetry and animality. It attempts to capture meaning-making as *significance* itself – meaning that does not yet mean any *thing*. At the same time, it tries to imagine the animality of the fox as neither collapsible to its animal mind nor to its mere material body. By the end of the poem, both its body and its mind are in fact sublimated: the former lost to poetic form and the latter absorbed into the poet’s conceptual, imaginative agency when the fox enters ‘the dark hold of the head’ (l. 22). In a certain sense, the poem’s conclusion comes across as Hughes’s ‘filing away’ of the constituents of animal being: its body returned to its ‘origin’ in linguistic substance and its mind appropriately fused to the human mind as its model. In other words, Hughes’s attempt could never be more than an attempt and it leaves in the poem nothing but the scar of the striving towards the ideal-material significance I discussed above.

One could say that formally the poem could not but fail, but thematically, I would argue that it successfully describes the solution to the

problem. It sees in the transparent but obstructed window the figure of the transparent/opaque impasse of poetic language and finds in the alternative path of fox-writing a way out of the paralysing dichotomy. But if philosophically or theoretically the anima-ted fox breaks away from the metaphysical duality, its poetic enactment is as fleeting and limited as the mouth-related lexical onomatopoeia described by Attridge. Previously, I 'rewrote' Derrida by reading in *Of Grammatology* the suggestion that, 'before being its object, [animality] is the condition of [mimesis]'.¹⁰⁶ The poem recognises this and tries to enact it at the level of form. However, just as Derrida organises *Of Grammatology* as the failure of a science of writing called grammatology, 'The Thought-Fox' offers the failure of a poetic practice thoroughly guided by zoogrammatology. This responds to the conundrum hinted at by McHugh when she wrote her position papers regarding the field of Literary Animal Studies. If a critical scholarship should not privilege either mental interiority or extra-textual animality, we are left with the Derridean arche-animal as the horizon towards which we strive.

¹⁰⁶ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 29.

Conclusion

I hope to have shown that the question of animality poses some very special issues and challenges to literary theory and criticism. As Susan McHugh rightfully points out, the approach that we as cultural or literary critics take towards 'the animal' is far from straight-forward and we in fact inherit a confusing network of significations attached to animality. On the one hand, we can conceptualise animals as radically different from humans due to their embodiment, but, on the other hand, we can take them to be only differently embodied subjectivities, not unlike the human's as it is thought to be housed in the body. Both positions are fraught with problems and are, in fact, entangled with age-old questions about the relationship between materiality and ideality.

In fact, it is very telling that most of the language employed to celebrate embodiment and materiality is the same used by the philosophical tradition to dismiss writing, the sign, and representation as obstacles to truth. These connections are systematic and reveal the co-implication of the issues of writing and animality. On the other hand, simply accepting animals as "differently human" (effectively dismissing the very question of species difference itself) registers as a mere updating of Cartesianism, where now animals have graduated into having their own minds with which to master over their bodies.

As I have argued through the thesis, the equation of animality with writing (and thus with the signifier) comes undone when exposed to deconstruction. Insofar as Derrida reveals that the signifier is itself a product

of metaphysical formulations (set up in such a way to secure the self-presence of speech), it ceases being a productive concept for theorising animality. But if animality and writing have been intertwined for most of the Western philosophical tradition, a deconstruction of the vulgar meaning of writing cannot but also deconstruct the meaning of animality. It is to the vulgar concept of writing that the animal is related, which means that this animality is similarly produced alongside (and in the name of) a metaphysics of speech and human subjectivity. A different, new – but actually very *old* – meaning of animality corresponds to the arche-writing resulting from the deconstruction of the signifier. I name this paleonym arche-animality.

The consequences for literary and cultural analyses of animality are two-pronged. On the one hand, ‘the animal’, as a metaphysical figure born out of the repression of arche-animality, must be constantly underscored as part of the discourse of speciesism we more often than not attack, so that the very object of study in question in a way represents an obstacle to the study.¹ However, and this is the other prong, it must be kept in mind that the whole of the process of signification constantly produces the very concept of animality by the means of the articulation of signifier and signified.

To be sure, Derrida’s deconstructive readings attempt to locate the site where and the moment when a text reveals both that there is no outside-text and that its own conventional signifying practices – as supported by the

¹ This is somewhat related to Saussure’s project in the *Course*. If he claims that his linguistics must in fact found the sign it goes on to study, Derrida’s grammatology must first destroy – or deconstruct – the writing it concerned with, just as zoogrammatology must deconstruct ‘the animal’.

difference between signifier and signified – are thwarted. One suspects that deconstruction reads a text for the the movement of the trace, past the workings of signifiers and signifieds. In that sense, deconstruction contributes to undoing the recurrent establishment of the human/animal distinction at work in any signifying process. Therefore, deconstruction will need to be an ally in the struggle to resist the vulgar concept of animality, but as deconstruction is never a done deal and always a work in progress, I argue that signifying processes require a careful vigilance. In the attempt to set up the human/animal distinction and utilise it to signify, texts will expose the repression of arche-animality, *especially when invested in producing discourses about animals*.

In my analyses above, I have demonstrated how the movement of arche-animality can be located in texts by means of undoing the repression it undergoes and looking beyond the ‘vulgar’ animal. I have intentionally selected texts from different genres and traditions so as to stress the ubiquity of the question of animality for textual procedures. Likewise, it is imperative that cultural and literary critics understand the instrumental role that animality can have in a variety of narratives and discursive practices, in such a way that attention to arche-animality can reveal the full extent and consequences of that role.

The sustained focus on Derrida is to some extent a response to the very deserved, if somewhat selective, fame he acquired within the Animal Studies field. Throughout the thesis, I have carefully shown how his early work always already contained extremely valuable contributions to the theorisation of

animality. I argue that his now famous late texts focused more specifically on animality can only be fully grasped in their importance when read as a product of these early writings. In a certain sense, his late work depends on this early framework. And this framework implies a suspicion of the neat dichotomy between materialism and idealism, so that animals will be not understood solely as either bodies or minds, and texts will be read for their deconstructive pull. Ultimately, deconstruction itself is anti-speciesist.

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