



Birgit Spengler, Babette B. Tischleder (eds.)

AN ECLECTIC BESTIARY

Encounters in a More-than-Human World

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From:

Birgit Spengler, Babette B. Tischleder (eds.)

An Eclectic Bestiary

Encounters in a More-than-Human World

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The essays, poetry, and visual art collected here consider the more-than-human cultures of our multispecies world. At a time when humanity's impact has put our planet's ecosystems into great jeopardy, the book explores literary, sonic, and visual imaginaries that feature encounters between and across a variety of living creatures: beetles and bisons, people and pigeons, trees and spiderwebs, vegetables and violets, orchards and octopi, vampires and tricksters. Offering a wide range of critical and creative contributions to *Human Animal Studies*, *Critical Plant Studies* and the *Nonhuman Turn*, the volume seeks to foster new ways of imagining a more »response-able« coexistence on our shared Earth.

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For **Susanne Opfermann**,
“doctor mother” and mentor
dog mother and significant human
companion and partner
colleague and collaborator
dear friend
and so much
more

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Introduction: Multispecies Chronotopes— Keywords for Thinking Creatively Beyond the Human

Babette B. Tischleder

There are these two young fish swimming
along and they happen to meet an older
fish swimming the other way, who nods
at them and says, “Morning, boys. How’s
the water?”

And the two young fish swim on for a bit,
and then eventually one of them looks
over at the other and goes, “What the hell
is water?”

—DAVID FOSTER WALLACE

We live in a more-than-human world, a fact we pay little attention to in our daily lives. We share the Earth with four-legged companions, with pigeons and penguins, rats and roaches, rivers and volcanoes, fireflies and water bugs. And even if we attend to pets and leaves and blossoms with pleasure, our cities are full of wildlife that more often than not goes unnoticed: not only the weeds, trees, and flowers that stretch their bodies out of the fissures of the pavement, or the swift sparrows that try stealing crumbs from your saucer when your mind is elsewhere, but also the smart-ass crows that watch you closely as they organize their communities, or the daring squirrels that climb up six floors on ivy and vine, balancing over balcony railings to find nuts and take a sip of water spared by potted plants. These are only some of our fellow urban dwellers in the street, in trees, on garbage cans and window sills, and in the sky, fighting over and feasting on our leftovers and occasional treats.

Urban wildlife also includes the shy figures of the night: foxes in Berlin, coyotes in Chicago, black bears in Reno, falcons in Manhattan, owls in Toronto, turtles in Athens, raccoons everywhere. If we think they are visitors on an aberrant path, or just passing through, we are mistaken: cities are their habitats as much as they are ours, and wild animals have been urban residents for quite a while. In fact, cities have become safer habitats for survival than many rural areas, and they are home for a large diversity of nonhuman species: city centers, residential neighborhoods and suburbs alike are places where not just squirrels, ducks, rats, and rabbits live, but also varieties of wild canines, bats and boars, and many species of birds, including hawks, herons, and eagles. Urban areas are where they roam, sleep, scavenge, hunt, mate, and raise their young ones.

Even less frequently, we consider cohabitation in terms of our intestinal faunas, the microbes in our guts and wrinkles, the dirt and debris that lives in the shadow of our daily existence, or the short lives “granted” to the cows and chickens and fish that end up on our plates. We humans are by far the greediest animals on the planet, claiming more resources, lives, and territories than all other species combined, and leaving much of our Earth depleted, thereby destroying and shrinking the habitats of other fellow creatures that, like us, have no other place to go.

Last but not least, there are the earthbound ecosystems we call flora—even though habitats for all living creatures, they are much more than just “environments” that provide food and shelter for amphibians, mammals, birds, fishes, and reptiles: they are complex living beings and systems of their own. Plants, to use a very general term for a highly diversified group of non-animal beings, have their own forms of sociality, exchange, and support. They “tell” their own stories and communicate with one another through complex channels and networks—subterranean, biochemical, airborne. Trees, for instance, form a “wood wide web,” an underground network made of fungi that allows plants to communicate with and support one another. But, sadly, their communication goes mostly unheard by those who consider vegetal life merely food, ornament, recreational space, building material, energy supply, or capital, even if people are becoming increasingly fascinated by, for instance, “the hidden life of trees” (*Wohlleben*).

The idea of this volume is to redirect the attention of our readers to the diverse life forms and rich more-than-human “cultures” of our multispecies world. The book offers essays, literary criticism, autobiographical pieces, poems, and photographs that represent and reflect a wide spectrum of human and nonhuman beings, which have lives of their own and thrive in ways that can suggest new ideas regarding the challenges of dwelling together, indeed sharing the same Earth. A crucial question guiding our efforts, and the efforts of those we follow, is how scholars of the humanities, writers, and artists can, in

and through their work, contribute to the “arts of living on a damaged planet” (Tsing et al.).

The essays in this volume provide different angles to give at least partial answers to this question; they explore the shared worlds—the social, physical, and emotional entanglements, the literary, aural, and visual imaginaries, and they rethink the conceptual boundaries between the human and the nonhuman. By attending to fiction and nonfiction, photography, art, and poetry, the contributions show how common categories that neatly distinguish between people and “beasts,” flora and fauna, the living and the dead, are often at odds with actual and imaginary forms of cohabitation, collaboration, and exchange. Offering a whole range of critical, theoretical, and creative approaches, and engaging with historical and satirical as well as fantastic and speculative ways of building more-than-human worlds, the chapters partake in contemporary debates in the fields of *human animal studies*, *critical plant studies*, and *the nonhuman turn*. Our contributors take up the critical concerns in these fields and focus on larger-than-human forms of sociality and solidarity as well as the ecological damage already done and on the horizon. They challenge long-held assumptions, hierarchies, and economies that have characterized the self-conceptions and views of “others” and “nature” in the Western world. Together, they offer fresh perspectives for thinking through the diverse and entangled life forms that make up our shared planet.

This book appears at a time when scholars in many fields are paying increasing attention to what geologists have come to call the Anthropocene, a geological age in which human impact has modified not just the face of the Earth but is prone to put into jeopardy all earth-bound forms of existence, even if in different degrees. Habitat loss has become an alarming fact for an increasing number of our planet’s populations, nonhuman as well as human, and many more habitats are on the verge of disappearing due to rising ocean levels, large-scale deforestation and desertification, ongoing industrial, agricultural, and nuclear pollution, and other ecologically hazardous developments. These problems will not arise someday in the future. They are happening and they concern us now: the rapid extinction of species and declining biodiversity, global warming and climate change, the acidification of oceans, which are becoming “home” to more plastic than fish; the local and global effects of a runaway corporate capitalism and the concomitant, ever-growing waste production. Moreover, there is the still largely uncontrolled exploitation of the planet’s “resources” through mining, fracking, and quarrying (from fossil fuels to precious metals, minerals, and rocks), industrial livestock farming and agriculture, where cows, pigs, birds, sheep, and fish are raised to be killed, and where bees and other insects and more birds and more fish and other critters die as bycatch and “collateral damage.” And let’s not forget the rapid decimation of rain forests, the shrinking of lakes, rivers, and intact marine ecosystems,

including unique habitats like swamps, coral reefs, and mangroves and their populations—species that cannot survive elsewhere. The rapid cycles of our consumerism, endorsed by neoliberal ideologies and promoted in the name of progress and convenience, are built on systematic obsolescence, not just the obsolescence of daily disposables (such as coffee or dinner to go) and the short-lived fashion cycles of gadgets, clothes, and architecture, but the coldly calculated obsolescence of the lives of others—the exploitation of human labor and nonhuman bodies that are utilized, eradicated, poisoned, deprived of their subsistence, left to die or killed for consumption and economic profit (see Tischleder et al. *Cultures of Obsolescence*).

What follows is not *about* the disconcertingly unsustainable ways in which people treat their fellow creatures and the land, air, and oceans of this planet, though this is an important context. The different encounters between humans and nonhumans addressed in the book call for a more nuanced attention to other-than-human forms of being-in-the-world. There is no way we can consider the life of plants in our backyards, the vegetal nature of our bodies, or the love of gardening, without recognizing the singularity of manifold life forms and our existential dependence on them. Contemplating the lives—the fear, joy, and pain, the style, skills, and intelligence—of nonhuman animals and plants, telling their stories, reflecting on our interactions with them, involves apprehending both that which we have in common with them and the way nonhuman life exceeds us, and it entails seeing our own pleasures and vulnerabilities reflected in their bodies and faces. Contemplating the life of others, then, requires both empathy and the recognition that there are many dimensions of the other that are in fact beyond our apprehension.

Trying to get in the footprints and “mindsets” of other animal and vegetal life forms, then, is an exercise in inhabiting our larger-than-human world in a more balanced way. It means paying heed and respect to a world that is not ours alone. In view of humanity’s considerable geological and ecological impact, this book means to direct attention to the ways we share the Earth with other creatures, and it considers how much we rely upon more-than-human cycles of exchange, which enable and sustain all terrestrial life forms. The volume is divided in four sections that deal with vegetal life, poetry and music, political ecologies, and questions of thinking with and beyond the nonhuman respectively. There are, in addition to these sections, two series of photographs, Birgit Spengler’s “The Lives of Trees” and my “Urban Animals,” as well as a selection of photographs that present work by the artist Nina Katchadourian: “Renovated Mushrooms” and “Mended Spiderwebs.” Rather than presenting an overview of the four thematic sections and individual essays, the remainder of the introduction offers a glossary of eleven keywords that constitute relevant concepts discussed throughout the book. Given the eclectic nature of this bestiary, it serves to consider the intellectual, ethical, and practical challenges

to understanding a multispecies world through key concepts raised by single contributions. The glossary constitutes an incomplete “alphabet” that aims at pointing out the connections and correspondences between individual chapters and thus draws attention to the book’s internal dialogism.

Keywords

A is for anthropocentrism. The world we live in is focused on human affairs, and this is true for our day-to-day lives and for academic thought, whether in the humanities, in politics, history, psychology, or economy. Our value systems and notions of the good life, our senses of democracy, justice, and equality as well as ideas of property, efficiency, sustainability—diverse as they may be, are usually restricted to human societies and culture. As a challenge to our vicissitudes and value systems, let’s for a moment assume that we extended the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness to cows, chickens, dolphins, rhinos, and orangutans, or, more “radically,” to bees, trees, or rivers. This would throw into disarray our legal systems, beliefs, and modes of living. It would also entail acknowledging that most people are complicit with systems of industrial mass murder, large-scale theft, annihilation, and waste. You may object that this is only a thought-experiment: our lives and social being cannot be compared to those of other creatures; their lives count too, but less somehow. That we usually disregard the fact of a more-than-human sociality, that we cannot or do not want to face what equality among all earthbound creatures would entail, is part of holding onto our anthropocentric worldviews and privilege. Yet we should not forget that these worldviews inform our practice of treating nonhuman beings—as resources, property, pets, capital, and food. One aim of the book, then, is to unsettle our perspectives and to suggest ways of imagining the world that go beyond this anthropocentric frame of mind. This begins with our willingness to acknowledge that frame in the first place.

Minding our own mindsets does not mean “apologetically distanc[ing one-]self from a human positionality,” as Katja Sarkowsky writes in her essay; it rather entails distinguishing between “the inescapability of a human perspective” and “the inevitability of human dominance.” Non-anthropocentrism, moreover, can be found in the original, playful, and strange aesthetic modes of literary texts and visual arts that either hyperbolize or defamiliarize prevalent human perspectives, such as the raccoon in Gregory Blake Smith’s short story “Hands” that Helmbrecht Breinig discusses, or the types of mimicry that Sabine Sielke takes into view in her interpretation of Marianne Moore’s poetry. Breinig shows how the raccoon’s agency interferes not only with the human narrator’s daily affairs (garbage in particular), but challenges the very distinctions between wild and civilized, protagonist and antagonist, and human and

nonhuman bodies, thus making visible the human character's animality and the raccoon's human features. How lyrical language can be a powerful "tool" to unsettle our anthropocentric view is further demonstrated by the poems and artwork in this volume. Karen Kilcup's "Skunk," Susanne Scharf's "Zoological Encounters," and Marianne Moore's poems, which Sielke discusses, are all witty and playful attempts to pay heed to other animals' idiosyncratic nature—a nature that calls, above all, for our respect. Nina Katchadourian's "Mended Spiderwebs" constitute a beautiful yet ultimately futile attempt at mending what spiders can do so much better, reminding us in a humorous way that the architectures of the nonhuman world might serve as models for our enterprises and affairs rather than the other way around.

B is for bestiary. We understand *bestiary* as a term for a heterogeneous collection of real, allegorical, fabulous, and imaginary animals and non-animal creatures. As a working term, *bestiary* invites thinking through and with plants and animals, reflecting on the allegorical and metaphorical dimensions of living beings as well as on human characteristics represented through figures of fantasy, tricksters, monsters, and vampires. Following the lead (and laughter) of Michel Foucault in *The Order of Things*, I will in the following consider the multispecies "beasts" of our bestiary along some of the categories of Jorge Luis Borges' humorous list of animals in "a certain Chinese encyclopaedia" (Foucault xv): first, "(f) fabulous"—the contributions by Christa Buschendorf and Susanne Scholz, each in their own way, are concerned with how fiction and folklore have always provided means for imagining historical power relations and cultural hierarchies, as well as offering occasions to assess the role and place of humanity as species among species. Buschendorf's "Revealing the Wellsprings of Power" examines the function of African American folk tales, known as Uncle Remus tales, that circulated in oral form among slaves, and became available in written form through Joel Chandler Harris. The figure of Brer Rabbit, a physically weak yet witty animal, embodies those intellectual and social faculties that enslaved people needed to survive. There is, however, no guarantee that the cunning trickster figure will succeed in escaping the symbolic violence and racism that threaten his social standing. Nevertheless, the animal nature of the trickster serves as a vehicle for strong emotions and aggressions that would be improper for "civilized" human figures.

While the African American animal figures thus have a liberating potential, the nonhuman vampire in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* apparently has no such emancipating traits. Referencing Judith Halberstam's work on gothic horror and technologies of the monstrous, Scholz discusses the parasitic mode of the vampire who takes on a human disguise, right at the historical moment when people gained insights into their own animal nature. The figure of the vampire that passes as human carries within him the bloodsucking danger of

contagion and pollution—a threat, above all, to the “pure” social body. Both Stoker’s *Dracula* and the notorious *Nosferatu* in Murnau’s 1922 movie, pose a threat to society from within, but they are also part of a popular anthropology that is challenging what it means to be “truly” human.

Another, less graspable, monster that “haunts” this book is one whose nature is all-too-human. In Yvonne Wiser’s reading of Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*, what is called the monster has no palpable traits and is defined by emptiness rather than presence; the novel is characterized by the total lack of nonhuman animals in the Western landscape that forms its setting. Wiser reads the horror of this absence as a form of monstrosity that throws into relief the critical state of humanity whose ruthless supremacy on planet Earth no longer allows any other species to survive. An equally dark chapter of disconcerting absence and death addressed in the book comes in the form of a photograph from the 1870s that shows hundreds of buffalo skulls piled up to form a huge mountain of skeletal remains, presided over by a comparatively tiny human figure standing on top (see fig. 2., p. 202). Gesa Mackenthun’s “Sacred Pact or Overkill” tackles the historical representation of the bisoncide and related anthropogenic impact on the North American megafauna by critically analyzing a direction of scholarly discourse that promotes a form of “Neo-Savagism” by casting doubt on the popular image of Native Americans as ecologically concerned people. Given that this animal genocide constitutes a historical monstrosity that, in its disturbing realness, goes beyond allegory, Mackenthun’s essay clearly falls out of the “fabulous”-taxonomy and should be granted a category of its own; hence I propose “(h) historical atrocity.”

Borges’ category “(g) stray dogs” fits well both for Claudia Lillge’s chapter on the work of photographer Martin Usborne and the photograph of the young dog mother in Dehradun, India, in my “Urban Animals” series. More generally, the beasts in this book can be classified according to category “(j) innumerable,” if only for the reason that those thought with and mused upon here evoke so many others elsewhere. Lillge’s discussion of Usborne’s photographic framing of a Spanish Galgo (hunting dog) in a scene that, in color and style, is meant to evoke Diego Velázquez’s still-life painting, justifies including category “(k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush,” or what comes closest to it at a time when pets and other animals are becoming popular categories on platforms like Instagram and YouTube. Borges’ category “(l) *et cetera*” is appropriate since the creatures collected in this bestiary include many hybrid and fantastic ones that don’t fit any of the other categories: consider, for instance, the Uroboros and the dodo, an extinct Mauritius bird, in Magda Majewska’s meditation on Thomas Pynchon’s ecological concern with plastics and harmful anthropogenic impact in the 1970s. The Uroboros, a figure representing the natural life cycles, is juxtaposed with plastics, a valuable material in rocket technology, yet one that is “indigestible” in biological terms. The dodo bird, which has only

“survived” as a specimen in the Oxford University Museum of Natural History, constitutes the first documented case of extinction due to human influence: the last dodo was seen in 1662.

Borges’ “Chinese encyclopaedia” ends with the letter “(n)” for animals “that from a long way off look like flies.” It is a category that corresponds, in a certain sense, to Bernd Herzogenrath’s essay “The Beetles—Greatest Hits,” though Herzogenrath is more concerned with sound than flies. His attention is directed to the smallest species represented in this book—insects such as beetles, cicadas, and fireflies who have inspired and resonate strongly in contemporary “bug music.” It makes insect sounds and rhythms audible in human compositions and thus creatively expands our common concepts of what constitutes music. In order to accommodate another variety of animals missing in the encyclopaedia, I suggest the category “(s) glossy sea creatures dressed in stylish words”—a category custom-tailored to fit the essay by Sabine Sielke—“Strange Animals in Stylish Habitats,” which leaves lyrical cats and dogs behind in order to cast a fresh feminist look at Marianne Moore’s lyrical poem “The Paper Nautilus.” This poem brings together the poet’s interests in poetry and biology, maritime habitats and mothering, and the complex interrelation between creative production, the sea, and poetry as dwelling place.

C is for companion species. If we think of companions from the animal kingdom, dogs and cats usually come to mind first. Donna Haraway has coined the expression, and her *Companion Species Manifesto (CSM)* provides a visceral sense of the intimacy she shared with her beloved companion Cayenne:

There must be some molecular record of our touch in the codes of living that will leave traces in the world, no matter that we are each reproductively silenced females, one by age, one by surgery. Her red merle Australian Shepherd’s quick and lithe tongue has swabbed the tissues of my tonsils, with all their eager immune system receptors. Who knows where my chemical receptors carried her messages, or what she took from my cellular system for distinguishing self from other and binding outside to inside? (2)

The *Manifesto* begins with a love story, a personal account, that is nonetheless put in historical perspective right away: “This love is a historical aberration and a naturalcultural legacy” (3). In other words, dogs and humans are what they are because they have coevolved. Adopted as pets, dogs, cats, hamsters, and parrots share their lives with people and more or less depend on them for food and shelter. But the question remains how this companionship defines us? Haraway clearly suggests that the relationships are mutual and that our nonhuman companions impact us at least as much as we impact them. All over the world, dogs have been bred and raised for particular jobs—hunting, herding, guarding, patrolling, and so on—and, if in the Western world, many have

become pet owners' best friends, they are still widely employed and trained for particular tasks: they work for the police, are part of rescue teams, do sentry and scouting jobs; they are service dogs for people with physical disabilities and serve as "professional" companions for those in psychological need. In the chapter "Paws of Courage," Simon Wendt discusses the importance of dogs employed in the military service in Iraq and Afghanistan and as rescue dogs in the wake of September 11, 2001. Their service, however, goes far beyond any practical job description. Their labor is both physical and emotional, and they also "do" considerable cultural work: as subjects of heroization, their interaction with people is interpreted as one way in which "humans use animals to make sense of their world" (Wendt). In other words, the heroic deeds and agency of canines are subject of a cultural discourse that reflects back on the values and hierarchies of US-American society. Heroization is just one way in which characteristics traditionally deemed human are articulated through the agency of nonhuman animals and through human-animal relations—here military or civil camaraderie—so that social values like courage, loyalty, companionship, and altruism are embodied by dogs while valued by people. Presenting these "heroic" character traits serves to both naturalize these values and to idealize them in the service of nationalist (war) interests.

Companionship can be exploited ideologically in many different ways, and it may be a long way from the kind of "biosociality" and "partners in crime" that Haraway has in mind when exploring the human-canine coevolution and cohabitation (CSM 5), to the idealized "paws of courage." Haraway's manifesto stresses the reciprocal character of human-canine relationships: rather than part of a human history of domestication, according to recent research, the coevolution might have been initiated by dogs rather than people—an "unending dance of distributed and heterogeneous agencies," which has instigated naturecultures more complex than we have imagined (CSM 28).

That Haraway's conceptualizations of interspecies love can be made productive in relations other than those between humans and canines, becomes clear in Maria Holmgren Troy's "'Strange Matings' and Cultural Encounters: Octavia Butler's Fiction as 'Companion Species' to Theory." Troy reads Butler's science fiction alongside Haraway's meditations on the encounters between species, reflecting on how significant otherness plays into the intimate relationships between human characters and the members of an alien species. Rather than offering an abstract conceptualization of intimacy, Haraway embraces the tactile and the sensory in thinking the nonverbal interactions between humans and other critters. Focusing on these nonlinguistic forms of accommodation and communication, Troy reads Butler's short stories as a form of theory that thinks interspecies relationships within the alien setting of a fictional story-world. Fiction might be a starting point for rethinking the bonds we forge with nonhuman companions (many others creatures besides dogs)—a thinking-with

that needs neither our culture's "infantilization of dogs," as Haraway calls it, nor their heroization but the recognition of their difference as subjects in their own right.

E is for empathy and entanglement. Empathy is one of the most crucial concepts around which the reflections on encounters between various beings in this volume revolve. In a general sense, *empathy* defines the "ability to share someone else's feelings or experiences by imagining what it would be like to be in that person's situation." While the *Cambridge Dictionary* considers empathy an ability, *Merriam Webster's* entry emphasizes "the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner." Whether described as action or imagination, empathy depends on a form of communication that is based on intuition. Such an understanding of two separate beings—psyches, bodies, minds—that overcome, to a certain extent, the distance between them through an empathic relation is rather different than Lori Gruen's notion of "Entangled Empathy":

a type of caring perception focused on attending to another's experience of wellbeing. An experiential process involving a blend of emotion and cognition in which we recognize we are in relationships with others and are called upon to be responsive and responsible in these relationships by attending to another's needs, interests, desires, vulnerabilities, hopes, and sensitivities. (Gruen 3)

Gruen's notion of empathy is entangled indeed, and it emphasizes the bonds between different beings through a heightened attentiveness and responsiveness, an attitude and ability that combines emotional intelligence with an ethical thrust, or what Haraway has termed "response-ability" (*Staying 2*). This kind of empathy foregrounds a mutual connection that applies equally to the bonds between beloved companions, friends, and kin, as to less intimate relationships. Many chapters in this book shed light on the wide range and specific dimensions of empathetic response-ability: Christine Brinckmann's and Claudia Lillge's essays both explore the role empathy plays in the reception of photographic and cinematic images. In Brinckmann's essay, empathy extends beyond the cognitive and emotional registers to include "affective mimicry" and "motor mimicry"—intuitive responses to (moving) images that are independent of either sympathy or moral (dis)approval, but involve our bodily reactions and rely on the specific modes of visual presentation rather than anatomical likeness. Brinckmann explores in detail how images can elicit empathy with animal bodies with whom we share little physical resemblance, including horses, herons, and millipedes. Lillge's essay on Osborne's

photography is also concerned with the emotional entanglements that images can trigger—imaginary “contact zones” that elicit empathy with lonely canines through their aesthetic appeal and suggestive iconographies.

K is for kinship. Kinship is another crucial term for rethinking the relations we forge with other beings, be they human or nonhuman, animal or vegetal. Haraway has coined the phrase “making kin” in an appeal to her fellow humans, suggesting that kinship extends far beyond the bonds we maintain with family members and relatives. In fact, if we begin to see more distant living beings as our kin, we can no longer ignore the kinds of being-in-the-world that often seem other and remote, but are closely entangled with our own. In this sense, then, kinship is about response—or “response-ability”—the willingness to open up our minds and senses to other forms of being: “The task is to make kin in lines of inventive connection as a practice of learning to live and die well with each other in a thick present” (*Staying* 1). Hence “making kin” is a task: a practice of entering connections and rethinking relations; it is an urgent appeal to recognize and respond to our connectedness with other life forms and organisms, and to understand that this “withness” is the only way we can face many terrestrial troubles. “What shape is this kinship,” asks Haraway, “where and whom do its lines connect and disconnect, and so what? What must be cut and what must be tied if multispecies flourishings on earth, including human and other-than-human beings in kinship, are to have a chance?” (2).

Katja Sarkowsky’s chapter “The Citizenry of All Things Within One World” explores kinship in Mary Oliver’s poetry as a connection that crosses species and is able to recognize the commonalities between, as Oliver suggests, people, camels, grass, and maple trees. Sarkowsky attends to poetic scenes that present a variety of kinship relations between humans and nonhumans, allowing us to perceive new forms of sociality that bring together notions of kinship and citizenship in a larger-than-human world. The contributions by Astrid Franke, “Robert Lowell’s Hidden Cats,” and Johannes Voelz, “Notes on Thoreau’s Posthuman Democracy,” equally reflect on kinship as a concept that permits us to see unexpected alliances and forms of conviviality; Lowell’s poetry (Franke) and Thoreau’s nature writing (Voelz) are the contexts for reconfiguring the relation between kinship and strangeness, responsiveness and responsibility, and for apprehending fellowships and practices of living and dying that are shared across species. That even science, when done with humility and respect for the reciprocity that characterizes all inquiries across species boundaries, can initiate new forms of kinship is one promising prospect of Breinig’s “Hands.”

P is for plant studies. Plants that prefer Mozart over Beethoven, plants that are able to process and pass on neurobiological information to fellow plants via fungal networks, plants that display specific behaviors—these examples

display a new interest in plants as a field of studies that is no longer restricted to the sciences but attracts the attention of scholars in the humanities as well. Michael Pollan even speaks of “a radical new paradigm in our understanding of life,” referring to the field of plant neurology: “Its proponents believe that we must stop regarding plants as passive objects—the mute, immobile furniture of our world—and begin to treat them as protagonists in their own dramas, highly skilled in the ways of contending in nature” (“Intelligent”). As Birgit Spengler discusses in greater depth in “Arboreal Encounters,” it is particularly the temporal dimension that distinguishes plants from animals, and because their lives unfold on so vastly different time scales their intelligence has not been appreciated accordingly. In recent times, however, some scientists read certain behaviors of plants as indicative of “learning, memory, decision-making and intelligence”; whether or not these terms are appropriate for non-animal beings, remains controversial, but these questions have become subject of serious debate (Pollan, “Intelligent”).

“The ancient relationship between bees and flowers is a classic example of what is known as ‘coevolution,’” writes Pollan in an earlier book, *The Botany of Desire* (2001). Here the question of intelligence is not yet a concept that guides his understanding of plant-animal co-evolution: “In a coevolutionary bargain like the one struck by the bee and the apple tree, the two parties act on each other to advance their individual interests but wind up trading favors: food for the trees, transportation for the apple genes. Consciousness needn’t enter into it on either side, and the traditional distinction between subject and object is meaningless” (xiv). Pollan sets out to present “a plant’s-eye view of the world,” as the subtitle of his book announces, and, at the beginning at least, it seems that the world works well without human animals and their categories of distinction. Humans nevertheless have their own co-evolutionary histories when it comes to apples, potatoes, tulips, or marijuana, all of which are discussed in Pollan’s book. While his account is one that presents a rather optimistic outlook on animal-vegetal coevolution, the contributions in this volume also take into account the dark side of plant studies and stories.

It is indeed a comforting idea that trees are sturdy, stable, and steadfast, that they not only outgrow, but will survive us, even if they have already lived for a hundred or several hundred years before individual humans saw the light of day. In this sense, trees are more than living creatures that we like to look up to, quite literally, for their stamina and longevity. Whether as individuals or as forests, they are often embraced (literally by so-called tree-huggers) as emotional bulwarks in our restless time, when dynamics of obsolescence rather than permanence set the tone and pace of our lives. But trees too can break (prematurely), as Judith Fetterley tells us in “Cleveland Select,” and they can break hearts as well. Fetterley explores her own attraction and attachment to trees—one in particular—for their splendor and capacity to provide shade,

protection, shelter, beauty, and fruit—unfolding the larger story of her own physical and emotional entanglement with the lives of particular pears, maples, magnolias, and spruces. Her essay is as much a love story as it is a meditation on loss—“gardening is not for the faint of heart”—critically reflecting on the romanticism with which humans idealize and anthropomorphize these beings.

Trees, like us “children” of the Anthropocene, constitute no “natural” counterbalance to human existence, but have to bear up against many forms of stress themselves, including the challenges of human (nursery, landscape, tree growing) industries. In her essay, Spengler tackles the anthropocentrism of human chronotopes by juxtaposing them with plant-based time-spaces. Combining a theoretical reflection on the complex lives of trees with a close reading of Richard Powers’s novel *The Overstory*, Spengler demonstrates how the narrative organization of the novel itself is inspired by the deep temporal dimensions and interconnected systems of trees rather than by human biographies and trajectories. Hence trees constitute not only a diegetic focus of *The Overstory*, but its novelistic form follows and articulates the non-animal temporalities and cyclical spatialities that characterize the growth of trees, thus unsettling anthropocentric notions of the world.

Kirsten Twelbeck and Ulla Haselstein both offer creative visions of plants that inspire poetic forms of thinking inside and outside human schemes. In “Flowers,” Twelbeck brings to cultural and political life a wide variety of flowers. Attending to the “mute eloquence” and expressive floral semantics of nineteenth-century American texts, Twelbeck shows how roses, jasmine, marigolds, petunias, and a number of other species contribute to cultural practices and ceremonial expressions closely related to pressing cultural issues, from life’s transience and gynecology to gender relations and racial politics. Haselstein’s “Blood on the Kitchen Table” is dedicated to a section from Gertrude Stein’s *Tender Buttons*: Haselstein shows how the materiality of language and the sound and varying positions of words on the page are closely tied to the materiality and creative space of the kitchen, revealing unexpected resonances between the practices of chopping, cooking, thinking, and writing. Her critical practice constitutes a playful engagement with and mimicry of Stein’s creative compositions.

T is for thinking with. “Thinking with” is different from “thinking about.” “Withness” has become a crucial category for our critical engagements with other species because scholars in both the humanities and the sciences are moving away from thinking the world as populated by individuals who supposedly think and feel independently from others. In the introduction to the volume *Thinking with Animals: New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism*, the editors Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman make clear that anthropomorphism is much more than the projection of “human” ideas and emotions onto

animals. Anthropomorphism used to be “a term of reproach,” but these thinkers embrace it as a way of thinking about relations: “humans assume a community of thought and feeling between themselves and a surprisingly wide array of animals; they also recruit animals to symbolize, dramatize, and illuminate aspects of their own experience and fantasies” (2). Thinking with animals, however, still includes thinking about them; thus animal activists try to lend nonhuman creatures a voice to represent their rights, especially when they live in captivity, or are exploited in the name of science, or raised exclusively to be killed and become food. That thinking with is as much a matter of the heart as it is one of the mind is a premise shared by many scholars in the field of animal studies: “Thinking with animals can take the form of an intense yearning to transcend the confines of self and species, to understand from the inside or even become an animal” (Daston et al. 7). Charles Foster’s *Being a Beast*, a book based on the author’s immersive attempts to live for a couple weeks respectively the lives of a badger, an otter, a fox, and a deer, is one of the most radical expression of this human yearning and the desire to put it into practice.

U is for urban animals. The first animals that come to mind when thinking of urban animals in Northern cities are our domestic companions, then pigeons and squirrels; then one might think of mice and rats and bunnies and crows. There are, as suggested above, many more nonhuman city-dwellers, four-legged and winged ones, insects, with tails and without, and in warmer regions, we encounter yet other wild species that populate the streets, roofs, parks, and many other niches that make great urban homes: cows, monkeys, geckos, lizards, parrots, and so on. The nonhuman creatures in my photo series are all “wild” animals that I came across in their urban habitats; none of them have significant human others as owners who provide shelter and food for them. Of course, their lives are not independent from those of people since they share the same streets with us: human and nonhuman paths cross, even if people are often little aware of these wild citizens. Coyotes in Chicago, for instance, not “naturally” nocturnal, have learned to avoid direct encounters with human and domesticated animals by living their active lives at night, travelling along major thoroughfares, such as Lake Shore Drive, when there is less traffic, and by keeping a low profile during the day, when humans are out and about. I was not fortunate to encounter a coyote, but friends told me about sightings of these wild Chicagoans while walking their dogs at night. It is quite remarkable that coyotes have become permanent residents of this major metropolis (as of other North American cities)—a development of urban naturecultures in which coyotes usually navigate around people with little interferences. Gavin Van Horn’s appreciation for urban wildlife has culminated in a fascinating recent study, *The Way of the Coyote: Shared Journeys in the Urban Wilds*, which, part memoir, part scientific study, explores the how the paths of coyotes, humans,

and other animals traverse and intersect, thereby retracing the map of Chicago to chart new ways of connecting and cohabiting. That daylight encounters with this wild species in the city are rather rare, is also due to the coyotes minding their own “business.” They excel at circumnavigating people, while making good use of our infrastructures, garbage, and leftovers, but also hunting other wild animals, such as squirrels, rats, and mice. The latter offers a “natural” transition to the next keyword.

V is for vermin. Vermin are not a species, the term denotes a classification, a label expressive of human disgust for animals that are considered “harmful” and/or “objectionable,” or a competition to what people think is theirs alone: crops, fruit, livestock. In fact, the concept of vermin is not scientific, but reflects an anthropocentric attitude toward certain kinds of nonhuman animals that are seen to be anything from distasteful (at best) to revolting and loathsome. Some vermin are seen to be repulsive because they prey on us (lice or fleas), or on our “things” (locusts, snails, mice, rabbits, and other so-called “pests”). Even if they stay out of our hair, they compete with us and our companion species because they like what we like. We detest mice, moths, pigeons, rats, and roaches because they seem to be in our way and trespass into what we consider our territories. Human animals have little compassion even for fellow mammals when they are deemed vermin. In fact, we have invented entire arsenals to exterminate them: whether poisoning or breaking their necks or both, humans have decided that, unless they serve in our labs or (sometimes) as pets, mice and wild rabbits and rats are, above all, a nuisance. On signposts in Chicago you can find the entire spectrum of human love and loathing in close proximity: instructions of how to handle and secure your garbage so not to feed rats are posted right next to posters promising rewards for bringing back a beloved cat.

Yet right next to humans, domestic cats (including strays) are among the most dangerous predators of contemporary naturecultures that—unless they live exclusively in houses or apartments—are likely to hunt not just “vermin” but all sorts of birds, while they care less for the edible leftovers in our garbage bins than do mice, rats, and raccoons. This may give us some “food” for rethinking our classifications and value systems regarding nonhuman animals more generally. Hal Herzog has explored the curious distinctions that characterize our ways of treating nonhuman mammals and birds in his book *Some We Love, Some We Hate, Some We Eat: Why It's So Hard to Think Straight About Animals* (2011). This is a study that poses important questions through a cross-cultural approach: Why can a puppy be regarded as a family member in Kansas, a pariah in Kenya, and lunch in South Korea? “What can we really learn from experiments on mice?” Clearly, the questions the book poses reflect not only on animal ethics, or the nature of the distinctions that lead to us to treat some as

friends, other as foods, and still others as vermin. Ultimately these distinctions challenge us to ask how we can maintain loving relationships with some fellow creatures, including people, while considering others as unworthy and disposable. On a more visceral level, however, we encounter vermin as a disagreeable proximity with other bodies; such encounters can turn empathy into disgust, as Brinckmann shows in her essay—a visceral reaction, rather than a conscious response, to the lives of other animals.

Y is for Yuman. The protagonist and first-person narrator of George Saunders’s darkly humorous tale *Fox 8* has learned to speak “Yuman” by hiding near the open window of a house where a mother reads bedtime stories to her kids. Attracted by “the most amazing sound” of the “Yuman” voice that sounds like “prety music” to him, he is “fast and nated by these music werds” (3). Returning “nite upon nite,” the observant fox over time acquires a pretty good command of Yuman and also learns about “luv”: “When done, she wud dowse the lite, causing dark. Then, due to feeling ‘luv,’ wud bend down, putting snout and lips to the heds of her pups, which was called ‘goodnite kiss.’ Which I got a kik out of that! Because that is also how we show our luv for our pups, as Foxes!” (4). The fox’s identification with the bedtime ritual is moving, but his good feelings and hope after witnessing Yuman “luv” is also alarming for the human reader, who is alert to the “danjer” involved (3). Taking the treatment of “pups” as an expression of a general Yuman friendliness toward the world—“hope full for the future of Erth”—indeed indicates that trouble is in store (4). This trouble comes in the form of “The Mawl” named “FoxViewCommons,” as Fox 8 learns when speaking to a dog in a car in a place called “Par King” (his command of Dog is “decent,” as he tells us) (15). Fox 8 tells his fellow foxes about the “Fud Cort” he’d like to explore, but the leader of the pack is skeptical—“What is Fud Cort anyway, sounds danjerus”—and advises Fox 8 to stay away (19). The latter, however, tries to convince his fellow foxes, assuring them, “Yumans are nise, they are cul” (20), and the next day, against the better advice of the elders, Fox 8 and his friend Fox 7 take off, resolved to find the “Mawl’s” “Fud Cort.”

Fox 8 is a self-conscious storyteller, since stories—fables and fairytales as well as overhearing Yuman conversations and talking to dogs—have taught him about “Yung Yumans,” “Old Yumans,” and Yuman-owned dogs and their (story)worlds (27). And Fox 8 has learned that narratives work by appealing to their readers’ feelings and playing with their expectations. Accordingly, he has been preparing “the reeder” for something to happen and announces a twist of the plot explicitly: “Then it happened” (29). Rather than giving away how the story develops from here, my brief account of this witty satire should give you a taste of the effectiveness of Saunders’s craft: by presenting the encounter between Yumans and Nonyumans through the perspective of a fox, the tale effectively reflects on the inherent “danjers” of Yuman culture (3). Even though

Fox 8 has a “reputashun as dreamer” among his own peers, we shouldn’t brush aside his point of view as purely naive (19). In fact, his “naïveté” is founded on a saneness that allows one to see the craziness and cruelty of Yuman institutions in the first place.

Saunders’s narrative focalization through Fox 8 has a similar effect as Tolstoy’s horse point of view in his short story “Kholstomer” (1886). Presenting the concept of private property through the viewpoint of a horse that marvels at the meaning of the phrase “his own” is an effective way of criticizing such concepts through defamiliarization. Considering the enigmatic nature of possessive pronouns, the horse infers, “I saw that people thought there was some sort of connection between me and the stable. At the time I simply could not understand the connection” (Tolstoy cited in Shklovsky 779). Not unlike Saunders’s fox, Tolstoy’s horse tries hard to unravel Yuman language, straining to grasp how it works as a powerful tool to define social relations among them: “The words ‘my horse’ referred to me, a living horse, and seemed as strange to me as the words ‘my land,’ ‘my air,’ ‘my water’” (779). Here a horse that explains to us Yumans what it means to own or to be owned; in the contemporary narrative a fox who hopes to find food in a “fud cort,” which seems “natural” to him, given that he also lacks any understanding that things in “mawls” come with a price tag, and that nothing in neoliberal economies is ever for free—neither snacks, nor land, nor air, nor water. Tolstoy and Saunders both narrate the stories from an animal perspective to call human ownership of “nature” into question. And the latter makes us anticipate early on that the fox will learn his lesson the hard way: even if two people in the “Mawl” will “drop a bit of fud” at him and his friend—“karmel korn, sevral parshul biskits, plus a pare so fresh it did not even stink” (28)—Yumans do not generally share, care, respect, or even notice, the nonhuman creatures whose habitats were destroyed in the course of building what now is ironically called “FoxViewCommons”:

Week upon week the Truks kep werking. These Yumans sure cud werk. They werked and werked until soon a hole forest is gone. . . . Terns out, what they were making is: sevral big wite boxes, with, written upon them, mistery werds. Upon my reeding of these werds, my felow Foxes looked at me all quizmical, like: Fox 8, tell us, what is Bon-Ton, what is Compu-Fun, what is Hooters, what is Kookies-N-Cream?

But I cud not say, those werds never being herd by me at my Story window. (14)

Fox 8 can only speculate about the purpose of these strange boxes and the meaning of enigmatic words, which, for Yumans familiar with the U.S.-American commercial landscape, are fairly easy to identify as actual or fictional brand names, evoking the bleak vista of strip malls with their chain stores and restaurants. While the foxes are mystified, the effect on the reader can be equally perplexing, yet in a different way. The reading experience is a complex

one, producing multiple layers of unsettling comprehension: the easy identification of familiar tokens of American consumer culture via “mystery werds” is paired with the much harder realization of the dark realities and “collateral” damage that comes with the expansion of this culture: the familiar American names are embedded in an unfamiliar language: the (mis)spellings require a more than cursory attention by the reader and her willingness to make the “werds” sound, that is, to read them aloud (at least in the mind) in order to grasp their meaning. Hence the materiality of sounding becomes a crucial part of the reading process, a form of reception that resembles that of Fox 8’s initial eavesdropping on fables and stories read aloud by the Yuman mom. Storytelling, then, is a process that constitutes making and unmaking at the same time; we simultaneously see more and less than the nonhuman protagonist, and his language and epistemology demand that we stop and think to be able to follow.

Even though the fox’s rendering of scenes seems pretty straightforward at first, our material resonance with his “werds” produce repercussions far beyond simple meanings, making palpable the sensory and imaginative multiplicity of a more-than-human practice of worlding. As Shklovsky writes of the image (be it literary or visual or both): “An image is not a permanent referent for those mutable complexities of life which are revealed through it; its purpose is not to make us perceive meaning, but to create a special perception of the object—it creates a “*vision*” of the object instead of serving as a means for knowing it” (781). In a similar fashion, a seemingly simple question, posed by a fox after he’s experienced the loss of his friend at the hands of a Yuman, in a way no Yuman storybook could have prepared him for, makes his “werds” resonate far beyond the confines of the story. It is a story, then, that defies being a parable, and a protagonist who defies serving as allegory by asking: “I wud like to know what is rong with you people?” Upon closing his “leter” that asks us for some kind of “eksplanashun,” he leaves his readers with a clear appeal (44, 48):

If you Yumans wud take one bit of advise from a meer Fox? By now I know that you Yumans like your Storys to end hapy?

If you want to your Storys to end happy, try being niser.

I awate your answer.

Fox 8 (48-49)

We are left with the uneasy sense that this is not a goodnight story, nor a book we can put aside because the animals in it go to sleep with the Yung Yumans, once the lights are dimmed. At stake is rather the way we are telling—living—our own stories, individually and collectively. And the question posed extends beyond Fox 8—the character, the book, the vision. We Yumans owe an answer.

Z is for zoomorphism: Unlike anthropomorphism, zoomorphism suggests the longing to understand and to embody a nonhuman form of living: Foster's *Being a Beast* is maybe the most physically engaged way of trying to slip into the skin, paws, and appetites of a badger and other nonhuman animals. On a more philosophical plane, it is a question that asks, "what is it like to be a . . ." Thomas Nagel's 1974 essay "What is it Like to Be a Bat" prominently poses this question, setting out from the realization that, even if we will never be able to really understand the sensory apparatus and corporeal being of a bat, we need to assume that "being a bat" is indeed a very different way of experiencing and navigating the world than that of two-legged or four-legged mammals who rely primarily on their eyes, ears, noses, and sense of touch (even though the range of senses here also varies considerably, if we take into consideration a bear's excellent nose or a falcon's keen eye).

The longing to experience what it is like to be another animal is part of the way in which etiologists understand other animals, how they fathom the sociality, emotional make-up, and relationships of the beings they observe and describe. "The yearning to understand what it would be like to be, say, an elephant or a cheetah scrambles the opposition between anthropomorphism and zoomorphism, that is, between humanizing animals and animalizing humans. This extreme form of thinking with animals is the impossible but irresistible desire to jump out of one's skin, exchange one's brain, plunge into another way of being" (Daston et al. 8). Zoomorphism, then, is not the opposite of anthropomorphism, but must be considered along a continuum with its companion term. Both anthropomorphism and zoomorphism can express the desire to expand the range of our own bodies and imagination and to think with animals to comprehend other forms of being-in-the-world and to "thicken" our own experiential range by seeing and sensing and reading in fresh, nonhuman ways. In any case, the ban on anthropomorphism needs to be lifted because we will never be able to slip out of our skins. Even those among us who restrict themselves to the diet and earthy shelter of a badger, need to rely on their own bodies to perform emotional and physical zoomorphism. The authors of this book—in the limited scope that poetry, photography, novels, and nonfiction allow—all engage in such intellectual (meta)morphisms, inviting our readers to experience with them the pleasure, pain, humor, and strangeness that can turn exploring the lives of others into an extraordinary journey.

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